

The Colenso Diamond

In 1887 John Ruskin presented a large diamond to the Natural History Museum, desiring that it should be known as the “Colenso Diamond” with the following inscription to be displayed with the diamond.

*The Colenso Diamond,
Presented in 1887 by John Ruskin
‘In honour of his Friend, the loyal
And patiently adamantine
First Bishop of Natal’.*

*The picture is held by the
Ruskin Library at Lancaster University*



The diamond was a pale yellow octahedron with rounded edges (major axis 3.2 cm) and with triangular markings (trigons) on its faces and weighing 26.62 grams and 133 carats.

The story is that it was found by a store-keeper in South Africa, who had abandoned his store to dig a mineral claim with two mates. After little success, the store-keeper and one of his mates left. The other continued to work the claim but was buried when the workings collapsed. The store-keeper returned some months later to bury his friend and found several loose diamonds.

The “Colenso Diamond” was sold to R.C. Nockold of Soho London, a well known precious stone dealer. Ruskin bought it from him for a 1,000 pounds and spent months studying and sketching it with his secretary W G Collingwood. It was called “St George’s Diamond” at this stage, after the Guild of St George founded by Ruskin – Fanny Colenso was one of the early members.

On the night of the 25th April 1965 intruders broke into the Natural History Museum and stole the diamond, after forcing the display case. The report in Times claimed that it was only of scientific value and worth a few hundred pounds.

David John Knight, aged 24, was arrested for the crime in November 1965. He was convicted on the evidence of Detective-Sargeant G Harris of the Flying Squad, who

testified that Knight had confessed “All right, I nicked the diamond, the Colenso diamond, it is called for your information.” He later said that diamond had been shipped off to Denmark. Knight was sentenced to three years in jail.

Knight lived in the Residence of the Victoria and Albert Museum, as his stepfather was a head warder of that institution. He claimed to be watching *Tamla Motown* when the robbery was occurring.

During the court proceedings the value of the diamond was considered to be between 7,500 and 10,000 pounds.

In 1973 a Senior Detective from the Midlands was appointed to investigate whether Knight had been framed by the two members of the Flying Squad, who had since been convicted of corruption. The Home Secretary decided to set-up the investigation after Granada Television showed a reconstruction of the trial on *World in Action* in October 1972.

Haven't found what the outcome of the investigation was yet.