

ST AUBYN COLLECTION PROJECT

NEWS UPDATES 2008 TO 2009

Natural history collection

Wednesday 23 January 2008

Today, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery are starting our search for other minerals belonging to Sir John St. Aubyn's original mineral collection before it was split in 1834. As part of the project we would like to locate as many specimens as we can so that Sir John's collection can be fully documented.

Monday 11 to Friday 22 February 2008

For the next fortnight, we will be trying to update all the scientific names associated with the St. Aubyn herbarium as well as checking our own documentation. In the past, all the sheets from this herbarium had been transcribed and entered onto an excel spreadsheet. In order to make sure that there were no transcription errors, we are going through them all again whilst updating the names.

Monday 25 February 2008

Most of the scientific names for the specimens on the St. Aubyn herbarium have been updated on our spreadsheet. This means we can use the current Latin names on our database which should help when searching for specimens.

Tuesday 26 February 2008

To make Sir John's mineral collection easier to work on, we have decided to extract his minerals from our main geological collection and store it in its own cupboard. Over the last fortnight all of the drawers and storage boxes that we ordered arrived. Today we began to move Sir John's minerals into their relevant drawers. It is very exciting seeing all of his minerals together in one space and surprising to see just how many there are. We hope to finish this part of the project before the end of May 2008.

Monday 3 March 2008

Today one of our conservators began to work on the drawer labels. We were trying to see if it was possible to remove the labels from the broken drawers without damaging them. By the end of the day it seemed that we had found a sympathetic method for removing the drawer labels. Work will continue to test this method on more challenging labels that have been damaged in the past. Once the labels have been removed, the museum will store them in archival quality files so that they are secure.

Thursday 3 April 2008

Staff from the museum's natural history department visited Sir John's property on St. Michaels Mount today in order to carry out some research on the St. Aubyn family. Luckily the weather was really beautiful making our visit extremely productive. After looking at the house and gardens we drove to the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro. Whilst we were there, we met the documentation officer who will hopefully translate our two French catalogues which were written by the Count Jacques Louis de Bournon. We think that the catalogues may be written about Sir John St. Aubyn's mineral collection, but currently we are not sure and hope that the translation may shed some light on this.

Monday 21 April 2008

This week Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery began photographing Sir John St. Aubyn's mineral collection. During the week we captured over two thousand images which we aim to put on our database.

Saturday 10 May 2008

Today, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery set up a small stall at the Local Studies Day Event in The Robbins Conference Centre. We wanted to show everyone at the event the work that we had been doing and talk about Sir John St. Aubyn. A small display case of his minerals was taken to the occasion and were on show for everyone to see. The day was extremely productive and there was a lot of interest shown in the collection.

Thursday 5 June 2008

This week, the natural history department finished scanning in Sir John St. Aubyn's herbarium at the Bristol Record Office. A member of our team stayed in Bristol for six days in order to scan every sheet using their large inverted scanner. Now that we have the entire collection imaged, we can start cleaning the very dusty sheets with our paper conservator.

Saturday 7 to Sunday 8 June 2008

During this weekend we visited Cornwall to photograph all the places that played an important role in Sir John St. Aubyn's life. Thankfully the weather was really sunny, and the trip was very successful. Firstly, we visited Clowance, which was Sir John's house and estate. The area had not changed greatly, and the gardens that he landscaped were still very beautiful. We even found a mineral grotto, which we think was made by him. After visiting Clowance we drove on to Pencarrow, which is the house of the Molesworth family. They kindly gave us a tour of the house and allowed us to take photographs of the portraits. There were many paintings of Sir John St. Aubyn and we think he must have visited the house regularly to see his sister Catherine, who married into the Molesworth family in 1790.

Friday 20 June 2008

In order to carry out some research, Jess Shepherd from the museum's natural history department travelled to London for the day. As soon as she arrived in London she went to the Natural History Museum to look at 12 mineral specimens that were originally part of Sir John St. Aubyn's collection. After talking to Michael Rumsey at the Natural History Museum and taking some images of the specimens, Jess then walked to Golden Square to take pictures of Sir John's birth place. After this she visited Putney to find Lime Grove, the place where Sir John died.

Monday 30 June to Thursday 3 July 2008

During this week, Plymouth City Museum sent a member of their team to Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow to have a look at their mineral collection. Since the task of finding other St. Aubyn minerals outside Plymouth City Museum began, a number of private dealers and other museums have been in touch with us. One of these museums was Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow, which owns the Glen Collection. Alastair Gunning, the Curator of Geology at Kelvingrove, wrote in to tell us that a small proportion of the Glen collection has labels very similar to the ones found on St. Aubyn minerals. During the week, we managed to spend three days working on the collection at Kelvingrove and took over 600 photographs. We plan to use these images to help us with our research and to deepen our understanding of the provenance of their collection.

July 2008

The Royal Society has made Sir John St. Aubyn their 'fellow of the month' for July. You can see an illustrated biography of Sir John on their website.

Monday 7 July 2008

Today, members from the Natural History and Conservation team met in the [National Museum Cardiff](#) to have a mineral conservation training day. Soon after arriving, we were introduced to Caroline Buttler, the museum's conservator, who was going to teach us for the day. The group was first taken on a tour around the National Museum's geology collections, so that we could see how they had stored their collections. After lunch, we were given talks about all of the mineral types that

can be difficult to store, and at the end of the day Caroline showed us how to clean our specimens without damaging them.

Wednesday 23 July 2008

This morning, the Keeper of Natural History and I spent some time in Devonport with the intention of photographing as many references to Sir John's life and his collection as possible. It was an extremely hot and sunny day, and we managed to take lots of photographs.

Friday 25 July 2008

Today, all of the transcribed information from the St Aubyn herbarium was handed to our documentation team so that they could start entering all of the notes into the database. Our data entry assistant, who has been working on the museum's mineral collection, will be doing most of this work. We think that she will be glad for the change and will enjoy typing up these botanical notes.

Monday 28 July 2008

In the morning, I met our Keeper of Natural History at Audley End train station with the intention of spending some time in the [Saffron Walden Museum](#) in Essex. Soon after arriving we met their Natural History Officer, Sarah Kenyon, who took us to her stores to show us the museum's collection of St Aubyn minerals. Sir John used to live at Shortgrove Hall which is very close to Saffron Walden, and apparently he donated this small number of minerals to the museum in 1834. After a cup of tea, we got straight to work in packing the minerals in acid free tissue paper and small boxes.

After packing the minerals ready for transporting them back to Plymouth, we wanted to find two of Sir John's houses – one at Shortgrove, Essex and the other at Woolmers in Hertfordshire. When we arrived at Shortgrove we were not sure if we should enter the estate as the road was labelled as being private, but keen to carry on with our research, we continued. As soon as the car drove past the large entrance, there was a beautiful avenue of oaks. Unfortunately though, Sir John's house was no longer standing. After seeing Shortgrove, we drove on to Woolmers, which had become a polo ground. In the distance from the roadside we could see a large white house, but it was too far away to photograph properly.

Tuesday 29 July 2008

The day started with the Keeper of Natural History and I walking to Saffron Walden Museum at 9am to collect the minerals which we packed the day before, we then made our way to the [Sedgwick Museum](#) in Cambridge to see some of Sir John's minerals. Upon arrival, we were introduced to Steve Laurie who showed us their St Aubyn specimens. After photographing these specimens, Steve then showed us some of the Abraham Hume minerals. We were interested in these because firstly Sir Abraham Hume was friends with Sir John, and secondly Comte de Bournon, who catalogued Sir John's minerals, also catalogued Sir Abraham Hume's minerals. After lunch, we decided to drive back to Plymouth via Chertsey in Surrey to try and find another one of Sir John's houses at Woburn Farm. When we set off on the M25 we were in high spirits, but when we exited on junction 12 for Chertsey our spirits were dampened. Not only had we gone off on the wrong exit, but when we did finally find Woburn Farm it was all fenced off with imposing gates and pillars.

Friday 8 August 2008

Today, our documentation and IT department completed the photography of Sir John St Aubyn's minerals. They will now optimise the photographs so that they can be attached onto the database later on next year.

Thursday 14 to Friday 22 August 2008

This week, all of the old labels on Sir John's minerals were recorded in an electronic format. Illustrations on the style of each label and all of its graphical and written data were drawn in a small word document. Each document was then saved with its accession number so that it could be

attached onto the database. Our documentation assistant has been working hard to attach all of these documents so that when we access one of Sir John's minerals, it is possible to see all the labels.

Thursday 11 September 2008

After identifying all of the herbarium specimens and updating the species names, it was apparent that we would need some assistance with updating the names of the mosses. In order to find some help, we contacted Dr David Long, a well-known bryologist at the [Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh](#). David was very interested in the herbarium because so few people were collecting mosses in the eighteenth century. Within a few days David had updated nearly all of the scientific names for the mosses and had supplied us with lots of references and interesting information. The most intriguing of which was the news that we are likely to hold some type specimens in the collection. A type specimen is extremely important in Natural History because it is the specimen on which the description and naming of a species is based.

Friday 12 September 2008

Cherry Lewis from the [University of Bristol](#) visited the natural history department at Plymouth City Museum today to have a look at the St Aubyn collection. We were really pleased to have Cherry visit us because she is currently writing a book on the origins of the [Geological Society of London](#). Two of the founding members of the society were Dr William Babington and the Count de Bournon, both of whom knew Sir John well, and Sir John himself became Vice-President of the society in 1810. Cherry was extremely interested to see our minerals and catalogues, and after much rigorous discussion, both Cherry and I learnt many things that we had not previously known. We hope to keep in touch with Cherry and are all looking forward to seeing her new book!

Monday 29 September to 13 October 2008

During this time the herbarium was dusted with a soft brush. It was interesting to look at all the specimens again, and it was particularly intriguing to find strands of hair attached to a Plum tree specimen. Throughout the herbarium there were many hairs on the twigs and flower heads, some of which were coloured and could have come from clothing. It was impossible to date most of the hairs, but the ones on the Plum tree ran through the glue. These of course could be animal hairs from when it was collected, or they could belong to Sir John or someone in his family. What was interesting to note was that the hairs must have been there when Sir John attached the specimen to the sheet of paper...

Monday 13 October 2008

Today we got an email from Margaret Morgan at the [Royal Cornwall Museum](#). She is translating the Count de Bournon catalogues. Apparently de Bournon put little red labels on some minerals to highlight something of interest, and she wondered if the labels were still on the specimens. Amazingly enough, these little labels are still on the specimens. The red ones have turned an orange colour over the years and there are also some blue ones. Each one is triangular shaped. This is great news, as we wondered where the little triangular labels had come from, and we now know that they are almost 200 years old!

Thursday 30 October 2008

Today I attended a meeting at the Linnean Society to talk about the James Edward Smith herbarium. John Edmondson at [Liverpool Museums](#) has been busy documenting the presence of Smith specimens in different herbaria all over Europe. This includes the few specimens that we have in the St. Aubyn herbarium. Members of staff from several institutions spent the day in the Linnean Society discussing how we could carry out an online digitisation project for the Smith herbarium. I felt really privileged to be invited to such a prestigious place and to be able to include Sir John's herbarium in the project.

Thursday 13 November 2008

This morning, members of the Natural History team went to the [Marine Biological Association](#) (MBA) to have a look at their library. We wanted to see their book on seaweeds by John Stackhouse, who was Sir John St. Aubyn's friend. We also wanted to see if they had any other historically important books. The Keeper of Natural History managed to find a copy of William Borlase's book on Cornish Natural History. William Borlase was Sir John St. Aubyn's teacher and therefore played an important role in initiating Sir John's fascination with botany and mineralogy. To find this book by Borlase was a real bonus, and we have since asked the librarian if Plymouth City Museum could loan these books for the St. Aubyn exhibition in 2010.

Monday 15 to Friday 19 December 2008

All of this week the St. Aubyn project conservator and I cleaned all of the old drawers that housed the St. Aubyn mineral collection when it was in Devonport Museum. The drawers had not been cleaned for over 40 years and they were pretty dusty. I was also involved in transcribing the labels inside the drawers, so that the information that they have written on them can be stored permanently on our database. Hopefully it will be possible for you to see the drawers once they are finished, as the Natural History department are intending to exhibit some of them in the St. Aubyn exhibition next year.

Tuesday 27 January 2009

Over the last two days I have been working with the museum photographer to photograph all of the drawers that used to house St. Aubyn's mineral collection when it was at Devonport Museum. We also photographed some of the micromount specimens and both volumes of the Count de Bournon catalogue. While I was handing over the micromounts to our photographer I took a closer look because the gem stones looked so pretty. However, what I saw was a bit of a surprise. Left in the wax mount, under the pretty gem stone, was a finger print. I wonder if this print was made by one of de Bournon's fingers 200 years ago...

Tuesday 10 February 2009

During this week I started to match the ripped drawer labels of the broken Devonport [drawers](#). Erana, our photographer, had printed all her photographs out to make the job easier. Amazingly, I was able to match a lot of them. All I have to do now is to match the labels with the minerals!

Wednesday 25 February 2009

Today, I went to [St. Michael's Mount](#) with the Keeper of Natural History and our photographer, Erana. After being introduced to James St. Aubyn and Richard Nesham, the curator of the house, we were taken round the building so that we could note all of the things that Erana needs to photograph for the touring exhibition. It was a good tour, and we got to see things that we hadn't seen last time. James also showed us Sir John St. Aubyn's walking stick, which was very grand indeed - it was 6ft tall, straight, with an engraved silver top.

Tuesday 3 March 2009

Today I was trained by our paper conservator on how to clean the embedded grime from Sir John's herbarium sheets. After brushing all the specimens in October, I noted that there were about 150 sheets that needed further cleaning because two centuries worth of dust had become stuck to the paper. From the training course I learnt that you could buy many different materials to clean the dirt off in a safe way. However, the best tool to use was a Mars Plastic rubber!

Saturday 7 March 2009

[Friends of Devon Archives](#) were running a special event at the Community Centre in Woolwell today, promoting Devon's old documents and the history that comes with them. With it being a while since I have been out-and-about promoting the St. Aubyn collection to the public, I decided to join in and set up a stall for the event. Throughout the day there were lots of interesting lectures and several people

were interested in the work that Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery are doing on the St. Aubyn collection.

Wednesday 11 March 2009

I got a very interesting email today from a local historian who I have been in contact with in Newport, Essex. He writes:

"Unfortunately we had some vandalism at our church. Either as a result of this or years of neglect the railing surrounding the tomb of Christopher Verlet a servant of Sir John fell down and thus has given the first opportunity since 1827 to get an unimpeded view of the inscription. There are five altar or chest tombs in the churchyard, but this is undoubtedly the best - wonderfully carved and despite 180 years of neglect is very fine. The tomb of Patricia Odger is also a splendid altar tomb though not as opulent.

We know from the inscriptions that Verlet was born in Switzerland, and was with Sir John from 1777. Patience was from Clowance and was 30 when she died in 1830. These tombs must have been very expensive and Sir John must have been very fond of them".

Monday 20 May 2009

Sir John St. Aubyn's micromount collection can now be viewed [online](#). You can find out more about this unusual collection on the [Micromount collection](#) page.

Friday 20 March

Finally, after much painstaking work, the documentation team have completed all the data entry for Sir John St. Aubyn's herbarium. This means that his [herbarium](#) online database, with pictures, is now available to view.

Monday 7 July 2009

Work has begun on designing the St. Aubyn touring exhibition, which is intended to display items from the collection as well as information about Sir John St. Aubyn. The exhibition starts its tour at the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro on 9 January 2010, and will tour the country for the following two years.

Friday 27 November 2009

The last portion of the St. Aubyn collection is now [online](#). Everyone in the museum has worked really hard to put all of Sir John St. Aubyn's minerals on the website so that you can see them. After matching as many specimens as we could to the catalogues, we made sure we put all this information online along with images and diagrams of the labels. Please feel free to browse this fascinating 18th century [online](#) collection.

Tuesday 15 December 2009

We aren't quite there yet, but on the 15th, several members of staff from Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery will be at the [Royal Cornwall Museum](#), Truro, setting up the St. Aubyn touring exhibition. This is the first venue for its two year tour and will be opening on 9 January. We are all very excited about this day, and have sent the panels to the printers in early December in preparation.