



The S A Gem and Mineral Club

Associated Member of FOSAGAMS

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NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2013

LAST CLUB MEETING Thursday 31st October 2013 at 7.30pm at the Conference Room, St Saviour's Church Hall, cnr 1st Avenue/Villiers Road, Walmer. It had been intended to show



Umjjindi's spacious workshop

one of the NMMU's videos, but we found that we had actually already seen the one we were going to bring. Derek Scotney stepped into the breach and gave us a most interesting talk accompanied by some excellent photographs. This was divided into 3 sections. The first was about a visit to a workshop in Barberton, **Umjjindi Jewellery**, run by Evert van Engelenhoven and his wife. In addition to being a successful commercial venture, the workshop trains unemployed young people to become skilled in jewellery-making, including techniques such as lost-wax casting. Their students are usually successful in finding employment in Johannesburg and have won various awards for their work.

The second part of the talk was about the interesting geology of the Barberton district. It was particularly gratifying to see how local government has realised the tremendous tourism potential of interesting geological phenomena and has made big efforts to attract geology buffs to these "geosites" by clearing and tending to the areas, providing parking, etc. The "geosites" are clearly worth visiting if one is in the area.



Interesting erosion patterns at Barberton geosite

Finally, Derek told us about the visit he and Pearl had recently made to the Kruger National Park and showed a series of photographs of some of the animals and gorgeous birds in this wonderful facility.



Blue-eared Starling

Colin said that he had some news for the Club, namely that he and Gill were planning to relocate overseas in the middle of 2014, as they had no family left in South Africa. Although other members could fill the portfolios of chairman and secretary/scribe, the workshop would need a new home. As members need time to

plan and execute whatever measures are decided upon before then, the Committee had decided to bring the AGM forward from February, and it will now take place at the Club meeting to be held on the 30th January 2014. Even if the Club machinery has to be put into storage until another facility is found, the social and meeting aspects can still go on as normal. Colin asked members to please consider these matters and bring their proposals to the AGM in January. There is no club meeting in December.

NEXT MEETING : The November meeting will take the form of a dinner to be held at the Crest Room, Beach Hotel, on the 28th November. Eighteen members have booked to attend as well as our guests for the evening, Russell Shone and his wife Jenny, who have graciously accepted our invitation.

There is, as usual, no meeting in December, and the next meeting will take place at St Saviour's Conference Room on Thursday 30th January 2014 and will comprise the Annual General Meeting. There are important decisions to be made so members are asked PLEASE to make every effort to attend and give their input.



In the meantime the Chairman and Committee wish all members a very Happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

PLEASE NOTE : the workshop will be available pretty much throughout the holiday season for those who want to use it. Please phone Colin who is willing to assist most days by arrangement.

We are rapidly approaching Christmas, and your scribe was wondering what to write about this month in the Newsletter which would relate to both Christmas and our interest of gems and minerals. One of the most popular Christmas Carols is “*We Three Kings of Orient Are*” or, as generations of small children have sung it “*We Three Kings of Orient Tar!*” These Magi or Kings, depending on your reference, were stated to have “*come from the East*” and to have brought the baby Jesus gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh; gold as a symbol of kingship on earth, frankincense (an incense) as a symbol of deity, and myrrh (an embalming oil) as a symbol of death. I found myself wondering where these three men, and the gifts they brought, had originated, so I did some research. Traditionally the view is that they were Babylonians, Persians, or Jews from Yemen as the kings of Yemen then were Jews. There is an Armenian tradition identifying the “*Magi of Bethlehem*” as Balthasar of Arabia, Melchior of Persia, and Gaspar of India, other ancient traditions say that the three men were one old, one middle-aged and one a young man, and some that the man carrying the gold was from the ancient city of Tarsus. Where was the gold likely to have come from?



Gold coins of Phillip of Macedonia

Tarsus was a rich and thriving city at that time. Extensive deposits of copper, iron, silver, and gold, in addition to alloying materials, formed the basis of an industrial revolution in the Bronze age. Tin was the principal metal mined and smelted as evidenced by thousands of crucible fragments with tin-rich slag accretion found there. Bronze was also made from tin with copper mined in the locality. The tin mine started around 3000 BCE, probably as an open-pit mine. Near the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, the mine expanded into shaft-and-gallery systems, workshops were set up outside the mine entrance, and the city of Goltepe grew. By the time of Christ’s birth, gold and silver coins were minted, and jewellery and other artifacts were being exported all over the Roman Empire. Tarsus was then a major commercial hub, attracting visitors like the famous lovers Cleopatra and Mark Anthony.

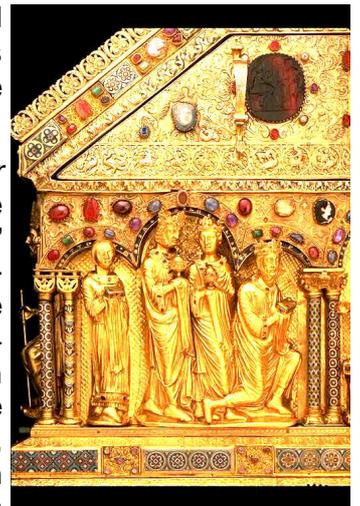


Cleopatra’s Gate named in Turkish “Gate of the Bitch” (!) built to commemorate her arrival at Tarsus with Mark Antony in 41BC.



The Shrine of the Three Kings

After the visit to Bethlehem, the Magi “*returned another way*” so as to avoid Herod, and do not reappear. One story is that their remains were found “*in the land of Ind*” by Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She took the remains to the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople whence in 344 they were taken to Milan, eventually making their way in 1164 to Germany. The “*Shrine of the Three Kings*” was made to hold these remains and took 55 years to make. It is 43” (110cm) wide, 60” (153cm) high, and 87” (220cm) long, and consists of 3 joined sarcophagi made of wood, with gold and silver overlay decorated with filigree, enamel, many gold figurines in scenes from the Bible, and over 1000 jewels and beads, including a large number of cameos and intaglio pieces, some pre-Christian. Cologne Cathedral was begun in 1248 to house these important relics and took 632 years to complete..



Part of end face of the Shrine showing gems and solid gold figurines

There are 3 crowns in Cologne’s coat of arms to this day, reflecting the importance of the Shrine to the city.

On July 20, 1864, the shrine was opened up, and there were discovered coins dating from the 1100s and “*in a special compartment of the shrine - along with remains of ancient old rotten or moulded bandages, besides pieces of aromatic resins and similar substances - numerous bones of three persons, which under the guidance of several present experts could be assembled into nearly complete bodies: the one in his early youth, the second in his early manhood, the third was rather aged.*” This is particularly interesting in view of the legends about the ages of the men. After being studied, the bones were wrapped in white silk and returned to the shrine.

In the Monastery of St. Paul of Mount Athos in Greece, there is a 15th-century golden case containing purportedly the Gifts of the Magi, namely pieces of gold and grains of frankincense and myrrh. It was donated to the monastery in the 15th century by the wife of the Ottoman Sultan Murat II, godmother to Mehmet II the Conqueror of Constantinople. They were part of the relics of the Holy Palace of Constantinople, looted by the Ottomans after the fall of the city, and were said to have been displayed in the Palace since the 4th century.

