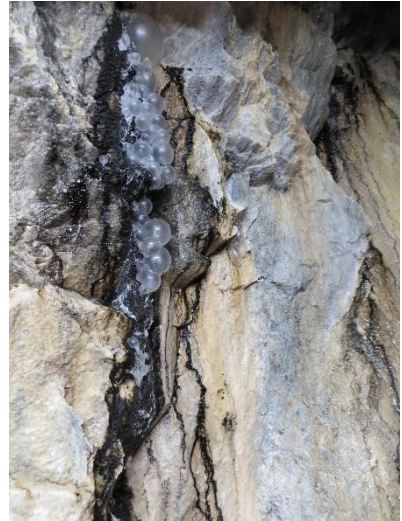


During a meeting held on Friday 26 and Saturday 27 April 2019, on the Swedish island of Resarö, Vaxholm Municipality in the Stockholm archipelago, the first EuChemS Historical Landmarks Award plaque was unveiled at the Ytterby mine, famous for being linked to the discovery site of some 8 rare earths elements. The ceremony was preceded by a symposium, organized by the Swedish Chemical Society (Svenska Kemistsamfundet), during which Dr Brigitte Van Tiggelen, Chair of the EuChemS Working Party on the History of Chemistry, and chair of the EuChemS Historical Landmarks selection committee, gave a presentation.

As early as the 16th century, the mine was exploited for the quartz (iron works) and then later for the feldspar (porcelain). During the 18th century, in parallel, its rich mineralogical diversity attracted scientists from all over Europe making it a unique historical and scientific site of centuries worth of international collaboration and ventures. Many rare earth elements were discovered in the mine, including yttrium (discovered in 1794), erbium (1842), terbium (1842), ytterbium (1878). The discovery of gadolinium, scandium, thulium, and holmium are also linked to the Ytterby mine.

Officially closed in the early 1930s, the mine was subsequently used as a military storage facility for fuel during the Cold War, to stock oil needs for one year of subsistence in case of conflict and warrant total autarchy for the country. In the mid-90s, the programme was stopped, and the mine was emptied of fuel. Scientists have more recently begun studying the inside of the mine again, noting the existence of unique bacterial life forms on the walls.

Two local associations are working to open the tunnels, and the inside of the mine, as well as a small museum and science centre by 2025.



Brigitte Van Tiggelen