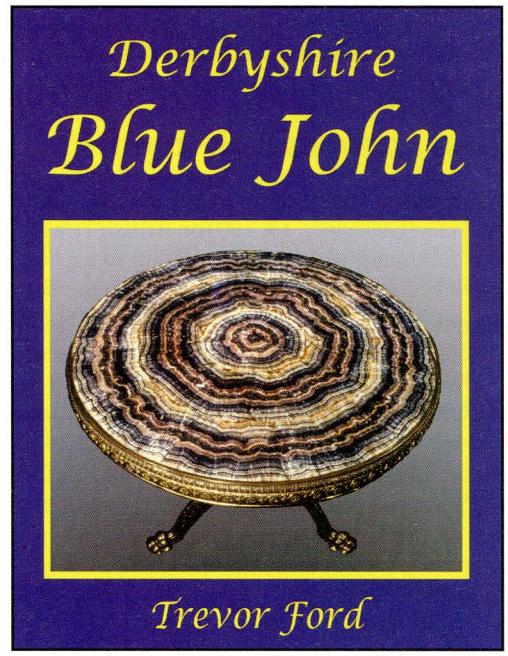
REVIEWS

Derbyshire Blue John, by Trevor Ford, 2019. East Midlands Geological Society: Nottingham (available from www.moorebooks.co.uk), 80 pages, 978-0-9519717-9-6, £6.50.



I last met Trevor Ford at his home in May 2015, and although suffering from various medical problems his mind was as sharp as ever and he was immediately interested to discuss the mineralogy and geology of Derbyshire. I shall always remember him, with his rather gruff style, but warm personality, as 'Mr Peak District'. His long association with the study of that region and his many publications will need no introduction to members of the Society.

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to review this book. To do so actually required reviewing two books – the original and the latest (Third) edition so as to be able to draw a meaningful comparison. The book provides a comprehensive and thoroughly researched history of Blue John, chronicling its discovery, geology, mineralogy, mining and usage for ornaments, jewellery and as an inlay material over the past 250 years or so.

The first thing that catches the eye is the larger page format (175 × 233 mm) compared to the original which at 140 × 215 mm was slightly smaller than A5, providing a healthy 36% more space on a page. The new edition sports a similarly styled cover, in a slightly brighter yellow and less vivid purple than the original, embellished with an image of a particularly fine Blue John table manufactured by Thomas Woodruff.

The larger format has permitted typesetting in a nice clear 11 point serif font, compared to the original which was set in a rather compact 9 point font. This is a most welcome change, especially for those of us with age-induced impaired vision! The wider page also facilitates slightly larger images, and the book is lavishly illustrated with colour photographs, almost all of which are new in this edition. Colour rendition is noticeably improved compared to the original version, and better showcases the beauty of the stone.

The new edition packs its content onto 80 pages, compared to the original 111, but still manages to include 124 full colour images, compared to an original 64, and a further eight colour maps and diagrams bring the total illustrations to 165 compared to 123 in the first edition. Overall, the book has an attractive feel and is printed on good quality paper.

What then of the content? The first edition included a foreword by the late Duchess of Devonshire who died in September 2014, and the new edition continues the family tradition with an enthusiastic foreword from the current Duke of Devonshire. This is followed by sections on the special features of Blue John, the derivation of the name, and descriptions of the caves and mines with which it is associated. There is much interesting detail here. The full colour maps, plans and sections in the first 12 pages add greatly to the visual appeal and clarity of the book.

The editors have tightened up the text; the mineral name fluorite correctly replaces the previously used term 'fluorspar' on page 7, for example, fluorspar strictly being an industrial product rather than a mineral species.

The section on the geological history and mineral deposits of the Peak District sets Blue John into a regional geological context, and leads into a discussion of the mineralogy and cause of colour of the famous stone. A detailed listing of the fifteen known veins, with illustrations of the characteristic appearance of each will be a useful aid to the collector of Blue John artefacts. Comparisons are drawn with banded fluorite from other localities, before launching into an account of the mining and working of Blue John.

The first edition included a section titled 'Blue John and the Romans' but the editors of the new edition have laid this myth comprehensively to rest in the section 'Blue John not with the Romans'! We then progress to explore the history of the discovery of Blue John and its importance to the business of Birmingham manufacturer and entrepreneur Matthew Boulton.

The final sections deviate slightly from the previous grouping and encompass Blue John in fireplaces, its usage in the 19th century, and a tribute to the great names of the past including, for example, John Mawe, John Vallance, William Adam and Joseph Hall of Derby. There follows a most interesting account of the craftsmen who work Blue John today and its continuing association with the Castleton area. I particularly enjoyed this latter section.

The final two sections of the book bring us right up to date, with a review of Blue John through to the 21st century, including the recently crafted Blue John window designed for the Wonders of the Peak Gallery at Buxton Museum and a gazetteer of notable collections

of Blue John, clearly aimed at encouraging the reader to go and seek out examples for themselves as they travel the country. Here, we learn that The National Trust houses no fewer than ninety Blue John ornaments in its various historic properties.

A list of 'further reading' running to 31 items, some as recent as 2018, is provided. Image credits, acknowledgments and brief biographies of the author and editors conclude the work.

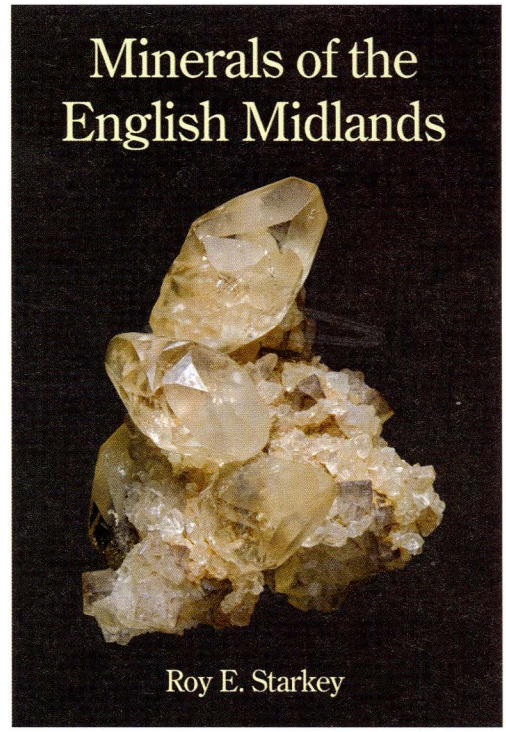
I would have liked to see an index included in the book, always a valuable feature of a reference work such as this, and figure numbers cross-referenced in the text, but these are minor criticisms of what is undoubtedly still the finest book on Derbyshire's most famous decorative stone 'Blue John'.

Given that the first edition was priced at £5.95 in 2000 (equivalent to £9.95 in 2019 terms), the publishers are to be congratulated on offering the new edition for only £6.50 (a real terms reduction of about 35%).

I am sure that Trevor would have been delighted with this new revised edition and it is a great shame that he did not live to see it. The book will appeal to mineral collectors, collectors of Blue John artefacts, the antique trade and visitors to the Peak District National Park alike, and can be thoroughly recommended to anyone with even a passing interest in the subject. Please go and buy a copy!

Roy Starkey

Minerals of the English Midlands, by Roy E Starkey, 2018. British Mineralogy Publications: Bromsgrove, 432 pages, 978-0-9930182-3-7, £35.



This profusely illustrated and beautifully produced book, with an introduction by the Duke of Devonshire whose collection at Chatsworth figures in the text, is a comprehensive and very readable account of the variety of mineral species, and the mines and quarries in which they occur, within the entire English Midlands. It covers 13 counties with separate chapters for each – Cheshire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire and Rutland, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Midlands and Worcestershire. There are also chapters on the regional geology, mineral deposits by area, notable local collections and collectors, mineral dealers and decorative stones. The 18 pages of references list 999 entries, and appear to be truly comprehensive. The text is accompanied by 943 superb illustrations, nearly all in colour and with comprehensive annotation. There is also a comprehensive index.

The book opens with an overview of the geological development of the area from the late Precambrian rocks of the Malverns and Charnwood to the present day accompanied by a geological map from the BGS. This is followed by brief descriptions of the main orefields, including Derbyshire, Shropshire, the Carboniferous coalfields and Jurassic ironstones, Cheshire copper, and the also the evaporite deposits of salt, gypsum and celestine. The separate county chapters then review the local mineral deposits in appropriate detail. For example the Cheshire salt industry is covered at length, with a number of historic and modern photographs and diagrams tracing the development of the industry from 'wild brining' to modern planned mechanical and solution mining and the development of gas storage cavities. The longest chapter is devoted to Derbyshire with 87 pages and 242 illustrations, mainly of calcite, fluorite, galena, baryte and sphalerite but also including rare examples, such as ashoverite and sweetite, whose type examples were found at Milltown quarry, Ashover. A number of unusual minerals are also covered including Warwickshire manganese species and several occurrences of agates in Silurian lavas of Gloucestershire and Triassic sandstones of Worcestershire.

All the illustrations are excellently reproduced with full details of the locality or the mineral species, The mineral images all include the collector or collection, location, scale and collection date, but strangely not their chemical formula.

There are many descriptions of individual mines or quarries with their minerals, sometimes with reproductions of historical illustrations of plans or sections. There are also many interesting asides including the story of the Leicestershire Barwell stony meteorite of 1965, the Shropshire Rowton iron meteorite of 1876, the 14-km 'walk' of the 1700 tonne Sundew ironstone dragline in 1973 across Northamptonshire, and the 1944 Fauld explosion crater.

The county chapters are followed by a section on collectors and collecting who include John Tradescant, Matthew Boulton, Georgiana Cavendish (Duchess of Devonshire), Sir Joseph Banks, Josiah Wedgewood,

Erasmus Darwin, Arthur Russell and Bob King. Local and national museums and university collections with notable mineral collections are described. Mineral dealers from the 18th Century to the present day are also discussed, with examples of catalogues. Finally there is a chapter on decorative stones, such as alabaster, Ashford black marble and of course Castleton Blue John, all with excellent illustrations.

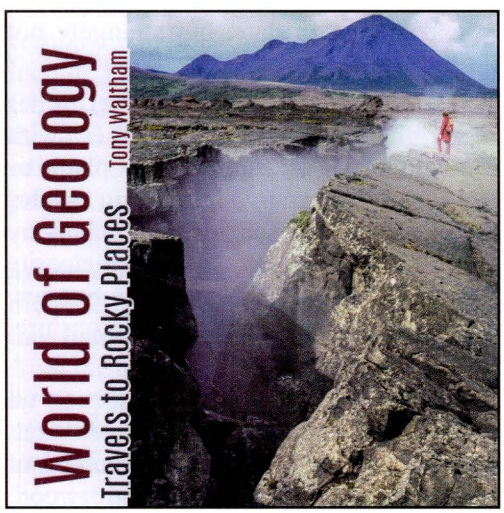
The book will appeal not just to mineral collectors, who will find much of interest from Roy Starkey's indefatigable research, but also to anyone interested in the natural history of the English Midlands and who appreciates a very good, beautifully illustrated and truly interesting book.

Tim Colman

World of Geology: travels to rocky places. Tony Waltham, 2019, Whittles: Dunbeath. 219 pages, 119 colour plates, 978-184995-437-2, £18.99.

Tony Waltham is well known to Mercian Geologist readers. He has occupied the editorial chair with distinction for almost two decades; but sadly, this year's issue is to be his swan song. For even longer he has been on the editorial board of *Geology Today*, the bi-monthly magazine of the Geologists' Association and The Geological Society (currently published by John Wiley). He became solely responsible for producing the magazine's hallmark back cover which has featured his superb geologically themed photographs, each accompanied by an extended explanatory caption.

Last year he created a book for private circulation which was mainly drawn from some of the *Geology Today* back covers and its warm reception has encouraged him to produce a revised version for a wider readership – *World of Geology*. Over several decades he has literally travelled the world, frequently to remote areas off the beaten track. Camera in hand, he has invariably been accompanied by his wife Jan who frequently acts as the human scale in his photographs. *World of Geology* is essentially a physical geological grand tour of six main continents (Antarctica is not in there). Naturally the choice of the 110 sites selected for the book is influenced by his professional background, ensuring a degree of applied geology with respect to civil engineering and mining. For example, Site 6 shows the stupendous open pit copper mine in northern Chile which covers an area of 4.5x3.5 km and currently attains a depth approaching one kilometre. Unsurprisingly, karst in its widest sense is well covered, as are the all-time favourites of geysers, glaciation and volcanism. Just one palaeontological site is included. This displays some spectacular dinosaur footprints consisting of two parallel sets exposed on a steeply dipping bedding plane in a Bolivian limestone quarry. The continental distribution of the localities is: South America 9; North America 26; Europe 31 including 14 from UK and Ireland; Africa 6; Asia 28 and Australia/New Zealand 8.



This collection makes a splendid coffee table type book, one to be periodically dipped into rather than read continuously from cover to cover. In order to also appeal to non-geologists and to help appreciate the site contexts, Tony has provided a very brief introduction to the basics of earth dynamics.

Your reviewer's outlook is primarily that of a Quaternary geologist, hence his nit-picking eye is focussed in that direction. Site 36 is the famed communal cellar excavated in the permafrost at Tuktoyaktuk on the Canadian shore of the Arctic Ocean. Readers might be puzzled by the kind of exposure in the cellar walls. This is not typical permafrost as it is extremely ice-rich and the key to this is the likelihood that the material is relict glacier ice in origin – a glacial influence is hinted at by the caption. Possibly the most interesting site demonstrating human-geology interaction is not a 'rocky place' but rather a peat-cutter working a blanket peat bog. This is Site 41 from County Mayo in western Ireland. Rather idiosyncratically, the caption suggests that peat is 'a green resource' due to it being a 'feature of human activities'. However, Irish peat commenced accumulating following total deglaciation, *c.*10 ka, and its subsequent growth has been heavily influenced by climate and relief; it is true that some Neolithic structures were later buried by peat growth but a causal link to anthropogenic activity is weak. Peat is a fossil fuel and is not green if dug, which is why the Irish are currently working towards the abandonment of peat cutting. Tony's photograph may well survive as a reminder of times past.

Until very recently this kind of book would be welcomed as an encouragement to world travel. Indeed, earlier in the year your reviewer, while on an ophiolite safari, sat at a café opposite the Nizwa souk in Oman (Site 76). The possibility of a flash flood sweeping across the parking area was farthest from his mind. Yet as the extinction rebellion campaign gathers pace and the reality of climate change becomes increasingly apparent it clear that global tourism is unsustainable. Although Tony's excellent book provides an inspiring insight into the Earth's magnificent landscapes, the 'inconvenient truth' is that our long-haul wanderlust urges must be restricted.

Peter Worsley