

The Betty Mayne Memorial Lecture

Mineral Icons of the Australian Museum

Ross Pogson commenced his lecture by advising that on the occasion of a memorial lecture being given it was customary to say a few words about Betty Mayne and the contribution that she had made to the Mineralogical Society. Over a few minutes the speaker provided a brief history of the Society benefactor who had become enthusiastically involved in lapidary and mineralogical interests in the 1980s after her retirement from nursing. Betty Mayne joined the Mineralogical Society during this time, being elected to the committee, becoming Secretary from 1988 to 1990 and then President from 1990 to 1991 presiding over the Joint Mineralogical Societies annual Seminar held in Sydney in 1991 on the theme of 'Mineral Collections and Collecting in Australia'. The Seminar and associated field trip to New England were held to have been a great success due in no small part to the enthusiasm, drive and organising work by the President. Very sadly and unexpectedly Betty Mayne passed away suddenly only about one month after the June 1991 Seminar.

Over the period of her interest in earth sciences Betty Mayne had built up a considerable collection of minerals, rocks, gemstones and fossils numbering some 2,000 specimens. According to the stipulation of her will the collection was sold by auction which was conducted a year after her death with the proceeds gifted equally between the Mineralogical Society and the Friends of the Geological and Mining Museum, (FOGAMM) Society to which Betty had also belonged. The Mineralogical Society used the bequest to set up the Betty Mayne Bequest Fund. At the suggestion of the late Laurie Lawrence a series of Betty Mayne Memorial Lectures were established with Professor Lawrence giving the first of these in 1992 on 'The Mineralogy and Geology of the Kingsgate Molybdenite Pipes'.

On the occasion of this year's Memorial Lecture Ross Pogson proceeded to present an informative, lively, often humorous and very well illustrated display of a number of superlative mineral specimens from the Australian Museum collection.

'Mineral Icons of the Australian Museum, - and the Stories Behind Them'.

Having introduced the background to the Memorial lectures Ross Pogson advised that he would be speaking about twenty-five mineral specimens that he had selected from the Australian Museum collections as being a selection of the very best, top-class, world-class specimens that the Museum had in its possession and which he regarded as icons. In displaying images of the specimens he would accompany them with some historical remarks and other descriptive information along the way.

The speaker then proceeded to work through images of the twenty-five specimens commencing with what he considered to be the premier icon of the entire Museum collection, a magnificent specimen of reticulated cerussite originally part of the Broken Hill Block 14 collection. When the Block 14 Mine closed down the then Manager, one F. Voss-Smith, was persuaded by Maurice Mawby among others, to donate the huge collection of oxidised zone minerals to the Australian Museum. At the time this was one of the most magnificent single bequests ever made to the Museum. The specimen is featured in a book that members might be aware of, 'The World's Finest Minerals and Crystals' by Peter Bancroft which featured specimens which had to have been nominated by someone to be placed in the book and which in the case of the Block 14 cerussite had been nominated by Albert Chapman. The description of the specimen stated that 'This specimen is

considered to be one of the best crystal groups of any species in existence'. The specimen has also been featured on an Australia Post pre-stamped envelope issued for the 1983 Centenary of Broken Hill and is also featured in both editions of the 'Minerals of Broken Hill' books.

The second specimen displayed was of a molybdenite group from the Allies Mine, Deepwater, some 43 cm across and considered to be the best of its kind in the world. According to a story given to the speaker by Lin Sutherland the Australian Museum received a visit many years ago from the then Curator of Minerals at the Smithsonian Institution (Paul Desautels) who upon being shown the molybdenite specimen supposedly 'went down on his knees in homage' in appreciation. It was acquired along with another fifty-five specimens in 1944 from a collector J. Huthnance who may have been a miner working in the Kingsgate district. The Huthnance purchase comprised a number of other molybdenites but the specimen shown was the pick of this collection and has been on continuous display since its acquisition.

The speaker continued to work through his selection of specimens noting features of each, relating details about the history, acquisition by the Museum and along the way inserting anecdotes about aspects of the histories and acquisition processes. The speaker also complimented photographers including John Haupt from the Mineralogical Society of Victoria and John Fields from the Australian Museum who had managed to take fine pictures of subjects such as azurite which are very difficult to photograph and preserve the colour of the specimen. The azurite specimen shown was from the Girofla Mine near Mungana in Queensland, from number 4 level at 400 feet depth, and was purchased from a C.J. Holland in 1908 for the sum of £4/10s which would be equivalent to a much larger sum today.

A very recent acquisition was of a fine crystalline gold in quartz from the Edwards pit at Kalgoorlie and purchased after some considerable time spent by the speaker composing a persuasive memo to the Australian Museum Senior management to obtain authorisation to access acquisition funds.

A number of the icon specimens shown were obtained by the Museum as part of the Albert Chapman Collection and the speaker provided some history about the acquisition of this collection which was originally purchased in 1988 by the State Government for one million dollars with some assistance from mining companies. It was housed for a few years in the Geological and Mining Museum until 1995 when that Museum closed and the Collection was moved to the Australian Museum and is now on permanent display helped by extra funding provided by the State Government.

A specimen of a magnificent gemmy pale blue topaz 7.5 x 7 cms from the pegmatites of the Ural Mountains in Russia had a very interesting history. It was originally mined in the late 19th century and went to a Russian museum. It was then bought by the American millionaire J.P. Morgan to be part of his second gem collection but who later donated it to the American Museum of Natural History in 1901. It remained in that museum for some sixty-six years until the collector Peter Bancroft persuaded the museum to part with it possibly in exchange for other specimens. Albert Chapman had been tracking the movement of this specimen once it had left the museum and after it had passed through the hands of one or two other collectors Albert eventually was able to buy it in March 1984 from Ed Swoboda.

An ex-Chapman specimen of a bournonite on quartz from the Herodsfoot mine near Liskeard in Cornwall was also displayed and had an interesting history. It was collected between 1858 and 1868 by a collector working in the upper levels of the mine where there were open vughs and some very

beautiful crystals. It was sold to the British Natural History Museum where it was noticed by Albert Chapman in 1973 who decided that it would look much better in his collection than in the museum and commenced negotiations to acquire it. The museum was very reluctant to part with the bournonite but because Albert had some very fine specimens of Broken Hill alabandite and Tasmanian crocoite to offer in return, the museum eventually agreed to an exchange.

Chapman collection specimens from Australia shown and described included a fine gemmy transparent raspberry red rhodonite crystal from the Zinc Corporation Mine at Broken Hill, a chalcopyrite crystal group on quartz from the Moonta Mine in South Australia with crystals 5cms across, a green smithsonite from the Proprietary Mine and a manganpyrosomalite from the South Mine, Broken Hill and a fine crocoite from the Adelaide Mine near Dundas in Tasmania. Chapman specimens from outside Australia included a 5 x 2.4 cm cuprite, one of the largest ever mined, from the Emke Mine near Onganja in Namibia, and a magnificent rhodochrosite from the N'Chwaning Mine at Hotazel near Kuruman in the North Cape Province of South Africa.

Other specimens shown not from the Chapman collection included a manganite from Germany, calcite from the Cliefden Caves near Carcoar in NSW, and a few more specimens from mines at Broken Hill: an alabandite from the Number 18 level, (2,600 foot depth), from the Zinc Corporation Mine, a George Smith stolzite from the Proprietary Mine, an azurite on cerussite and a pyromorphite from the Proprietary Block 14 Mine. The azurite specimen has crystals of up to 8.5 cms long and was registered by the Australian Museum in 1933. It was purchased from the estate of a collector Richard Eustace as part of a collection of some 450 specimens. The pyromorphite with crystals 14 x 9.5 cms was a George Smith specimen purchased in 1907 as part of his first collection. Entries for the stolzite and pyromorphite in George Smith's handwritten 1896 catalogue were shown. A fine calcite with fluorite 17 x 14 cms from the Elmwood mine in Tennessee was bought on behalf of the Australian Museum by Albert Chapman at the Tucson Show in 1984.

Still displaying Broken Hill specimens which comprised a substantial proportion of his mineral icons Ross referred to the acquisition by the Museum in 1936 of the Phillip Charley collection and a specimen which he displayed of native copper from this source. Phillip Charley was one of the seven Mount Gipps station workers who formed the original syndicate headed by Charles Rasp and George McCulloch to open up the Broken Hill mine after Rasp had discovered the lode in 1883. The Charley collection was auctioned after his death in 1936 with Oliver Chalmers from the Australian Museum and Horace Whitworth from the Geological and Mining Museum bidding against each other but with an eventual decision to buy the collection jointly and divide the specimens equally. Apparently Horace Whitworth came out ahead in the arrangement by winning a coin toss over which museum's half would include a particularly magnificent azurite specimen prized by both curators. The specimen is now on display at the Geological Survey of NSW.

Ross ended his display of mineral icons by showing a specimen of brightly sparkling vanadinite on barite crystals 9 x 7.5 x 4 cms from the Mibladen deposits in Morocco which very appropriately led into the next speaker's report. Ross finally advised that he had had great difficulty deciding what specimens from the wealth of iconic material in the Australian Museum to present to this meeting and suggested that an 'Icon II' was in the offing.