

History and Highlights, including New Mexico Minerals, of the Natural History Museum (NHM), London, England

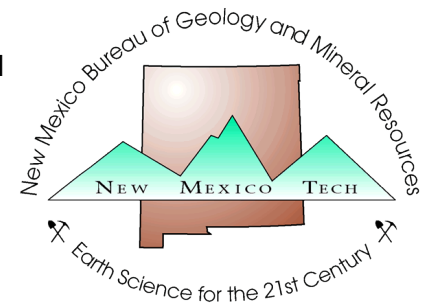
Michael S. Rumsey

45th New Mexico Mineral Symposium
November 7-9, 2025, Macey Center, Socorro, NM
pp.25-27

Downloaded from: <https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/museum/nmms/abstracts/home.cfm?yr=2025>

The annual [New Mexico Mineral Symposium](#) provides a forum for both professionals and amateurs interested in mineralogy. The meeting allows all to share their cumulative knowledge of mineral occurrences and provides stimulus for mineralogical studies and new mineral discoveries. In addition, the informal atmosphere encourages intimate discussions among all interested in mineralogy and associated fields.

The symposium is organized each year by the [Mineral Museum](#) at the [New Mexico Bureau of Geology & Mineral Resources](#).



Abstracts from all prior symposiums are also available: <https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/museum/nmms/abstracts>

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MICHAEL S. RUMSEY

Principal Curator in Charge, Mineral and Planetary Sciences, Science Department,
Natural History Museum, Cronwell Road, London, UK, SW7 5BD.



The collections at the NHM were started with the purchase of the eclectic collections of Sir Hans Sloane in 1753, funded via a national lottery. This collection founded the British Museum which over time got so voluminous that it was separated into three different institutions, the British Museum, the British Library and the Natural History Museum (Figure 1). Sloane was not an avid collector of minerals, so despite a few notable exceptions the mineral collection did not get going until about 1799. Coinciding with a period of economic growth, scientific enquiry and the Victorian interest in collecting within the UK, the collection expanded at a rapid rate, slowing down only into the 1980s

In this talk, we will cover the history of the collection by looking at specific highlights, focusing on who these items came from (including royalty), the global coverage of the objects (with a little tangent on New Mexican minerals), what historical relevance they hold and who studied the specimens for

Figure 1. The NHM, London, England.

the purpose of forwarding our scientific knowledge (including the discovery of elements, the first fluid



Figure 2. Smithsonite, Kelly Mine, Magdalena Mts., NM on display in the main mineral hall.

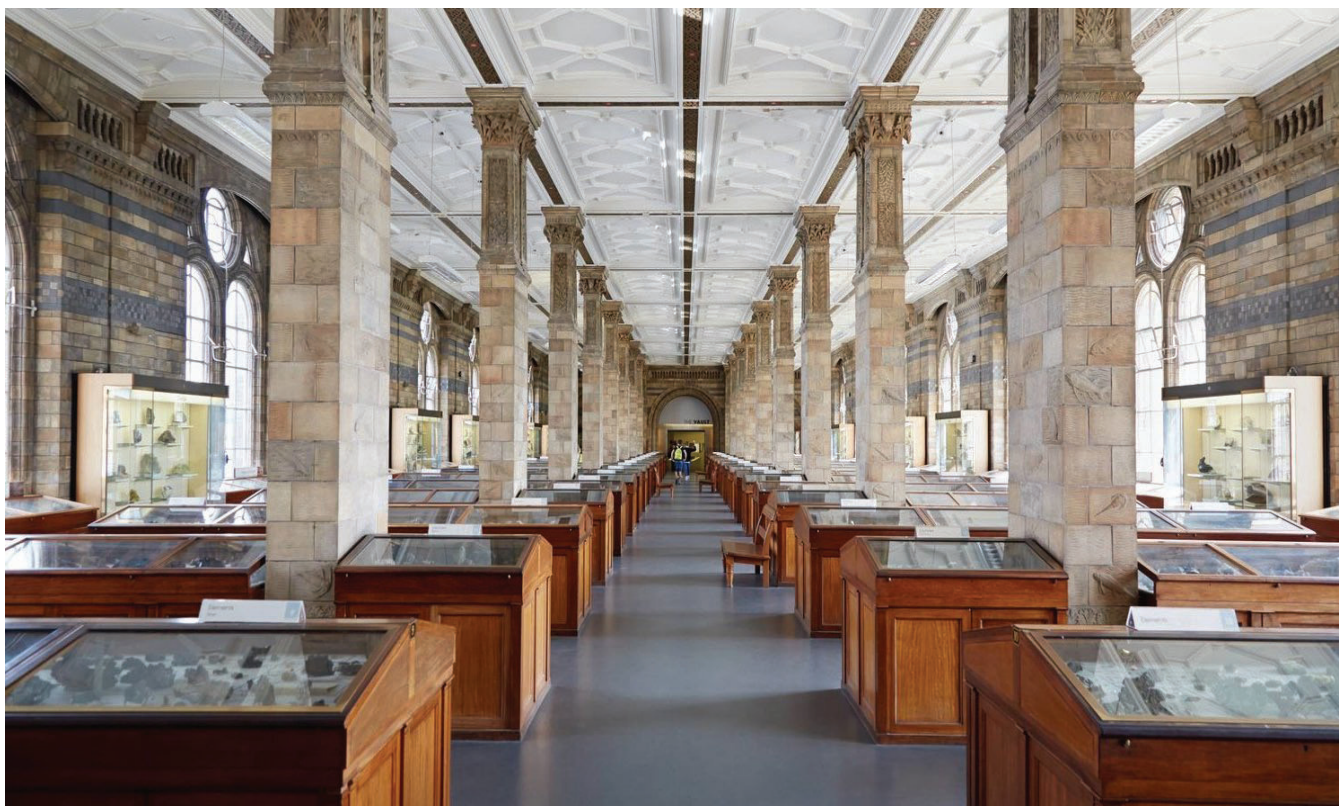


Figure 3. The main mineral hall, NHM.

inclusions and fundamental mineralogical concepts).

Well considered as a collection of collections, on four occasions, the finest private collection of minerals in the UK ended up at the museum; Charles Greville (1810), Allan/Greg (1860), Sir Arthur Russell (1964) and Heuland/Ludlam (1985). Two of these now stand alone as specific collections alongside the unique and incredibly well-documented Ashcroft Collection of Swiss Alpine minerals.

Containing nearly 200'000 minerals, around 5'000 gems, 5'000 meteorites, over 150'000 rocks and ores, there have been many beautiful and aesthetic samples acquired that have graced the cabinets of the iconic systematic mineral gallery, which remains largely unchanged since its opening at the current location in South Kensington after an early relocation in 1881 (Figure 2). With around 12'000 samples still on public display at the museum across three permanent galleries, the museum is an incredible place to view multiple different aspects

of the mineral kingdom.

Finally, we will look at how the collection is used behind the scenes today, often not appreciated by the 5-6 million visiting tourists each year, the Natural History Museum is not just a bucket-list dinosaur attraction, but a museum with over 300 scientific staff and cutting-edge research labs in the basement. We will look at how the collections are



Figure 4. Smithsonite, Kelly Mine, Magdalena Mts., NM on display in Hintze Hall, NHM.

currently being developed and the new discoveries

that are still made on this old collection – exemplifying the importance of having readily available scientifically aligned mineral specimens alongside knowledgeable curators who can help navigate over 250 years of history.