

Alexander Parkes Encyclopedia Article

Alexander Parkes

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Alexander Parkes

1813-1890

British chemist and inventor who perfected the extraction of metal from lead. In 1850 he patented the Parkes process for using zinc to desilver lead. In the 1850s Parkes's experiments with cellulose fibers and nitric acid led to the discovery of cellulose nitrate. This led to his invention of parkesine, the world's first plastic, which was patented in 1855. Parkesine (later known as xylonite) was used in the production of ornaments, knife handles, and fishing reels.