



<http://www.natsca.org>

## NatSCA News

---

Title: Beneficial Beetles Project: Cataloguing Coleoptera at the Potteries Museum

Author(s): Hewitt, H.

Source: Hewitt, H. (2010). Beneficial Beetles Project: Cataloguing Coleoptera at the Potteries Museum. *NatSCA News, Issue 20*, 34 - 39.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1371>

---

NatSCA supports open access publication as part of its mission is to promote and support natural science collections. NatSCA uses the Creative Commons Attribution License (CCAL) <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/> for all works we publish. Under CCAL authors retain ownership of the copyright for their article, but authors allow anyone to download, reuse, reprint, modify, distribute, and/or copy articles in NatSCA publications, so long as the original authors and source are cited.

## **Beneficial Beetles Project:** **Cataloguing Coleoptera at the Potteries Museum**

Helen Hewitt

Assistant Collections Officer (Zoology)  
Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, City Centre, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3DW  
[www.stokemuseums.org.uk](http://www.stokemuseums.org.uk)

Email: [helen.hewitt@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:helen.hewitt@stoke.gov.uk)

### **Natural history collections at Stoke-on-Trent Museums**

Stoke-on-Trent Museums, a collective of four council-run museums spread across the city, house a wide and varied collection. The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery is the main museum for the city. Well known for its nationally important collections of Ceramics (both local and world-wide), it is also home to collections of local history, archaeology, fine and decorative art, and natural history; the other museums in the city hold collections of social and industrial history. All collections held in Stoke-on-Trent museums are Designated. Although the collections are spread across many museum sites in the city, only the Potteries Museum houses natural history collections; these are divided into Geology, Botany and Zoology. The Zoology collection consists of 350 mammals, 1,850 birds, 5,000 birds' eggs, 20,000 land snails, 2,000 freshwater bivalves, 450 arachnids, 18,000 Lepidoptera, 4,000 Diptera, and 24,000 Coleoptera; as such, the beetle collection makes up the largest section in the zoology collections.

The Coleoptera collection was acquired mainly through the donations of private collectors. The collections of Charles Ernest Stott (1868-1935) and Maurice Waterhouse (1939-2003) make up the majority of the specimens. Currently, both of these collections are held in the storage cabinets and boxes that they came in; in the case of the Stott Collection, the cabinet is a part of the historical context of the collection. The Waterhouse Collection consists of local specimens from the Staffordshire area, although there are also many specimens from Kent, Wales, Scotland and Bulgaria; additionally, Waterhouse acquired specimens from other collectors which may be of historical interest.

### **The Beneficial Beetles Project**

As part of the Beneficial Beetles Project, funded by the Designation Development Fund, I have been appointed for the next 6 months to formally catalogue and conserve the Coleoptera collection held at the Potteries Museum. Specifically, I will be working on the Waterhouse Collection. Overall, this will involve:

1. improving storage conditions of the collection
2. adding specimen data to the collections database (MODES)
3. working with partner organisations

Currently, the Waterhouse Collection is housed in the cork-lined drawers and boxes that it arrived in (Fig.1). Over the course of the project specimens will be moved from these boxes to new archival plastazote-lined specimen boxes, and entomological cabinets and drawers (Fig.2). In the process, each specimen is given a record number, condition checked, and grouped into taxonomic order.

The Potteries Museum currently uses MODES for Windows as its collections database software, although there are plans to upgrade to MODES XML in the near future. Data from each specimen will be put into MODES. As Waterhouse did not keep additional notebooks, all data relating to each specimen is recorded on a card pinned with the specimen, so there is only basic data to be entered into MODES. This usually consists of locality, date of collection and the initials of the collector.

Once a large dataset has been created on MODES, it is hoped that the specimen data will be used in partnership with the Staffordshire Ecological Record and the Staffordshire University Institute for Environment, Sustainability and Regeneration in looking at changes in habitat over the last half century. In addition, there are plans to instigate biological surveys of the local beetles and habitats, involving local wildlife and conservation groups, and the general public.

As this is a short-term funded project, it is hoped that the majority of the aims and outcomes are achieved by the end date, which is the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

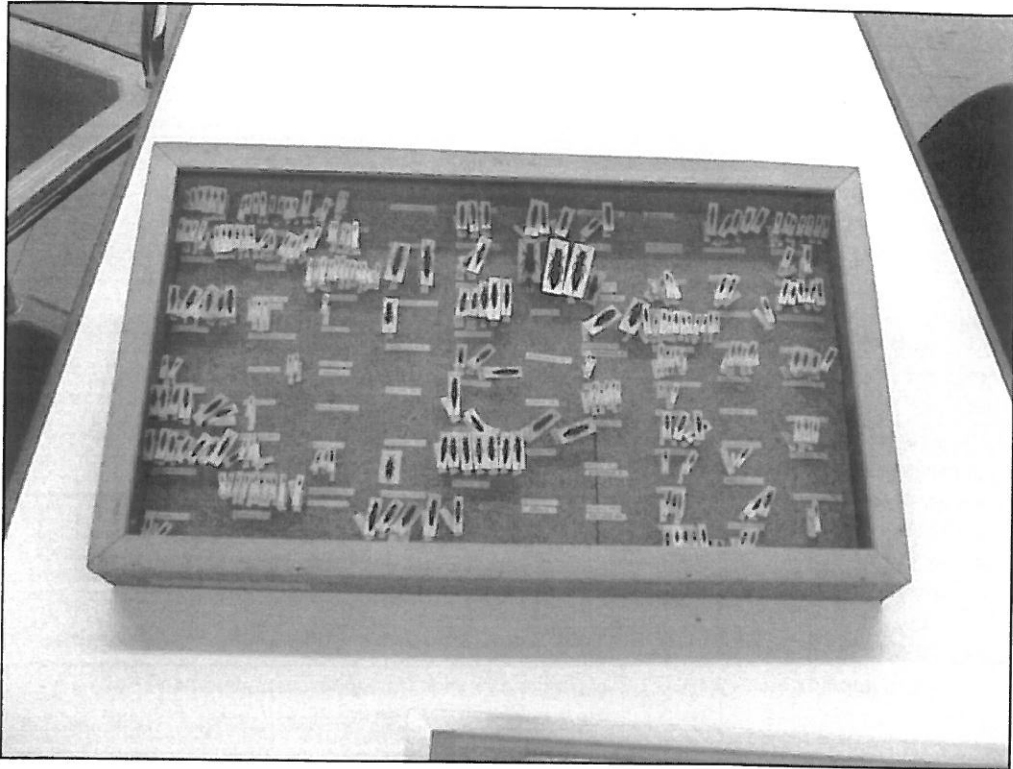


Fig.1. Original storage as bequeathed to the Museum.

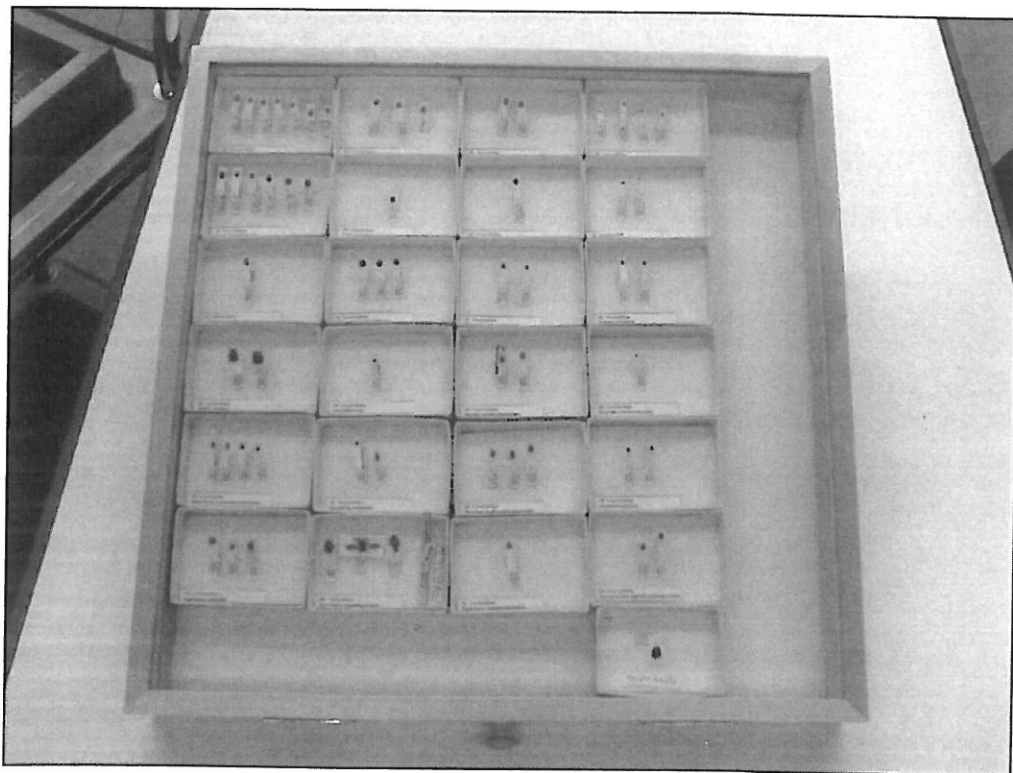


Fig.2. Improved archival storage in entomology drawer and plastazote-lined trays.

### Preliminary findings

The project has been up and running now for just over a month, and as such is far from completion. Even so, some interesting outcomes are already evident. From a scientific view-point, the range of localities and habitats represented by the collection is wide and varied, ranging from the Staffordshire Moorlands and Kent marshes, to the Cairngorms and Welsh peninsulas. The range of dates is also important, giving a view of habitats across time, from the early 1970s up to 2002. Although the collection contains specimens from most groups of Coleoptera, the Staphilinidae particularly are particularly well represented.

From a history of collections perspective, the Waterhouse Collection is also interesting as it contains specimens from historic collectors. Waterhouse's own specimens are labelled up with small strips of card with data written in pencil (Fig.3). Specimens collected by Thomas Herbert Edmonds, Alan Brindle, Harold William Daltry, Walter Douglas Hincks, David W. Emley and Robert Wylie Lloyd are all easily recognisable as they usually still have their original labels (Fig.4a-f); Edmonds specimens are readily identifiable by being mounted not on card but on small strips of Perspex. Specimens collected by Charles Ernest Stott have also been found in this collection and have been returned to the Stott Collection. Mysteriously, many of the Stott specimens have been given what I have been calling 'pink labels'; these appear to be poor quality paper and ink which has deteriorated, either through age or damp, to a pink colour (Fig.5). Usually, these are found associated with specimens collected by Stott, although they have been found on specimens from other collectors too, as well as on data-less specimens. Additionally, they usually carry the locality of either Coombes Valley or Bolton Gate (both localities in Staffordshire), and a date sometime in either 1972 or 1973, and the initials MW. These pink labels, however, carry data that is, on the whole, inconsistent with the specimen with which they are associated; for example, Fig.5 shows a Stott specimen with a pink label attached that says 'Bolton Gate, 1972, MW', whereas the data on the base of the specimen states that it was collected in 19.6.1934, in Cromer, Norfolk. Unfortunately, as Waterhouse does not seem to have kept notebooks, the significance of these pink labels remains unclear.

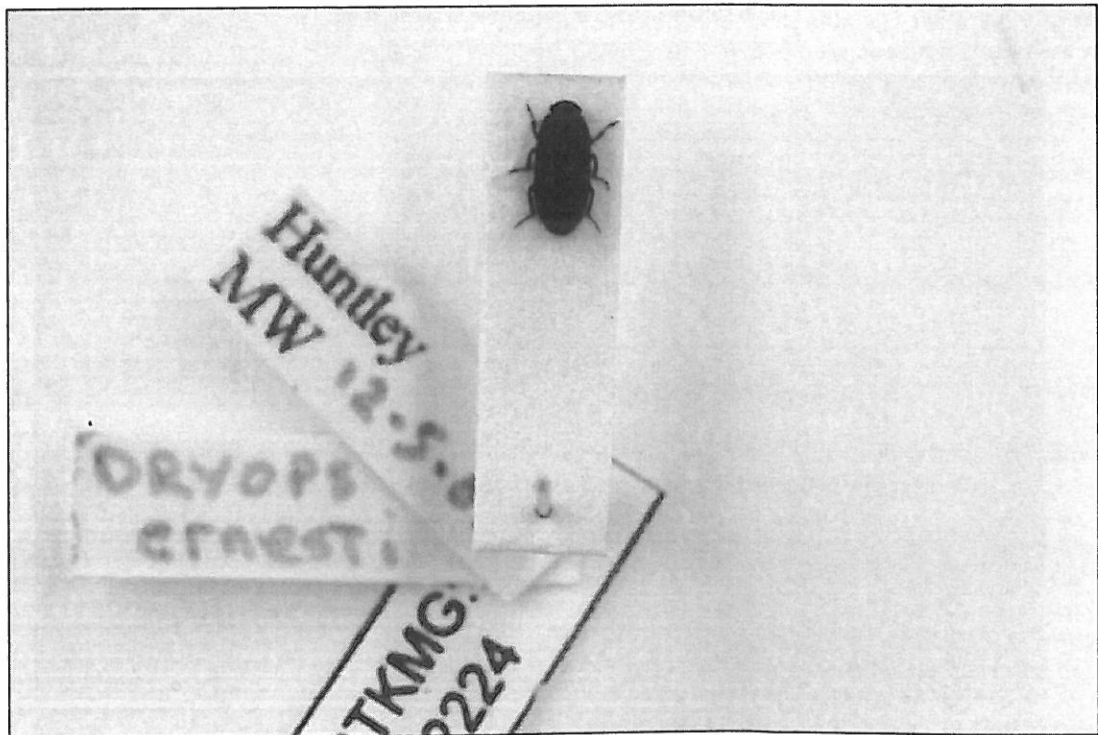


Fig.3. Example of a Waterhouse label.

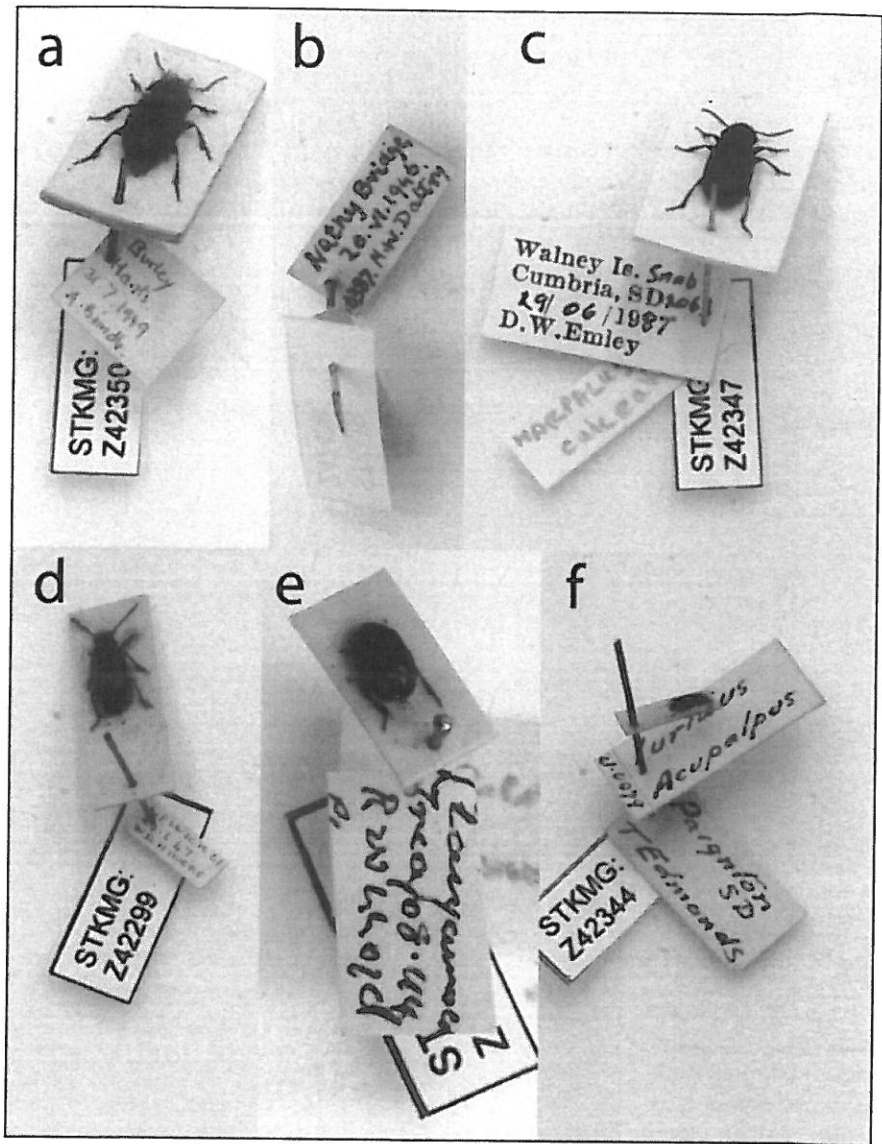


Fig.4.a. examples of labels of known collectors found in the Waterhouse Collection. a. Alan Brindle; b. Harold William Daltry; c. David W. Emley; d. Walter Douglas Hincks; e. Robert Wylie Lloyd; f. Thomas Herbert Edmonds.

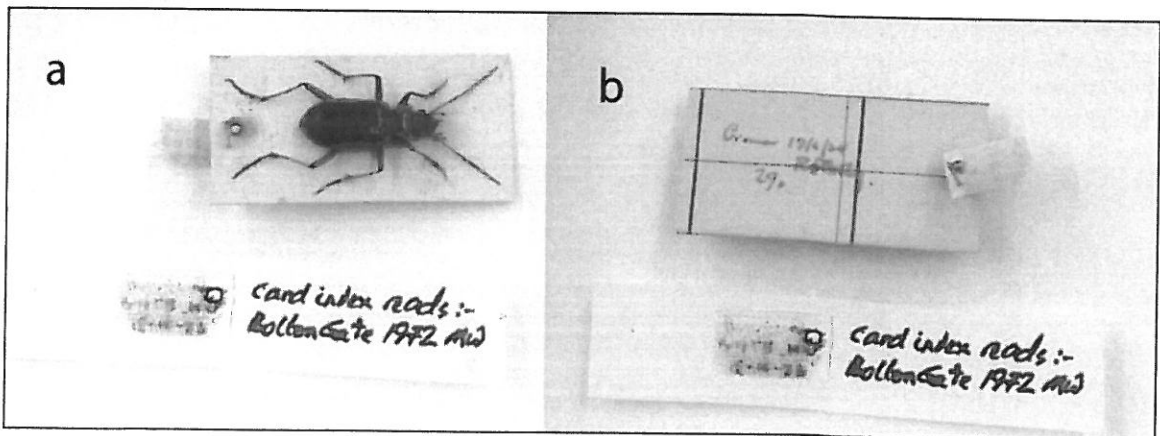
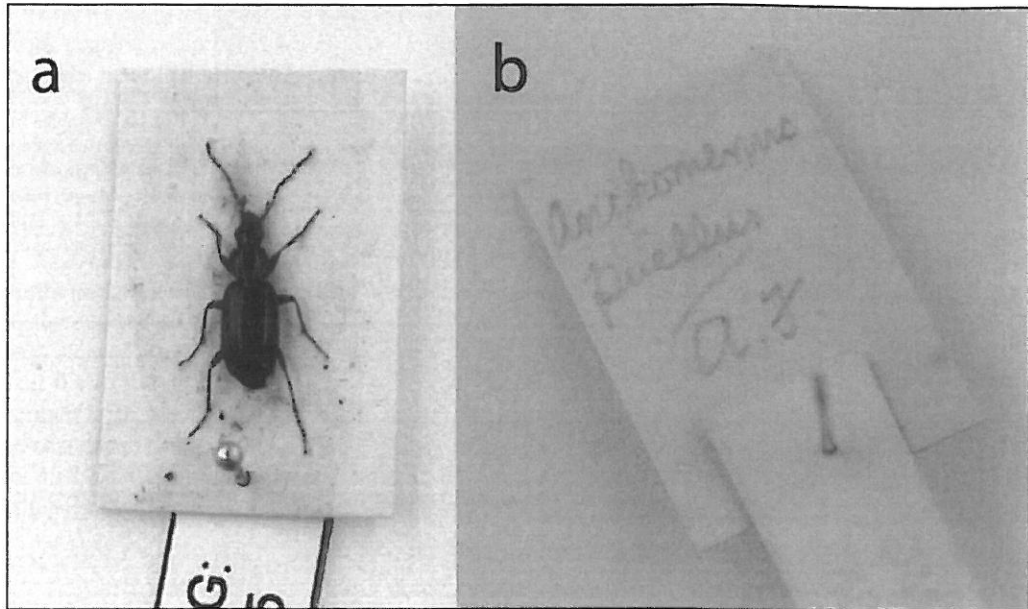
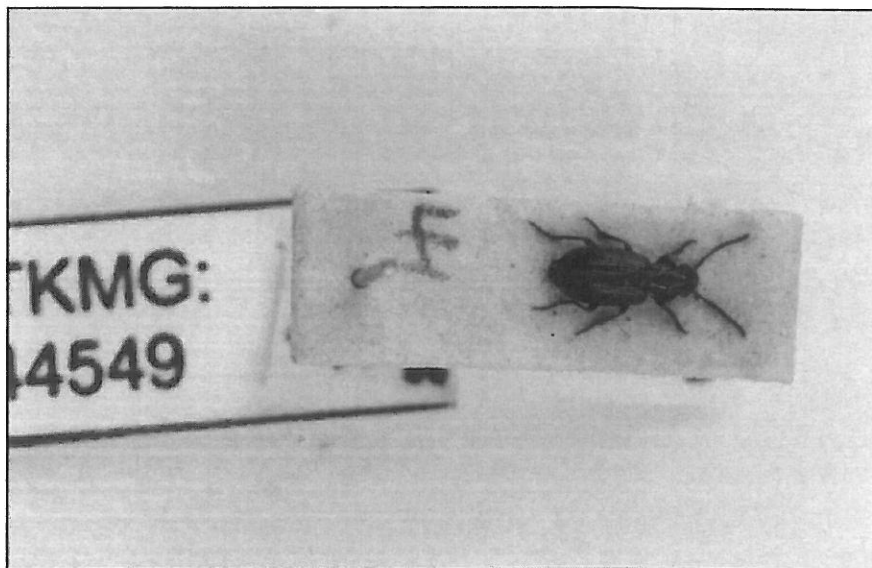


Fig.5.a. an example of a 'pink label'. b. the back of the specimen attached to the 'pink label'; as can be seen, this is actually a specimen from the Stott collection.

Other collectors are more difficult to identify, either because they did not initial their specimens or because their names do not appear in the Biographical Dictionary of British Coleopterists (<http://www.coleopterist.org.uk/>). These include A.F. (Fig.6), J.R. le B.T, Johndown (spelling uncertain), M.L, Luff, S. Shaw, C.S., P. Tatt, S. Swain, C.E.T., W.E.S., Sidebotham, M. Shields, R.N.H., and A.J. Purcell (Fig.8 a-m). Others, despite being from old collections and having distinctive labelling, do not have collector names or initials on them, so currently remain a mystery (Fig.7). Additionally, a few specimens seem to be ex-museum specimens; specifically, duplicates from the Manchester Museum (Fig.8 o-p).



**Fig.6.** Example of a specimen from the A.F. collection; all specimens from this collector are labelled and initialled on the reverse of the specimen card. **a.** obverse; **b.** reverse.



**Fig.7.** Example of a specimen from a mysterious collector; no names are found with these specimens, just a number written in pencil next to the specimen.

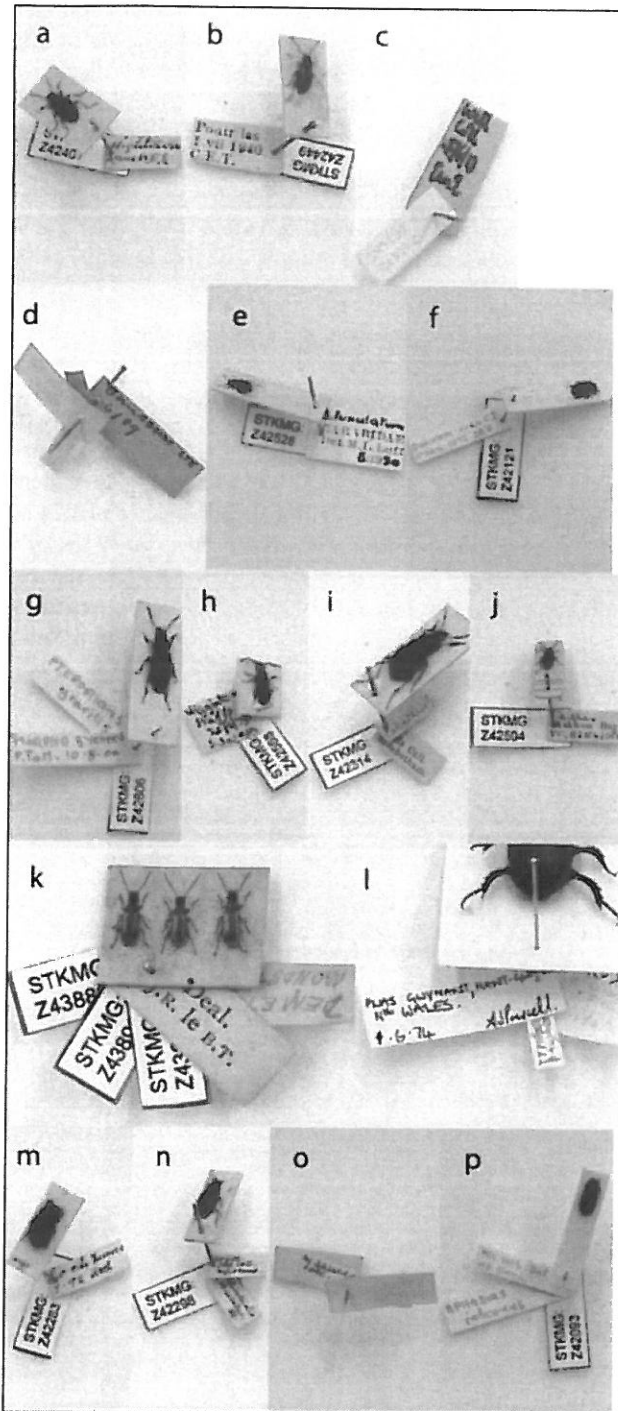


Fig.8. Examples of labels from unknown collectors and museums found in the Waterhouse Collection. a. W.E.S.; b. C.E.T.; c. Will; d. Johnsdown; e. Luff, M.L.; f. C.S.; g. Tatt, P.; h. Swain, S.; i. Sidebotham; j. Shaw, S.; k. J.R. le B.T.; l. Purcell, A.J.; m. R.N.H.; n. Shields, M. (obverse); o. Shields, M. (reverse); p. Manchester Museum duplicate.

**Preliminary conclusions**

Although there is still a lot of work to be done on the Beneficial Beetles Project, some initial conclusions on the collection can be drawn. Firstly, the wide range of specimens, both in species, localities and dates, gives a good basis for many avenues of research into changes in habitat and ecology over time, especially for the Staffordshire area. From the collections viewpoint, systematically going through each specimen during storage improvement work has allowed for individual specimen condition reporting and research. On the whole, the collection appears to be in good condition, especially taking into consideration the age of some of the specimens from older collections. These specimens from older collections also allow for research into historic coleopterists, some of whom may not be widely known. It may be that other collectors' specimens may be found in this collection, adding to our knowledge not only of species ranges over time, but also to our knowledge of the history of Coleoptera collecting and collectors.

**Acknowledgments**

Thank you to the Designation Development Fund for funding this project, and to all the staff at Stoke-on-Trent Museums for all their assistance. Thank you to the Beetles-BritishIsles email discussion group for all their assistance.