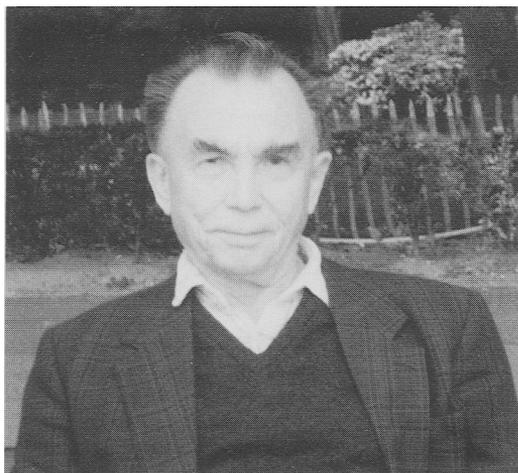


Oleg von Knorring

OLEG VON KNORRING was born in 1915 and lived as a child near Novgorod, south of St. Petersburg, where the family was well known. His grandfather was a general living in St. Petersburg and his great grandfather a judge in Karelia (Karel'skaya). The family moved from Russia to Finland after that country became independent after the Bolshevik revolution. Because of recent relaxation of travel restrictions in Russia, Oleg and his family were able to revisit St Petersburg and Novgorod in 1992. He was overwhelmed by the joyous reception given by his relatives, most of whom he had never seen, except one elderly cousin, last seen by him as a baby girl in a cradle.



Oleg was educated at the Swedish High School in Helsinki and, from 1934 to 1939 at the University of Helsinki where he studied geology under the renowned Professor Pentti Eskola. From 1938 he was private research assistant to the Professor of Mineralogy, L. H. Borgström. During this latter period he took part in a geological expedition to Newfoundland and Labrador where he studied lamprophyres under Dr E. H. Krank.

From 1940 to 1944 von Knorring served with the Finnish army. While stationed on the Karelian

front he learned that he had been granted three months leave, through the good offices of Professor Eskola, in order to complete his M.Sc. examinations. On his way back to Helsinki, he recalls walking back from the front for thirty kilometers in sub-zero temperatures with his pack on his back and his violin under his arm. In 1936, whilst working in an industrial laboratory, to earn money for his studies (as well as by playing the violin) he met his future wife Saga; they were married in 1941 in Helsinki.

After completing his army service he returned to the University as a research geochemist in the Department of Geology. It was while he was working on the mineralogy and geochemistry of iron ores in south-west Finland, his eventual Ph.D. topic, that he was granted an ICI research fellowship to study at Leeds University. He joined the Department of Geology in October 1948, and in 1950 was appointed lecturer in mineralogy and geochemistry. He worked with Professor W. Q. Kennedy who was attracted by OVK's unrivalled encyclopaedic knowledge of the Earth's 2000 or so minerals (then known) and with which, it seemed he had almost a personal relationship! In 1951–52 Kennedy led two geological expeditions to Mount Ruwenzori which straddles the Western Rift between Uganda and Zaïre. Oleg was a member of the expeditions and thus began his lifelong love of Africa.

In 1955 he left Leeds University to join the Geological Survey of Malaya where he became interested in the varied mineralogy of the tin placer deposits. However, after a year he was recalled by Kennedy and appointed as an Oppenheimer Geological Fellow within the Research Institute of African Geology. His international recognition was rewarded when he was made a Reader in Mineral Chemistry in 1962.

In order to verify new minerals, lengthy purification and 'wet' chemical analytical procedures were necessary in those pre-electron microprobe days (when microprobes were being installed there was a great demand for 'OVK' material). He would work until 9 pm, and often at weekends, on the top floor of the victorian

building of the Geology Department in Hilary Place. In this laboratory, and later in the new Earth Science building he would meticulously and unhurriedly carry out the time-consuming hand-picking of a powdered concentrate with a needle under a binocular microscope.

He would, thus, acquire data to confirm many new minerals, varieties and new occurrences of rare species which he had tentatively identified visually in the field, mainly in pegmatites in Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Namibia, Zaïre, Nigeria, Ghana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Madagascar as well as in Finland. New minerals published by Oleg von Knorring and co-authors include bertossaite, burangite, cerotungstite, holdawayite, karibibite, kenedyite, mboziite, mpororoite, namibite, rankamaite, waylandite, and westgrenite. Oleg's prodigious memory enabled him to remember the name and locality of every specimen in his extensive collection. His list of publications also includes specimens from Malaysia, Canada (Labrador), Spain, Egypt, Ireland and the United Kingdom (Devon, Cornwall, Sutherland, Outer Hebrides). His co-workers were mainly students and colleagues, through one of whom, Th. G. Sahama of Helsinki University, he maintained contacts with Finland. In 1988 Oleg was awarded the Insignia of the *Order of the White Rose of Finland, Knight First Class*, in recognition of his scientific achievements and the presentation of a large collection of mineral specimens to his old University.

He always had time to advise students, to discuss problems and to translate papers (he spoke 6 languages: English, Finnish, German, Norwegian, Russian and Swedish) and to reminisce about the 'old days' with those who had visited Africa with him. For someone who was quiet and retiring he wrote many letters and kept in contact with many colleagues, prospectors, and former students of all nationalities. Such was his love of Africa and his insatiable thirst for minerals, that after retirement he took the post of Chief Geologist (Mineralogist) with the Namibian Geological Survey from 1981–84. A few months before his death on 6 April 1994, at the age of 78 he was actively involved with a Canadian diamond research project in the Department of Earth Sciences at Leeds. He was in his element demonstrating the technique of heavy mineral separation and visual identification, to an audience of admiring colleagues. His eye was as keen as ever and he singled out diamond and unusual mineral species which were deserving of further study, and these were put carefully aside — the habit of a lifetime.

It was appropriate that in 1968 the chrome magnesia garnet, knorringite, from a Lesotho kimberlite, was named after him by two former students.

Oleg will be missed by many former students. Future students will look enquiringly at the many mineral specimens — his memorial to them — that he left behind at Leeds and elsewhere. His many friends from all walks of life, especially in Africa, Scandinavia, and in his adopted home in the UK, will remember him with deep affection. Our sympathies go to Saga, and to George, Marina, Peter and Catherine.

PETER H. NIXON

A short selection from the 120 papers published by Oleg von Knorring:

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- Von Knorring, O. and Cox, K. G. (1961) Kennedyite, a new mineral of the pseudobrookite series *Mineral. Mag.*, **32**, 676–82.
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- Von Knorring, O. and Sahama, T. G. (1981) Namibite, a new copper-bismuth-vanadium mineral from Namibia *Schweizerische Mineralogische und Petrographische Mitteilungen*, **61**, 7–12.
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- Von Knorring, O., Sahama, Th. G. and Lehtinen, M. (1972) Mpororoite, a new secondary tungsten mineral from Uganda *Geol. Soc. Finland Bull.*, **44(2)**, 107–10.
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- Von Knorring, O., Sahama, Th. G. and Siivola, J. (1979) Zincian staurolite from Uganda. *Mineral. Mag.*, **43**, 446.