

## Royal Cornwall Museum Reveals Stunning New Mineral Gallery

Discover the treasures of the earth

**Link to video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5GvlacT13g>

**Link to high-res images:** <https://shorturl.at/6dgPk>

A major milestone in the institution's history, Royal Cornwall Museum's Mineral Gallery has reopened following a comprehensive transformation, with a mission to share the knowledge and understanding of Cornish mining and minerals. Home to over one million artefacts, including the globally significant collection of more than 12,000 mineral samples, Royal Cornwall Museum is the caretaker of 3,500 years of mining history.

The Mineral Gallery transformation has been made possible thanks to part funding of £476,000 from Truro's Town Deal Board and Cornwall Council.

**Louis Gardner, Cornwall Council cabinet portfolio holder for economy, said:** "It's great to see the results of the Town Deal funding coming to fruition with the opening of the transformed gallery that brings to life Cornwall's history and looks forward to an exciting future. This Town Deal investment in such an innovative cultural asset will promote our rich and unique heritage to visitors, as well as supporting a thriving cultural heritage sector and the wider economy of the city."

Essential raw materials for modern daily life, the history of minerals, and the vital role they perform is an important story to tell. From agriculture to construction and health through to the technology we rely on, minerals underpin our modern world, and Cornwall is emerging once again as an important player in mineral extraction with the Lithium industry. Minerals are also collected purely for their beauty, creating stunning natural crystal forms with a spectrum of colours, all unique, with some of the world's most spectacular specimens on display at Royal Cornwall Museum.

"Minerals are the building blocks of the earth, with the unique geology and minerals of Cornwall having shaped the history of this region" commented **Frances Wall, Professor of Applied Mineralogy at the Camborne School of Mines, University of Exeter**. "We probably don't think about minerals very much and yet everything we do, every day relies on minerals. Humans do two things- we grow plants and nurture animals, and every other material we use comes from the minerals in the earth. Phones, gadgets, high-tech renewable energy devices, cars, trains, machinery - all rely on minerals, so we should care about them very much."

Closed since January 2024 for redevelopment, the newly imagined space has been designed in consultation with the museum's visitors. With a vision to bring the story of the specimens to life, making geology accessible and engaging to an eclectic audience were fundamental design initiatives, spanning local school visitors through to scientists and academics. The reinvention of Royal Cornwall Museum with the transformation project also aims to respond to the brief of what a modern museum needs to be, with this 200-year-old institution working towards welcoming more

visitors, making the space more accessible, and narrating history in an immersive way.

**Bryony Robins, Artistic Director for the museum:** “The Mineral Gallery is the first exhibition space in the museum to undergo an upgrade as part of our transformation project and we’re delighted to be re-opening its doors. This gallery holds a special place in many people’s hearts, in part not just because so many of the minerals are beautiful, but also because it’s an important collection for understanding Cornish mining and minerals and the role that mining continues to play in Cornwall. Our goal is to ensure that these improvements protect our collections and Institution, so future generations can continue to learn, explore, and visit us for another 200 years.”

Royal Cornwall Museum’s Rashleigh Mineral Gallery redesign, developed in partnership with design agency, Wignall and Moore, presents a skillful upgrading of the space whilst retaining its original essence, retaining iconic elements such as the Edwardian cases now sympathetically renovated and redesigned to make the displays more accessible. Combining these classic components with contemporary needs, the design team has incorporated interactive digital facilities allowing people from further afield to engage with the collection whilst also being available for school learning activities.

Themes explored within the gallery include Deep Time (Geology); Minerals; Stone (rock); Mining; Landscape, Climate, and Environment, with the newly developed space divided into three narrative zones. The Orientation Zone introduces the core themes of the gallery, with the North Zone focused on the mineral samples and the Digital Lab offering an immersive experience covering mining, minerals, and rock, including mineral handling and audio stories that build on the case contents and the broader narratives.

With a unique geology, Cornwall has more varieties of minerals than anywhere else in Britain which have been mined and used for centuries, with the most important minerals for industry being tin and copper. Mining of these minerals led to the discovery of others, with practical uses, beautiful forms, or scientific value and by the 1700s, through trade, Cornish minerals had widely spread across the globe. Miners would often save exceptional samples for collectors, which ultimately found their way to the museum. The fame of Cornish mines and minerals attracted many collectors, with Philip Rashleigh one of the most significant, with Royal Cornwall Museum the caretakers of his 250-year-old collection, containing several minerals that were the first of their kind to be formally identified.

**Dr Eva Marquis, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Camborne School of Mines, University of Exeter** commented: “Cornwall has had a recent renaissance in its mining history. Since around 2016, we’ve had an influx of companies searching for minerals essential for applications including lithium-ion batteries and solder for electronics. Royal Cornwall Museum’s impressive collection not only gives a broad understanding of the processes that formed our planet, but also how we’re using those minerals to help with our climate change ambitions.”

“In terms of our collection, it would be impossible to choose just one mineral that’s the most important. Cassiterite is the main tin ore and is what started Cornwall’s

mining heritage. Blister copper is another interesting one as it became a huge generator of wealth and its extraction drove a rise in mining employment as Cornwall became the biggest exporter of copper during the 18th-19th centuries. Also, the large liroconite crystal in the Rashleigh collection is a key piece, being the largest single crystal of its kind known to be found.” **Jeni Woolcock, Collections Manager for Royal Cornwall Museum**

With recent carbon dating of Royal Cornwall Museum artefacts uncovering the first Bronze Age tin mining tools discovered in Europe providing evidence of tin workings in Cornwall over 3,500 years ago, reflects Royal Cornwall Museum’s unique role as custodian and authority to disseminate the rich history of Cornwall’s rocks, minerals and mining.

**Alan Stanhope, Chair of Truro Town Deal board, said:** “The opening of the Mineral Gallery is the first Truro Town Deal project to reach completion, which is an exciting milestone for our programme of investment.

“The gallery will attract new visitors and build on our cultural offer in Truro, driving footfall into the city centre. Congratulations to the Royal Cornwall Museum team for delivering their project swiftly in good time for the summer season. We’re looking forward to seeing the positive impact the Mineral Gallery will bring to Truro.”

### **Lead Supporters**

The transformation of the Royal Cornwall Museum wouldn’t be possible without the belief, support and funding of a number of organisations.

### **Cornwall Council and Truro Town Deal**

The Mineral Gallery has received £466,000 from the UK Government’s Town Deal programme as part its Levelling Up initiative. Truro Town Deal Board in partnership with Cornwall Council successfully bid for a Town Deal worth £23.6 million to support a range of projects that will contribute to the town’s regeneration and boost the local economy. Cornwall Council is the lead authority for Town Deals in Cornwall and supports the governance role of the Truro Town Deal Board and administrates the Fund.

For more information on Town Deal visit: [trurotownfund.com](https://trurotownfund.com)

### **Cornwall Council and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund**

This project is part of wider works that includes £2.1m from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to transform the main gallery, the nature gallery, the museum entrance and garden, and improve accessibility. Cornwall Council has been chosen by Government as a Lead Authority for the fund and is responsible for monitoring the progress of projects funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK Government’s Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK by investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills. For more information, visit: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>

## **Arts Council England**

Arts Council England Museum Estate and Development Fund, which is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to address the infrastructure and urgent maintenance needs of the Museum sector. [artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

## **Sponsor - Cornish Lithium**

Cornish Lithium is a pioneering mineral exploration and development company that is using highly innovative and sustainable processes to extract lithium from geothermal waters and hard rock in Cornwall. The Company is supporting the UK's transition to renewable energy by building a secure domestic supply of lithium for electric vehicles and power storage batteries, and aims to catalyse a modern-day renaissance of Cornwall's proud mining heritage.

Cornish Lithium has supported the transformation of Royal Cornwall Museum's Mineral Gallery by contributing expert insight to the educational and outreach aspects of the revised displays. The Company has also helped to source the local minerals that have been used by London Pigment to develop the paint for the Gallery's new colour scheme. [cornishlithium.com](https://www.cornishlithium.com)

## **About Royal Cornwall Museum**

Set in the heart of Truro, Royal Cornwall Museum was founded in 1818 by the Royal Institution of Cornwall with an objective to 'advance the education of the public by encouraging and promoting the study and knowledge of literature, natural sciences, archaeology, history, ethnology, geology and the fine and applied arts, with special reference to Cornwall'. The museum looks after over a million objects and artefacts relating to Cornish history and culture, local treasure, and minerals. Alongside the permanent collection, there is a regular showcase of temporary exhibitions.

The museum is in the process of a large-scale transformation to secure its vast collection and update its physical spaces. Royal Cornwall Museum is a registered charity (Registered Charity Number 1150749)

### **Editor's notes:**

**Website:** [royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk](https://www.royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk)

**Opening times:** Tuesday to Saturday 10am – 4pm

Additional Monday opening during school holidays

**Prices:** £7.50 for an annual pass, free to under 18s

**Location:** Royal Cornwall Museum, River Street, Truro, Cornwall TR1 2SJ

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