

Book Review

Making it Mine: Sir Arthur Russell and his Mineral Collection

by Roy E. Starkey. Published (2022) by British Mineralogy Publications, 15 Warwick Avenue, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, B60 2AH, England. Hardcover, 27.6 x 21.8 cm, 432 pages; £40 (+£35 shipping to the U.S.; £10 and £20 to the UK and Europe; £40 to Australia and New Zealand). Order from www.BritishMineralogy.com.

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'Making it Mine' is a magnificent book – and indisputably substantial: 2.25 kg in weight, 22 x 28 x 3.3 cm, 21 chapters and 426 pages in full colour. Within its hardback covers, Roy Starkey conveys a wealth of information about British minerals and the person who contributed more than anyone else to the preservation of iconic specimens from the heydays of metalliferous mining. The Russell Collection, bequeathed to the nation in 1964 and housed in the Natural History Museum, London, UK, is the 'jewel in the crown' of one of the finest collections in the world. Mike Rumsey (Principal Curator of Earth Sciences at the NHM) in his foreword remarks that Britain's rich and diverse mineralogical bounty contributed to the development of mineral science and is the foundation of much of the country's industrial prosperity. Sir Arthur Russell's collection of over 12,000 thoroughly documented specimens now provides an invaluable reference, constantly in use by museum staff and visitors, for research on British topographic mineralogy and cultural history. Roy Starkey's book is a comprehensive account of this collection with over 450 superb photographs of the specimens plus detailed descriptions of key localities.

As Roy says in his Preface, the book is as much about Sir Arthur's collection as it is about his long life and family – he held the hereditary title of 6th Baronet of Swallowfield in Berkshire. Early parts of the book are focussed on his predecessors and the Russell family home. The purchase of the Swallowfield house and estate was an investment by the 1st baronet Sir Henry Russell, an accomplished lawyer serving the Empire as Chief Justice in Calcutta in the early 1800s, who with his sons built up a considerable fortune. Roy's 'compelling narrative' of the family history is illustrated with reproduced portraits and Roy's own photographs. We are even treated to a picture of Jon Pertwee as Dr Who, filmed on location at Swallowfield in 1972. Sir Arthur's youngest son Christopher contributes a personal account of his upbringing and we learn about his father's personality, marital and financial difficulties, and interests in automobiles and planes.

At this point the book seems to abruptly change tack as chapter 5 is about goniometry and crystal drawing, a long-lost skill in which Sir Arthur was accomplished. Following are accounts of the Mineralogical Society and Sir Arthur's involvement over a fifty-year period, and his consultancy and advisory work including details of an ill-fated attempt to reopen the New Consols Mine in East Cornwall. With chapter 9 the book turns to Sir Arthur's collection and its acquisition. This was from numerous visits to

field sites and mines throughout Britain and Ireland, as well as from the purchase of old collections. As Roy states, the range of 'choice specimens' from old collections is a particular strength of the Russell Collection. This topic is considered in the book's longest chapter that describes and illustrates these acquisitions in chronological order with fascinating historical accounts of the original collectors and Arthur's often protracted negotiations.

Readers in the mineral collecting fraternity will relish the next chapter 'specimen gallery' comprising 45 pages of captioned photographs of the most aesthetically attractive and/or scientifically interesting specimens in the Russell Collection, as chosen by Roy. Many further specimens illustrate the chapter on featured localities of which 14 are described ranging alphabetically from Benallt Mine in north Wales to Wheal Gorland in Cornwall. Mine plans and sections, historical photographs, field sketches, letters and specimen labels provide a fascinating record of the contemporary context of the mineral specimens – many of which are shown in full-page images. Short chapters outline Arthur's unpublished work including notes on Britain's antimony mines and gold occurrences, and catalogue the 'Russell Archive' of paper-format documentation. Mike Rumsey has almost the last word in a chapter on 'an enduring legacy' outlining the collection's value and ongoing discoveries of new mineral species, topped by Roy's one-page epilogue. The book finishes with a comprehensive reference list and index.

As the back-cover blurb states, 'Making it Mine' is neither a coffee table book nor a biography but a blend of the two. Why should readers of the *Mineralogical Magazine* purchase a copy? I suggest for several reasons, not least that it serves as a worthy accompaniment to the one of the world's best mineralogical archives, housed in the NHM. Illustrated here for the first time are 445 of the Russell Collection's specimens. All are accurately provenanced and in many cases accompanied by detailed descriptions of the historic mines and mineral deposits from which the specimens were obtained – sites that are now mostly inaccessible for further collecting. But for those less excited by 'treasures of the Earth', the book's main appeal will be narratives about the people behind the specimens and the interesting anecdotes that capture the life and bygone times of a humble, largely self-taught, early-to-mid 20th century gentleman who strived single-mindedly to assemble and document a wonderful collection of mineral specimens from Britain and Ireland.