



**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 × 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](http://www.BritishMineralogy.com).

This is an important book for the history of mineral collecting. Author Roy Starkey

(whom readers may recall for his exceptional 2012 *Mineralogical Record* special issue on the famous Herodsfoot mine) has done an amazing job of gathering historical information and photos regarding one of the leading English mineral collectors of all time, Sir Arthur Russell (1878–1964), and his collection.

The book begins with a documentation of Russell’s family genealogy and an account of his life at the family estate of Swallowfield Park near Reading—well illustrated by paintings, portraits and photographs. Russell acquired his passion for mineral collecting

and mining from his mother, with later support from his first wife (of three). With a sufficient income from the tenant farms on his estate, he never had to work at a job, and was able to pursue his interest in minerals full-time, traveling throughout the British Isles for specimens. Despite a lack of formal training, he became an expert in many aspects of mining and mineralogy, especially including goniometry and crystal drawing; many of his articles in *Mineralogical Magazine* are illustrated with his own crystal drawings. Eventually he was elected president of the prestigious Mineralogical Society of Great Britain and Ireland, serving from 1939 to 1942. Arthurite, a new copper-iron arsenate from Hingston Down Consols in Cornwall, was described from a specimen he personally collected, and it was named in his honor in 1964. He was hired as a mining consultant on numerous occasions, and was involved in an attempt (unsuccessful) to reopen the New Consols mine in Cornwall. All of these endeavors and more are meticulously recorded in Starkey’s very thorough biography of Russell.

The mineral portion of the book begins on page 98, with a discussion of his first specimens, a sketch of what his mineral room looked like, and details of his field collecting activities, followed by a major chapter on various old collections he acquired over the years. They include the collections of John Hawkins (1761–1841), Alfred Fox (1794–1874), Edmund Pearse (1788–1856), Richard Boyns (1822–1897), William Semmons (1841–1915), Isaac Walker (1794–1853), George Croker Fox (1785–1850), Richard Hawke (1824–1887), William Sargent (1851–1943), Baroness Angela Georgina Burdett-Coutts (1814–1906), Philip Rashleigh (1729–1811), John Ruskin (1819–1900), and no fewer than 27 others, all meticulously biographized, with portraits and many photos of their actual specimens. Just as interesting for the historian are the following chapters on the many mineral dealers that Russell interacted with and obtained specimens from, and on the colleagues and contacts that he developed over the years.

A chapter is devoted to the tortuous process through which Russell’s collection finally ended up at the Natural History Museum in London. And by the time that discussion is completed, we are still only halfway through the book! Chapter 15, “The Collection,” starts on page 233, and its story runs through the packing and shipping of the collection, its arrival at the museum, its sorting and cataloging, and the creation of the collection database; the chapter also offers a statistical analysis of the contents

of the collection.

Then at last we arrive at chapter 16, “The Specimen Gallery,” beginning on page 245. The selection of Figures 419–556 was based on considerations of scientific or historical interest, visual impact, unusual localities, unusual associations, and the author’s personal favorites. There are far too many highlights to go over in detail, but the first photo to catch my eye was a 13-cm bournonite on matrix from the type locality of Wheal Boys—the same specimen that was illustrated by a painting in Philip Rashleigh’s famous *Specimens of British Minerals* (1797). Also fun to see is a 5-cm specimen of brookite crystals on matrix from Prenteg, Tremadoc, Wales, that Isaac Walker had purchased from Henry Heuland in 1838 for 30 shillings. There is an excellent 8-cm witherite from the Fallowfield mine; a beautiful 6-cm cluster of green pyromorphite crystals from Wheal Alfred in Cornwall; three charming botryoidal blue hemimorphites from Roughton Gill; a superb 7-cm connellite from the Poldice mine, Cornwall; and many, many others.

Then comes Chapter 17, entitled “Featured Localities,” actually a series of short articles, well illustrated with Russell specimens, maps and historic photos, and full of fascinating historical research. The localities given this special treatment include the Benallt mine (Carnarvonshire), Boltsburn mine, Caradon mine, Greenside mine, Laharran quarry (Ireland), Nentsberry Hags mine, New Brancepeth colliery,

Rotherhope Fell mine, St. Peter’s mine, Virtuous Lady mine, Wanlockhead (Scotland), Wheal Gorland, and the Egremont-Frizington-Cleator Moor area (check out the 8-cm Cumbrian blue barite on page 352—the most gorgeous cluster I have ever seen).

Chapter 18 was an unusual surprise. Russell was a prolific author and had many articles published in *Mineralogical Magazine* and elsewhere. But in his files were several unpublished articles, and these Starkey has rescued from obscurity and published here.

The next chapters discuss the Russell archive preserved at the Natural History Museum, and Russell’s enduring legacy (this latter chapter by Mike Rumsey, principal curator at the museum). Concluding the book are an 18-page bibliography, a list of visiting collectors Russell had entertained at Swallowfield Park, a list of Russell specimens that have been illustrated in other publications, and (thank goodness!) a very detailed index.

Arthur Russell’s lifelong quest was to build the finest collection of British Minerals ever assembled, a task he certainly accomplished. He doggedly pursued the acquisition of important collections made during the period of most intensive mining in Britain, especially in Cornwall and Devon, gathering over 14,000 specimens. This extraordinary feat yielded what Smithsonian curator Paul Desautels called “probably the finest regional collection ever made.” Through the cooperation of the museum, Starkey has been able to

obtain and publish new photos of a great many specimens, including 445 that have never previously been published; this alone is a major contribution to the literature of mineral collecting.

The book is printed on glossy paper for best photo reproduction, and is bound hardcover with a sewn binding. It should provide many hours of interesting reading, and stand as a valuable historical reference not likely ever to be duplicated.

My only quibble is marketing-related: the peculiar main title of “*Making It Mine*” says nothing elucidative or evocative, and must be rescued by the perfectly descriptive subtitle, “*Sir Arthur Russell and his Mineral Collection*.” However, I have no right to criticize, since the *Mineralogical Record* published Michael P. Cooper’s *Robbing the Sparry Garniture* (2006), a poetic title I loved but was obscure to many readers who did not understand what “sparry” meant in the old parlance, or what a “garniture” was. That estimable book also had to be rescued by its more descriptive subtitle, *A 200-Year History of British Mineral Dealers*. Starkey’s expansive new book on Sir Arthur Russell, especially in combination with Cooper’s 2006 book, is a treasure indeed for any collectors interested in the history of mineral collecting and the minerals of Britain. The price is extremely reasonable (even when the hefty cost of shipping the 4.1-pound tome is included).

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