The John Hugh Sutton Collection

The John Hugh Sutton Collection of antiquities was established in memory of an outstanding classics student and resident of Trinity College who was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident in 1925. Sutton's parents, George Henry Sutton and Jessie Campbell Sutton (née Lennon), gave the University of Melbourne the significant sum of £500 (equivalent to approximately $200,000 today) to establish a classics museum and purchase objects for it. Classics professor Cecil Scutt was responsible for the development of the collection. Professor Scutt enlisted the help of Cambridge numismatist and classicist Charles Theodore Seltman to buy items with funds from the bequest. Seltman became a fixture at auction rooms and antiquities shops in Britain and the excavation sites of Greece, buying a wide variety of objects for the collection.

When the Sutton bequest had been expended by the end of 1929, it had resulted in the acquisition of a diverse collection of mostly ancient Greek-related coins, vases, artefacts, plaster casts and other objects. The John Hugh Sutton Collection includes: 93 coins, 20 vases, 10 figurines, 3 metal objects, 6 plaster casts, and 71 electrotype copies of ancient coins.

In June 1929, architects Gawler & Drummond (who would later design the university's Grainger Museum) commenced work on a small museum enclosure to house the collection. Made of blackwood timber 'polished to a dull finish', the enclosure (or numismatics museum as it was sometimes called) was located at one end of the west corridor on the first floor of the Arts Building, now known as Old Arts. Foy & Gibson department store in Collingwood was commissioned to manufacture a coin case lined with velvet and two glass cases in Pacific maple timber to display the collection.

This exhibition features the complete John Hugh Sutton Collection and includes archival material related to Sutton's life. Archivists and librarians at Melbourne Grammar School, Trinity College and the University of Melbourne have been instrumental in providing material displayed here as a tribute to John Hugh Sutton.
An ongoing tradition of giving

The John Hugh Sutton bequest marks the foundation of the Classics and Archaeology Collection at the University of Melbourne. The objects in the collection were primarily selected as an aid to teaching and to enhance the study of the ancient world. Those involved in its establishment were well aware of the merits of object-based learning; the objects give a sense of reality and immediacy to what may otherwise seem a remote past disconnected from modern life. The collection continues to be used in teaching today.

The tradition of donation established by the Sutton bequest also continues. Over the decades the Classics and Archaeology Collection has been expanded by significant donations including the Dr Geoffrey Kaye Collection (1986), the Peter Chaldjian Collection (1995), the Huber Collection of Maltese Antiquities (1995), and the Neil Taylor Collection (1997).

This outstanding generosity has continued in recent years. In 2007, Yvonne Audette donated a collection of Coptic textiles, and David and Marion Adams presented a major donation of over 200 antiquities. In 2009, the descendants of Keith and Zara Joseph, Peter, Sue and Marilyn, donated thirty rare works that exhibit the hallmarks of ancient Near Eastern, Egyptian, and classical Greek and Roman civilisations. An important collection of antiquities acquired in South Africa was donated by Harold and Barbara Sacks in 2011. The latter collection was originally established by Hilda Purwitsky and Roza van Gelderen: two prominent South African women who amassed the collection during their travels from the 1930s to the 1970s in Africa, Azerbaijan, Europe, Israel/Palestine, Iran and the Americas.

Most recently, in early 2013, the university received an important donation known as the Oscar Whitbread and Corinne Kerby Collection. Comprising twenty-two rare and intact antiquities acquired in London in 1970, this collection is publically displayed here for the first time. There are striking parallels in a number of the works in the Whitbread and Kerby Collection and the Sutton Collection: most notably the Mycenaean stirrup jar, the black-figure lip cup, and the red-figure lekythos.

This legacy of giving has made the university’s Classics and Archaeology Collection one of the most significant collections of antiquities in Australia.
John Hugh Sutton was born in 1906. His father, George Henry Sutton, was a distinguished public servant serving as the chairman of the Railway Disciplinary Board, and his mother, Jessie Campbell Sutton (née Lennon), was from one of the most enterprising and established agricultural equipment and supply firms in the country. The Suttons lived in Balwyn Road, Canterbury.

At a very early age John Hugh Sutton began to display an extraordinary literary gift. One of the hobbies of his childhood was the production of numerous magazines. These magazines were a continuous series, containing verse and prose of both merit and imaginative power.

Sutton started secondary school at Camberwell Grammar before entering Melbourne Grammar School in 1920 where he distinguished himself academically. Sutton’s early competence in classical languages earned him the Foundation Scholarship in 1921, and the Marion Flack Scholarship in 1922. His achievements at the school resulted in his appointment as head boy in 1922. Though from a wealthy family, Sutton entered Trinity College with the AM White Scholarship, and won university honours in Latin in 1923 and ancient Greek in 1924 at the ages of seventeen and eighteen.

In one tribute, Sutton is described in the following terms: ‘At school and university all who came in close contact with him learnt that he combined with a brain of extraordinary brilliance and solidity a truly loveable nature and an exceptionally honourable and fearless character’.

John Sutton died in a motorcycle accident on Friday the 6th of March 1925, as he was leaving Trinity College. His funeral was held on Sunday 8 March. Present at the service was Sir Harrison Moore, professor of law at Melbourne University, who would soon edit Sutton’s complete literary works, and RL Blackwood, Trinity College’s sub-warden and commonly regarded as one of the pre-eminent classicists in Victoria. Blackwood tried to give meaning to the proceedings, stating that ‘by the death of John Sutton, Australia has lost one of its most promising literary personalities ... I venture to say that none was so able as John Sutton’.
The literary work of John Hugh Sutton

Following Sutton's death, a collection of his literary works was published by Melbourne University Press in 1925. It was edited by eminent academics and Sutton's former teachers including Sir Harrison Moore, the celebrated legal theorist and chair of law at the University of Melbourne; RP Franklin, the headmaster of Melbourne Grammar School; and Professor Cecil A Scutt, Melbourne University's chair of classical philology.

Sutton's writings were divided between prose and poetry. Sutton's winning entry for the Sanderson Essay Prize constituted the only non-fiction piece in the collection. The overall impression which emerges from his fiction is of an anti-establishment author, concerned predominantly with analysing the catalyst for social discontent. Sutton's narratives tend to underline the efforts of his protagonists to escape the confines of academic life. *The Apology of Marcus Cornelius* exemplifies this central theme of Sutton's work. The storyline of this short story revolves around the expectation of a grandfather that his grandson should listen to the words of the philosophers and learn their wisdom: 'I came to this city of Athens with my grandfather, Titus Cornelius, to listen to the words of the philosophers, and to learn their wisdom. I have lived here for three years, and they have taught me nothing'.

In a recent biographical study, Joshua Crowther notes that the literary work of John Hugh Sutton 'makes consistent references to the classics and classical themes, yet their role remains subsidiary and directed towards illustrating a broader contemporaneous point. Despite his academic reputation, the focus of Sutton's writings draws the reader beyond the boundaries of historical and classical subject matter.'
The coins in the John Hugh Sutton Collection were acquired by Cambridge University classicist Charles Seltman (1886–1957). Seltman was also a numismatist and author of several studies on Greek coins. One of his seminal publications was titled *Greek coins: a history of metallic currency and coinage down to the fall of the Hellenistic kingdoms*, published in London in 1933. In selecting coins for the collection, Seltman chose representative types—an indication he was clearly mindful that coins were to form part of a teaching collection.

The coins acquired by Charles Seltman reached the University of Melbourne in two consignments, in October and December 1928. Seltman must have invested considerable time and energy in tracking down and amassing such an encyclopaedic collection. The following countries and regions are represented: Spain, Gaul, Italy, Sicily, Macedonia, Thrace, Thessaly, Phocis, Euboea, Attica, Corinthia, Peloponnesus, Crete, the Cyclades, Asia, Pontus, Bithynia, Prusias, Mysia, Aeolis, Lesbos, Inonia, Caria, Lydia, Pamphylia, Cyprus, Syria, Ptolemaic, and Carthage.

Seltman's father, Ernest John Seltman, is credited with instilling in his son an enthusiasm for ancient Greece and Greek numismatics. *The Dictionary of art historians* records that in 1948 Seltman wrote his most innovative, if controversial, book, *Approach to Greek art*. In it he argued that sculpture, the dominant medium for understanding classical art, should be avoided because it was created by assistants interpreting the works of masters. Seltman's other publications include: *The temple coins of Olympia* (1921), *Attic vase-painting* (1933), and *Women in antiquity* (1956).

Today, the significance of the coins in the John Hugh Sutton Collection is enhanced through the historical and cultural association with Charles Seltman—who at the time of the acquisition was one of the most important internationally regarded authorities of ancient Greek art and coinage.
Casts and reproductions in the John Hugh Sutton Collection

Some of the Sutton bequest was used to acquire reproductions including plaster casts of classical statuary and a series of electrotype copies of ancient coins. In the 1920s it was not unusual to supplement museum collections with reproductions, especially for teaching or public collections. Professor Scutt had in mind the use of classical plaster casts to decorate the Classics Department located on the first floor of the Arts Building.

One hundred electrotype coins costing fifteen pounds were acquired in 1929 by Charles Seltman. The copies, mostly of Greek originals, were presumably to supplement the ancient coin collection. It is not known exactly where Seltman purchased the electrotypes. Electrotypes of the coins in the British Museum were at one time produced by Robert Ready for sale to schools, universities and museums. Recent research on the electrotypes has revealed that at least some examples are copies of originals in the British Museum.

By the late nineteenth century, cast collections around the world had begun to fall from favour. Many cast collections were relegated to storage or sold, and reproductions and cast collections in museums and galleries are now rare. In addition to the items in the John Hugh Sutton Collection, the university has a significant group of plaster casts and reproductions (numbering over 80 plaster casts of Near Eastern, Egyptian, Greek and Roman originals that date from the 4th millennium BCE to the 2nd century CE), which were presented in the 2011 exhibition *Casts and copies: ancient and classical reproductions.*