

Samuel Stutchbury and the Australian Museum

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ABSTRACT. Samuel Stutchbury arrived in Australia in November 1850 as Mineralogical Surveyor. Although coming from a position as Curator of a large museum in Bristol, he had wide experience of coal and metal mining and field geology. As a young man he had spent the years 1825 to 1827 in the Pacific, including several months in the Sydney region.

In a period of less than five years, under extremely difficult conditions, he mapped an area of some 80,000 km² of eastern Australia, extending from Sydney as far north as Gladstone. His work is buried in official reports and in his journals.

Although well regarded by the common miners and landholders, who asked for his assistance, his work was undermined to some extent by the lack of appreciation by officials, and by ill-informed press statements.

Stutchbury's relations with the Australian Museum were strained for a time by accusations that he was giving them poor specimens, while collecting material to sell in Britain, a matter which he vehemently denied. His collections were displayed in the Museum to enthusiastic crowds in 1855, but they seem to have since vanished.

However, the list of his minerals was found at the Museum in 1907, and provoked some interest. Much earlier, some of the minerals collected by Stutchbury and the accompanying documentation attracted the attention of John Calvert, who passed the materials off as his own to show his knowledge of the Australian mining scene, and probably to support his dubious mining ventures.

BRANAGAN, D., 1992. Samuel Stutchbury and the Australian Museum. Records of the Australian Museum Supplement 15: 99–110.

Oliver Chalmers has often expressed his admiration for Samuel Stutchbury, the first person to identify stilbite: "...immediately underlying the soil is a vein of flesh-coloured stilbite, foliated and crystallised, the crystals ranging from one to two and a half inches in length...". This was in 1853 at Garrawilla, south west of Gunnedah, one of Chalmers's happy hunting grounds

(Chalmers, 1979).

It is unnecessary to extol Oliver Chalmers' virtues as a mineralogist; however Stutchbury's abilities in this field, and his other geological endeavours, are remembered only by a few present-day geologists. This festschrift seems therefore to be an appropriate place to pay homage to the work of one of Chalmers's important predecessors.