

## FOSSIL SPONGES IN THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON.

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Since 1753, when the sale of Sir Hans Sloane's Collection to the nation resulted in the foundation of the British Museum (BM), later to become the British Museum (Natural History), many important specimens and manuscripts have been donated to or purchased by what is now The Natural History Museum (NHM). Using specimens, publications and contemporary manuscripts, this poster aims to highlight some historically and taxonomically important specimens added to the fossil sponge collection over the past 250 years, and the lives and work of the early palaeontologists who described them.

Although some fossil sponges housed in the NHM are from collections first made in the 18th Century, such as those of Thomas Pennant (1726-1798), a zoologist and antiquarian from Flintshire whose collection was donated in 1912, many more are from collections that were either purchased or donated in the 19th Century. These include sponges of historical importance, such as those collected and figured by William Smith (1769-1839, collection purchased 1816 and 1818), who was the first person to use fossils to identify strata in England and to produce a large-scale geological map. Smith's illustrations (1816-1819) include specimens figured by him as *Alcyonites*.

The earliest taxonomically important specimens are those that were figured from the 1820s onwards and which represent the first attempts at understanding the British fossil sponge fauna, especially the rich fauna of the Upper Cretaceous Chalk. Amongst those who contributed to the collection at this time were J. S. Bowerbank and G. A. Mantell. Their work along with that of Joshua Toulmin Smith, G. J. Hinde, H. A. Nicholson and R. G. S. Hudson is will be reviewed.

### Reference

Smith, W. 1816-1819. Strata identified by Organized Fossils, containing prints on coloured paper of the most characteristic specimens in each Stratum. London, 32pp, 18 pls.