Bismuth, the heaviest non-radioactive naturally occurring element, was isolated by Basil Valentine in 1450. It is a hard, brittle metal with an unusually low melting point (271°C). Alloys of bismuth with other low-melting metals such as tin and lead have even lower melting points and are used in electrical solders, fuse elements and automatic fire sprinkler heads.

The metal can be found in nature, often combined with copper or lead ores, but can also be extracted from bismuth(III) oxide by roasting with carbon. Compounds of bismuth are used in pigments for oil painting and one is in a popular pink preparation for the treatment of common stomach upset.

Contributors and Attributions

Stephen R. Marsden