

The lecturer for the evening was introduced by Peter Williams. John Rankin's professional career has been mostly spent as a chemist and among other work he has been associated with analyzing mineral pigments. In reference to John Rankin's mineralogical interests Peter Williams noted that he has been very dogged in pursuit of information on his particular areas of interest. These have included a long and binding love of Broken Hill minerals and the historical background to mines, mining areas and mineral collections. Over the last two years Peter Williams has been working on a project studying the Sunny Corner mining area and John Rankin has been particularly helpful in providing and digging out of sometimes very obscure literature and reports an amount of very useful historical information and images relating to the mining at Sunny Corner. As a consequence of his work with U.W.S. over the past few years John Rankin is now an honorary research associate of the University.

This evening John Rankin was to speak about George Smith aka 'Specimen Smith' who had a long and illustrious career working both in private industry and for the state government. He was mine manager at the Broken Hill Consols mine in the 1890s when the mining was hitting the big bonanza grades and later went to work for many years as the Mines Inspector for the N.S.W. Geological Survey and the Department of Mines. He assembled and disposed of several collections in his lifetime, some of which were sold with many specimens from these ending up in the Australia Museum and in private collections. There is supposedly a mysterious George Smith gemstone collection which 'Sir' Howard Smith used to refer to although Peter Williams has never seen it and does not know whether it still exists or ever existed but if it des it would probably be very valuable.

George Smith was a collector with a very fine eye and was clever and smart enough to ensure that a fair portion of his collecting life ended up in either public repositories or in private collections where his great specimens would be preserved. George Smith specimens, preferably accompanied by his original labels, are prized by collectors and Society members will have a few of these.

### **George Smith - the man and his minerals'** by John Rankin.

In conducting research into George Smith's life John Rankin had found that the mining engineer was a much larger figure than people might have thought. His contributions to, and acquisitions of, NSW minerals are unparalleled by anyone else and George Smith stands alone in this area. His birth name was actually George Kurn but his father died two years after George was born and when he was seven his mother married a Captain Smith whose surname George gradually assumed. In 1879 he took up his first employment with the English & Australian Copper Company at Waratah in Newcastle. Three years later he married a lady from Adelaide and a copy of the marriage certificate had been obtained by the speaker showing George Smith's name as 'George Kurn otherwise Smith'. In 1888 he became an ore buyer at Silverton and in 1890 started working at the Consols mine as an assayer and sub-manager. During their time in Broken Hill the Smiths had four children sadly losing the youngest child at fourteen months of age although the other three outlived their parents.

The Australian Institute of Mining Engineers was a very prestigious body. It was formed in

1892 at Broken Hill and on a document listing the names of the Committee members, George Smith's name is featured along with a number of senior figures from the managements of the several mines operating on the Broken Hill lode. The Proprietary Mine was then the biggest mine at Broken Hill and the general manager, assistant general manager, the two top metallurgists and the chief engineer of that company were on the committee of the inaugural A.I.M.E. In addition there were the general managers of the mines on either side of the Proprietary, and the Consols (which was a much smaller mine than the others) also provided its general manager - and George Smith !

This indicated that George Smith had made very good contacts with important people early in his career, which must have done wonders to assist his mineral collecting and his knowledge of what was happening in the mines. In January 1894 he became the mine manager of the Consols which was a silver mine only, it did not produce any lead and its high point in production had been 1892. This meant unfortunately that George Smith had taken charge of a gradually less successful mine and he left in 1898. During these years George Smith was also busy outside his mine management duties. George Smith became secretary of the Mining Managers Association which among other duties involved him sending out a number of letters to people chasing their overdue subscriptions. He was also a keen cricketer.

In 1898 George Smith decided to move on, leaving Broken Hill and coming to Sydney with his family for a while before moving up to Chillagoe to be mine manager. The Chillagoe mine was experiencing various financial mismanagement problems over that time and after three years George Smith returned to Sydney where he stayed for the rest of his life. In 1902 he was issued with a mine manager's certificate of service, a copy of this being shown by the speaker and in 1904 he joined the Department of Mines as an Inspector of Mines. As such he traveled extensively in New South Wales inspecting mines every year. He was particularly active in the New England area from about 1912 to 1920. He had first traveled around in the west of N.S.W., starting off in the Condoblin and Cobar areas and also in the south but eventually concentrating on New England from where he was able to bring back many fine specimens.

In 1907 George Smith sold part of his mineral collection then comprising mostly Broken Hill minerals to the Australian Museum. Subsequently he exchanged numerous minerals (mainly New England specimens) with the Museum. In 1925 he retired and the Department of Mines contracted him to write "The Mineralogy of New South Wales" which he set about doing and which was published in 1926. This book is still a current bible for many people. In 1927 George Smith sold the rest of his mineral collection to the Australian Museum. He died in 1944 at Mosman aged 82.

A concern for the mineral collector in the 1890s was that since the Consols mine was a very rich silver lode, a few cases had gone before the courts where miners were convicted of stealing ore in the form of specimens. The Consols was the only mine to prosecute for this. Since George Smith wanted specimens and was an officer of the mine he had to do everything by the book. In obtaining specimens he would give the mine the same weight in silver in exchange for the specimen. Notes on these transactions proving that he had not stolen the specimens accompanied the collection sold to the Australian Museum. Whilst he was at Broken Hill, George Smith exchanged minerals extensively with American collectors having made contacts through

Americans working in the Broken Hill mines. Also during this time he donated valuable specimens to the N.S.W. Mining Museum and to the Adelaide University. Strangely enough George Smith never had anything to do with the British Museum.

The Consols mine was a British company. On the occasion of George Smith's resignation from the company in 1898, a testimonial was given by the chairman in London which read, "*He is one of the most accomplished mineralogists and metallurgists in Australia and I might say in the whole world. He has been a most masterly manager for us*". This was written in spite of the fact that the last four years of George Smith's tenure at the Consols mine had been economically poor for the company.

George Card wrote in 1927 :

*"Since W.F.Petterd passed away, Mr George Smith is the only collector who had any claim to be called a Mineralogist. Probably none but Dr.Anderson and I know how much our museums owe to him."*

Sir Maurice Mawby said of Smith:

*"I would like you to know how highly I regarded his friendship, advice and courtesy. Because of his keenness in mineralogy, most of the minerals from Broken Hill were recorded & his exchanges with eminent people did much to attract attention to the scientific & mineral wealth of Broken Hill."*

George Smith selected his minerals specimens based on aesthetics and mineralogical importance. When looking through the drawers of the mineral collection at the Australian Museum, his specimens always stand out from the rest. He was also meticulous in recording mineral specimen localities with mine depth and date often being recorded.

John Rankin continued to display a large number of views of the early Broken Hill mines and mining operations as well as notes and documents written by George Smith listing and describing his specimens and the people with whom he was corresponding about them. There were also assay reports on ore samples and analysis of specimens.

John Rankin also displayed the book written by George Smith, 'A Contribution to the Minerals of New South Wales' which was published in 1926 costing then three shillings and three pence. Finally the speaker displayed a large number of images of George Smith specimens, mostly of Broken Hill and New England minerals and mostly from the Australian Museum collection, some of which are on display in the Museum today.