Antiquities Collection honors gifted Classics scholar
17 April - 13 October 2013

Important classical antiquities collected in the late 1920s as the result of a major bequest to the University will be on display at the Potter Museum of Art, from 17 April to 13 October 2013.

The collection was established in memory of John Hugh Sutton, an outstanding classics student and resident of Trinity College, who died tragically at the age of 19 in a motorcycle accident in 1925.

Sutton’s parents gave the University the then significant sum of £500 to acquire classical objects for the John Hugh Sutton Collection and to be called "The John Hugh Sutton Classical Museum" thus beginning the University of Melbourne’s classics and archaeology collection.

The Collection features a wide variety of classical coins, vases, terracotta artifacts and bronzes acquired in the late 1920s through auction rooms antiquities dealers in Britain, and the excavation sites of Greece. The purchase of objects for the Collection was directed by the University’s Classics Professor, Cecil Scutt, assisted by Cambridge classicist, C T Seltman.

Curator of the exhibition, Dr Andrew Jamieson, says the John Hugh Sutton Collection continues to be an immensely important teaching tool and aid to research.

“Actual objects from the period give a sense of reality and immediacy to what may seem a remote past, disconnected from modern life.”

“This Collection allows us to examine antiquities as a primary source, free from the interpretations of other commentators,” Dr Jamieson said.

The exhibition will also feature historical and archival material related to the creation of the Collection which will tell the story of the era in which Sutton lived and the spirit with which the generous donation was made. This historical backdrop, set between the wars, coincided with a grand era of archaeological exploration, most notably the discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb, and the development of these areas as academic disciplines.

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The Ian Potter Museum of Art The University of Melbourne, Swanston Street (betwn Elgin & Faraday sts), Parkville, T: 03 8344 5148 W: www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au
Hours: Tuesday to Friday 10am - 5pm: Saturday and Sunday 12 - 5pm
The Edwardian society into which John Hugh Sutton was born in 1906 was in the throes of economic expansion and social change.

Sutton entered Melbourne Church of England Grammar School in 1920 where he distinguished himself academically. Sutton’s early classical prowess earned him the Foundation Scholarship in 1921, and the Marion Flack Scholarship in 1922.

He completed his swathe of achievements at the School with his appointment as Head Boy in 1922. Sutton entered Trinity College with the A. M. White Scholarship, and won University honours Latin in 1923 and Greek in 1924.

Following his death, Sutton’s parents established at his old school the John Hugh Sutton Memorial Scholarship and prizes for compositions and verse in Latin, English and French, in addition to the significant £500 to establish a classics museum and purchase objects for it through the Classics Professor Cecil Scutt at University of Melbourne.

The Melburnian states that John Sutton had "a most distinguished literary gift‘ and a collection of his works, including essays, stories and poems was edited by Sir Harrison Moore, Prof. C. A. Scutt and R. P. Franklin and published in 1925.

The funeral for John Hugh Sutton, on Sunday 8 March, 1925, was a significant social event for the cultural elite of Melburnian society. The mourners represented the intellectual apex of 1920s Victoria. Present was Sir Harrison Moore, Professor of Law at Melbourne University, who would soon edit Sutton’s complete works. Also there was R. L. Blackwood, Trinity College’s Sub-Warden and commonly regarded as one of the pre-eminent classicists in Victoria. Blackwood later 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‘.