

# Introduction

Peter McPhee

The variety of subject matter and authors contributing to this, the third issue of *University of Melbourne Collections*, illustrates just how important these cultural collections are to the life of the University. The topics covered range from the papers of a German-born polar explorer and meteorologist to a ledger which provides intriguing clues to the lives of Melbourne's amateur and professional musicians in the early 20th century, and a medical textbook which tells us about the diseases common in an 18th century English farming community. A university such as Melbourne which endeavours to provide all its students with breadth of experience, knowledge and understanding has much to gain from such rich sources.

Our authors range from a young artist whose works in glass gained fresh inspiration from dentures and dental implements to highly specialised conservators of precious paintings, documents and artefacts. We have contributions from students and young curators just starting out on their careers, to retired staff who in their senior roles at the University did much to shape and preserve the very collections explored in this magazine. It is essential for example that we record the knowledge and memories of the former Vice-Principal,

Dr Ray Marginson AM, who among his many achievements established a museum to care properly for the thousands of artworks owned by the University. The contributions of two more recently retired staff—Michael Piggott, one of Australia's most eminent archivists, and Dorothea Rowse, a librarian-scholar in the fields of social and medical history, vividly illustrate how a lifetime of working with archives and rare books imparts great skill in extracting fascinating information from these sometimes apparently arcane sources.

I commend this issue of *University of Melbourne Collections* to any reader with an interest in herbal remedies, bookbinding, geology, art collecting, glass making, Freudian psychoanalysis, polar exploration ...



Professor Peter McPhee is the Provost of the University of Melbourne. This position was established in 2007 to bring together the management of academic and student support functions. Prior to this he was Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and he has held a personal chair in history at Melbourne since 1993. Educated at Colac High School, Caulfield Grammar and the University of Melbourne, Professor McPhee has taught and published extensively, particularly on the history of modern France. He is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Academy of Social Sciences.