

The President then introduced the first speaker for the evening, Jim Sharpe, by referring to a search that he had conducted through the Internet for information on the Mendip Hills in south-west England, the subject of the talk Jim was to give. John Chapman had found a reference '*Mendip deep lead mineries*' from 1470 where '*all commoners were ordered to attend a meeting at a place of my Lord of the Bath called the Forge Upon Mendippy*'. The records indicated that it was apparently attended by some 10,000 people '*Who sought by many at this meeting a Code of Mining Laws for Ye Olde Ancient custome of ye Occupation of ye Mendippys*' - which showed that mining was well established in the fifteenth century. In fact some lead mining in the Mendip Hills goes back to Roman times.

### **'The Hidden Collection – The Minerals of the Mendip Hills'**

Jim Sharpe commenced his talk by acknowledging that he had never actually been to the Mendip Hills but had been enthused to read about the mineralogy of the area by a guest editorial, 'The Hidden Collection' written by Peter Williams for the December 2001 issue of the Australian Journal of Mineralogy. The editorial advised that many specimens in a collection may have smaller amounts of other minerals in addition to the dominant one indicated on the label and recommended that the collector should be alert to this prospect. It was stated that careful, detailed and informed examination of specimens would inevitably lead to a considerable increase in the number of minerals represented in a collection.

In examining his own collection Jim Sharpe gradually found a number of specimens which clearly had additional minerals present and particularly came across a specimen labeled as chloroxiphite, a lead copper oxy-chloride, from the Mendip Hills. The specimen did not have a striking appearance but had been obtained because the mineral is extremely rare and in re-examining it the speaker noted that there were crystals of another mineral present. By recourse first to reference books and then arranging x-ray analysis the secondary mineral was found to be diaboelite, another lead copper oxy-chloride. This mineral may be more familiar to collectors as coming from Arizona but Jim Sharpe found that the reference books indicated that it was first described from the Mendip Hills about the same time as chloroxiphite was identified in 1923. Chloroxiphite is particularly rare because there had to be precise chemical and temperature conditions prevailing for it to form.

Continuing this investigation the speaker was concerned to find out what other minerals were likely to be associated with his Mendip specimen and after further examination established that there was also a coating of the type mineral mendipite, lead oxy-chloride. Mounting enthusiasm for the number of different rare minerals being identified in the specimen was slightly deflated when analysis of minute light blue-green crystals also present found that they were actually copper-coloured cerussite! Also identified were pyrolusite, and hydro-cerussite presenting a fascinating array of minerals from the one specimen.

In conclusion Jim Sharpe recommended that collectors continually examine and re-examine their collections, by hand lens initially, then by microscope if available and eventually arranging for x-ray analysis which was bound to reward the collector by increasing the number and variety of minerals represented. His experience with the Mendip specimen and the number of additional minerals found had probably been exceptional but potentially any collection would repay more detailed examination.