

# Anniversaries

Died 110 years ago



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## WILLIAM FREDERICK PETTERD (1849–1910) AND TASMANIAN MINERALOGY

Carol Bacon (Australia)

The author of the first catalogue of the minerals known to occur in Tasmania, William Frederick Petterd FGS (London), FRS (Tasmania), CMZS (London), FLS (NSW) (1849–1910), died just over 110 years ago, on 15 April 1910.

Petterd compiled his first catalogue of minerals in 1893 and made several additions to it during his lifetime. He was not employed by the government; he made a living first making, then selling boots, but he had an extraordinary interest in the natural world and became an expert in natural history. In the 1893 catalogue he described 244 species of minerals, 40 of which had not been recorded in other parts of Australia, including crocoisite (crocoite),  $\text{PbCrO}_4$ , (now the State mineral emblem of Tasmania) and vauquelinite,  $\text{Pb}_2\text{Cu}(\text{CrO}_4)(\text{PO}_4)(\text{OH})$ . Petterd noted that, at the time, 185 species of mineral had been discovered in NSW, 100 in South Australia, 101 in Queensland and 172 in New Zealand. His last update of the catalogue, which was published posthumously in 1910, contained descriptions of just over 330 mineral species. The rare mineral, Petterdite  $\text{PbCr}^{3+}_2(\text{CO}_3)_2(\text{OH})_4 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}$ , and the living mollusc, *Notoacmea petterdi* (Petterd's limpet), are named after him.

William Frederick Petterd was born in Hobart, Tasmania to William Frederick Petterd Sr (1825–1896) and his first wife, Sarah (née Andrew) (1828–1851) in 1849. Petterd was only two years old when his mother died of consumption. His father subsequently married his mother's sister, in 1853.<sup>i</sup> William Frederick Petterd Sr worked as a shoemaker, a poulterer, a cabinet maker and finally as an undertaker. He frequently won prizes at agricultural shows for his poultry.

As a young man, the younger Petterd showed a great interest in scientific matters and *when little more than a boy he was looked upon as an authority in matters relating to Australian conchology and entomology*.<sup>ii</sup> He travelled widely through parts of Polynesia and Queensland on collecting expeditions, although he had some bad luck in early 1875 after he had been collecting in Queensland with Charles French. Almost the whole of their uninsured collection of birds and insects were lost when the vessel in which the specimens were being shipped was wrecked on the passage to Melbourne.<sup>iii</sup>



Photograph of WF Petterd from the *Cyclopedia of Tasmania* 1900 held by the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office.

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Petterd joined the *Chevert* expedition as a naturalist in May 1875. The venture was financed and led by William Macleay, who purchased and then modified the 313-ton barque *Chevert* for the purpose.<sup>iv</sup> He wanted to collect natural history specimens on islands in the Torres Strait as well as on New Guinea. The expedition returned to Cape York, Queensland, in September 1875, when Petterd reported to his uncle, TA Reynolds, that *we formed a large collection, and got some new things.*<sup>v</sup>

Petterd and some fellow expeditioners resolved to return to New Guinea in October 1876 to continue collecting on their own account. Perhaps the loss of the collection made with Charles French influenced his decision, as Petterd wrote to his uncle:

*Dr. James, Mr. Knight, and myself, return from here to New Guinea per mission steamer Ellengowan, collecting on our own account, and as I have lost the result of years of toil, I come to the conclusion of losing my life, or turning up trumps. The steamer is to land us at Port Moresby, on the south eastern coast of New Guinea, and from there we will try and penetrate into the interior, and ascend Mount Owen Stanley (13,000 feet high), or perish in the attempt.*<sup>vi</sup>

Petterd noted that:

*Several foreigners have penetrated a short distance off the coast, but have not done anything particularly great; so a vast field is before us and that his party were to be the first English speaking expedition that has attempted to penetrate into the interior [...]. If things go well we anticipate stopping some years in New Guinea, so that in all probability I will never again return to civilisation.*<sup>vii</sup>

Once aboard the *Ellengowan*, Petterd met with explorer Octavius C Stone FRGS and his party, consisting of Lawrence Hargreave (who is pictured on the current AUD20 note) and Mr Broadbent. On arriving in Port Moresby, Petterd realised that he and Dr William James could not agree; Petterd joined Stone's party, while James and Knight went off on their own to Yule Island.<sup>viii</sup>

After again returning to Cape York in February 1876, Petterd reported that:

*although we did not succeed in the great object of the expedition, viz., crossing, the Peninsula of New Guinea, we, however, penetrated a considerable distance the first trip toward Mount Astrolabe and the second, to Mount Owen Stanley. We got Coleoptera and Lepidoptora which I had never seen before.*<sup>ix</sup>

Despite Petterd's prediction about not coming back to civilisation, he returned to Hobart, though in rather poor health suffering from fever and rheumatism and took to working as a bootmaker. He married Harriet Rule (1850–1882) on 22 September 1877 in Hobart. After the birth in 1878 of the first of their three children, Petterd moved his family to Launceston in northern Tasmania, where he opened a Boot Mart and Boot Palace, advertising himself as a *boot and shoe manufacturer and importer*.

Petterd produced his impressive *Monograph of the land shells of Tasmania* in 1878. He was a regular presenter at meetings of the Royal Society of Tasmania, writing numerous papers on his favourite subjects of entomology and conchology, but he also wrote about terrestrial animals, birds and spiders. In the late 1890s, Petterd became interested in rocks and minerals, co-authoring over a dozen papers with Tasmanian Government Geologist, William Harper Twelvetrees.

A friend in 1901 praised his skills: *Petterd to say the least is a wonder. You cannot touch him in recognising minerals at sight, and he unquestionably has the best collection in Tasmania. I don't think any other private collection in Australasia is likely to beat it. Microscopically Petterd is right up to it. Glue his optic to the micro, and it is a thousand to one that he will recognise at the first shot a rock, a mineral, or any organic matter.*<sup>x</sup>

Petterd sat on the boards of a number of Tasmanian mining companies, usually in the capacity of chairman. Among these included the boards of companies operating the Hercules

Mine, the Comet Mine, the Mt Magnet Mine, the Mount Farrell Mine, the Mutual Hill and the White Hawk Mine.<sup>xi</sup> These were all silver-lead mines, located on the west coast of Tasmania, apart from the Mutual Mine which was a tin mine in north eastern Tasmania.

He was a keen gardener and avid show entrant. Petterd dabbled in plant breeding, producing *new forms and colours* of *Gladiolus* by cross fertilisation. He engaged in *the study of the new species of the daffodil*<sup>xii</sup> and was a prolific rose grower, with hundreds of varieties gracing his garden. His blooms, particularly his roses, won many prizes at local shows, including a gold medal offered by the National Rose Society of Great Britain. He was also a keen philatelist, selling his collection in Sydney five years before he died at *a satisfactory figure*.<sup>xiii</sup> Petterd also found time to be president of the Launceston Literary and Musical Competitions Committee, president of the Launceston Microscopical Club and was a member of the Oddfellows' Lodge for over 30 years.<sup>xiv</sup>

After Harriet's death in 1882, Petterd married her sister, Kate Annie Rule, with whom he had three more children. Kate died in 1889, he then married Lucy Manning, with whom he had two children. His third wife and six of his children survived him.

Petterd left instructions that on his death, his mineral collection (of 2522 specimens)<sup>xv</sup> was to be loaned to the Royal Society of Tasmania for 999 years. Today his collection is held by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.



Photo of crocoite, PbCrO<sub>4</sub>, (State mineral emblem of Tasmania).

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Author: Carol Bacon  
Vice-President for Australasia/Oceania:  
IUGS International Commission on the History of Geological Sciences  
(INHIGEO)

74 Summerleas Rd., Fern Tree,  
Tasmania 7054,  
AUSTRALIA  
Email: [gclota@trump.net.au](mailto:gclota@trump.net.au)

### Further Reading

The newspapers referenced below are all available on [www.trove.nla.gov.au](http://www.trove.nla.gov.au)

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<sup>i</sup> TAHO RGD37/1/12 no 854

<sup>ii</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 16 April 1910

<sup>iii</sup> *Mercury* 22 March 1876

<sup>iv</sup> *The Singleton Argus and Upper Hunter General Advocate* 27 March 1875

<sup>v</sup> *Mercury* 21 October 1875

<sup>vi</sup> *Mercury* 21 October 1875

<sup>vii</sup> *Mercury* 21 October 1875

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viii *Illustrated Australian News* 22 March 1876

ix *Illustrated Australian News* 22 March 1876

x *Clipper* 21 December 1901

xi *Daily Telegraph* 16 April 1910

xii *Examiner* 16 April 1910

xiii *Daily Telegraph* 16 April 1910

xiv *Daily Telegraph* 18 April 1910

xv Kemp, Neal R. and Bottrill, Ralph S., 'The mineralogical collections of the Tasmanian Museum, Hobart and the West Coast Pioneers' Memorial Museum, Zeehan', *Australian Journal of Mineralogy*, 6 (2) (2000), 75-82.