

University of Melbourne Cultural Collections

by Belinda Nemec

Readers of the *University of Melbourne Library Journal* will be familiar with the richness and diversity of the collections held in the University of Melbourne Library, the University Archives and the Grainger Museum. But not all will be aware of the cultural collections owned by other departments of the University.

The University of Melbourne Archives holds the personal papers of many of the University's most distinguished teaching, research and administrative staff. These paper records are complemented in numerous cases by three-dimensional objects, books, photographs and documents held in museum collections on campus.

One such example is the papers of Professor Thomas Laby (1880–1946) in the University of Melbourne Archives. Laby — known to generations of scientists and students as the co-author (with G.W.C. Kaye) of *Four Figure Mathematical Tables and Tables of Physical and Chemical Constants* — was Professor of Natural Philosophy (Physics) from 1915 until his retirement in 1944. A distinguished scientist of strong patriotic convictions, during World War 2 he devoted his considerable energies and the research resources of his department to the war effort, establishing the local manufacture of high quality optical glass and its applications in gun sights and other munitions. Australia had previously imported such items from the United Kingdom but wartime circumstances prevented this.



Meeting of the Optical Munitions Panel, September 1943. Professor Thomas Laby, Chairman of the Panel, is seated fifth from the right. Photographer unknown, 1943, black and white photograph, 18.5 x 25.0 cm. (Physics Museum Collection, School of Physics, University of Melbourne, reg. no. 143)



A slab of optical glass, an early attempt at producing optical glass as part of Australia's Optical Munitions Program. It was made in the Chemistry Department, University of Melbourne, c. 1941–1942, and comprises eleven glass plates, 7.0 x 13.5 x 9.5 cm, 'welded' together. (Physics Museum Collection, School of Physics, University of Melbourne, reg. no. 70)



This timber eucalypt specimen cabinet was made by Sir Russell Grimwade c. 1919–1920, to house his collection of eucalyptus seeds and pods. It is made of eucalypt with brass handles, 85.0 x 72.3 x 53.0 cm. (The University of Melbourne Art Collection, Gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973, 1973.0755)

The Optical Munitions Panel (later renamed the Scientific Instruments and Optical Panel), chaired by Laby from 1940 to 1944, coordinated the efforts of research laboratories and manufacturers across Australia in developing optical glass and then turning it into lenses, gratitudes and prisms of the high level of accuracy needed for military purposes.¹ Samples of the glass itself and related apparatus are held in the Physics Museum in the School of Physics, together with a fine series of photographs of Professor Laby and his colleagues and students working on this important project.

Other University of Melbourne scientists involved in optical munitions work were Professors W.E. Agar (Zoology), E.J. Hartung (Chemistry), E.O. Hercus (Associate Professor of Physics), J.S. Turner (Botany), R.D.

‘Pansy’ Wright (Physiology) and V.M. Trikojus (Biochemistry), as well as Ernst Matthaei, a microscopist in the School of Botany. The contributions of these individuals included the development of ‘tropic-proofing’ fungicides to protect binoculars and other instruments in locations such as New Guinea. Archival records relating to the careers of most of these scientists are held in the University Archives.² Matthaei’s contribution to scientific and collegiate life at the University is also commemorated in the Ernst Matthaei Memorial Collection of Early Glass. Established in his memory following his death in 1966, and enhanced by generous gifts and bequests over the years, this fine collection of mostly English drinking glasses is part of the University of Melbourne Art Collection and is displayed in University House.

The Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences earlier this year launched the Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology, created from a merger of the previously separate anatomy and pathology collections. The core of this museum, which is an essential resource for future doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, dentists and many scientists studying at Melbourne, comprises 12,000 ‘pots’ containing human organs and other anatomical specimens preserved in fluid, as well as skeletons, showing both normal and abnormal or diseased states. The recent re-naming of the museum honours the vision of Sir Harry Brookes Allen (1854–1926), who, upon appointment in 1882 to the new chair in Anatomy and Pathology, stated in his letter of acceptance to the University, ‘One of the final objects which I set before myself is the creation of a large and efficient Museum of Anatomy and Pathology in the Medical School, a small but valuable nucleus being already in place.’³

Sir Harry’s papers in the University Archives include records on the acquisition of museum specimens, while copies of his publications are held in the Baillieu Library Special Collections and the Brownless Biomedical Library’s rare books collection.

The Medical History Museum, located in the Brownless Library building, contains a number of items relating to Allen, including a very handsome illuminated address prepared by Troedel and Co., a leading firm of Melbourne lithographic printers. The address was presented to Allen in appreciation of his contribution as Secretary to the Intercolonial Medical Congress of Australasia of 1889, and was signed by the committee members, representing Melbourne’s leading medical men of the day.

The anatomy and pathology museum now named after Sir Harry Brookes Allen also includes a fascinating display of historic artefacts that tell us about both the formal study

and popular understanding of anatomy and pathology. These include plaster death masks of Ned Kelly and other individuals executed for their crimes. Such masks were used in phrenological studies, and for public entertainment. The 'moulder' of the Kelly mask, Maximilian Kreitmeyer, displayed an example in the window of his Bourke Street waxworks establishment the morning after the hanging. Several copies of the Kelly mask were made at the time, but the University's is thought to be the original, although how and why it came to the medical school is not known. In a nation founded as a penal colony however, phrenology's frequent focus on the causes of criminality continued to be of interest, even in academic circles, into the 20th century.⁴

Among the University's most generous benefactors are Sir Russell Grimwade (1879–1955) and his wife Mabel Grimwade. Not only did they donate £50,000 in 1944 for the construction of a building for the School of Biochemistry, but their bequest to the University included their Toorak home *Miegunyah*, and their important collection of artworks, books and historic documents, which are now housed in the Ian Potter Museum of Art and the Baillieu Library Special Collections. Their papers are in the University Archives.

A man of wide-ranging activities, Grimwade's abiding interest in botany, particularly his affection for Australia's indigenous trees, resulted in his support for forestry research; experimentation on the potential uses of the essential oils of Australian species; his well-received book *An Anthography of the Eucalypts*⁵ (of which several copies are in the Baillieu Library and the Archives); and his hobby of woodworking. A fine example of the furniture which he enjoyed crafting from Australian timbers is the specimen cabinet he made in about 1919–1920 to house his collection of eucalyptus seeds and pods. This chest, with its drawers still holding the carefully classified contents, is now part



Commemorative plaque, presented by Dr C.F.L. Nord of Amsterdam to the Dental School of the University of Melbourne and the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne, on the occasion of the official opening of their new building in 1963. It was made in Delft, the Netherlands, c. 1963, of hand-painted and glazed porcelain, diameter 29.0 cm. (Dental Museum Collection, University of Melbourne, DMC00443)

of the University of Melbourne Art Collection.⁶

The key institutional records of the University held by the University of Melbourne Archives — such as statutes, minute books, official correspondence, reports and financial papers — are also complemented by museum collections. The origins of the Dental Museum, for example, date back to 1884, when a concerned group of dentists, all trained overseas, formed the Odontological Society of Victoria with the aims of the regulation and education of dentists in this State. The efforts of the Society, which at an early meeting decided to develop a library and museum, resulted in the establishment of the Melbourne Dental Hospital in 1890 and the Australian College of Dentistry in 1897, the latter affiliating with the University in 1904.

Today the museum collection includes both objects and paper-based material such as photographs and trade catalogues. The early surgical instruments in the collection were already old when brought to Victoria by European-trained practitioners and thus the objects in the collection cover a wider time span than the written records. The collection also includes many models and instruments used in training dentists in Victoria as well as items donated by individual dentists.⁷ The Museum is part of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences and in 2005 it will move to new premises in Swanston Street from its existing location in the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne and Dental School building, which is illustrated on a presentation plate from the collection.

Described here are just a few examples of items in museum collections across the University that have connections to the holdings of the University Library and the University Archives. Other cultural collections held by the University include the University of Melbourne Herbarium in the School of Botany, the Surveying and Geomatic Engineering Collection, Electrical and Electronic Engineering Collection, Tieg's Zoology Museum, the Bionic Ear Archive in the Department of Otolaryngology and the F.A. Singleton Earth Sciences Collection. The managers of these diverse cultural collections have been working co-operatively over the past few years to increase public awareness of their existence and significance, encourage their use among students, researchers and the general community, and share knowledge and information to improve the standards of care and management.

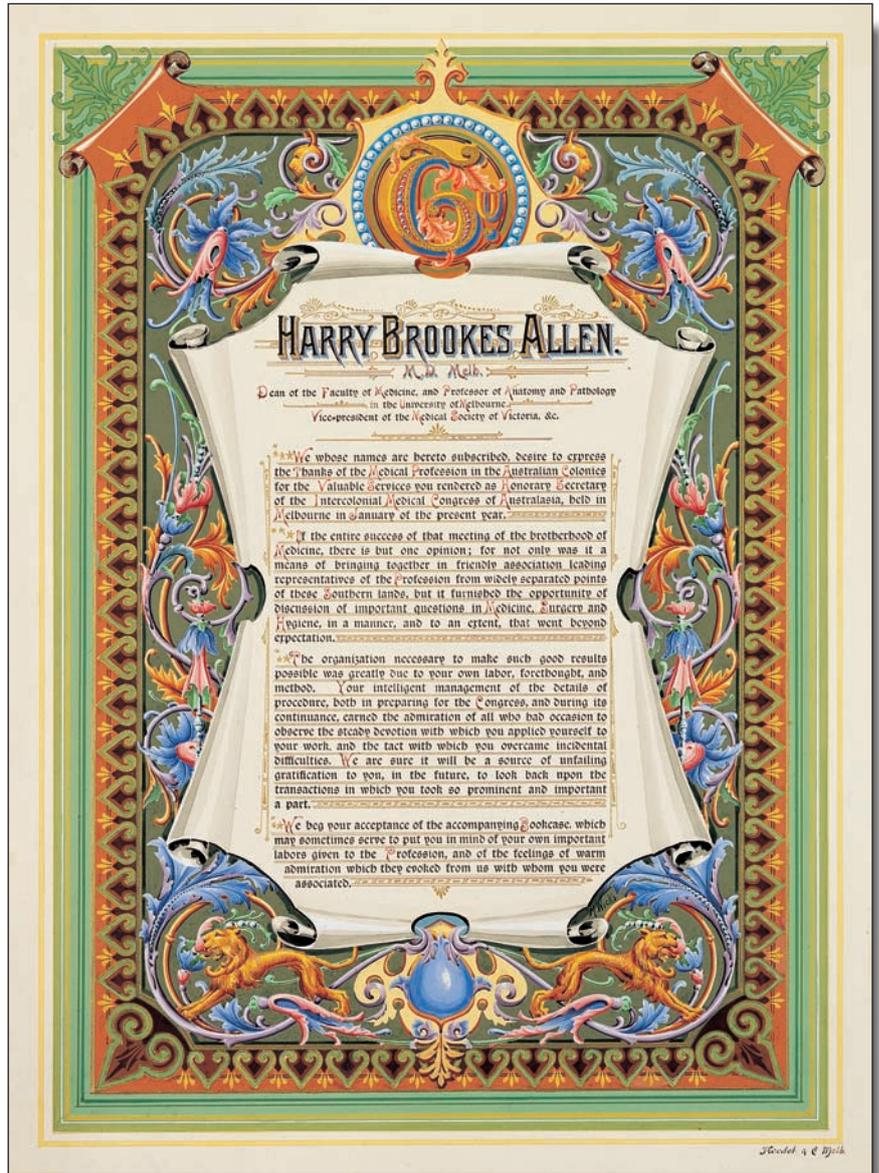
Belinda Nemeč is the University of Melbourne's Cultural Collections Officer.

Further information about the University's cultural collections can be found at these websites:

<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/community/museums.html> (museums and galleries)

<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/community/libraries.html> (libraries)

<http://www.unimelb.edu.au/community/collections.html> (other collections)



Illuminated address, presented to Professor Harry Brookes Allen MD by the members of the Intercolonial Medical Congress, 1889. It was made by Troedel and Co., Melbourne, 1889, of tooled leather, gilt, cardboard, polychrome paint, paper, 54.8 x 42.6 cm. (Medical History Museum Collection, University of Melbourne, MHM00518)

NOTES

- 1 H.C. Bolton, 'Optical Instruments in Australia in the 1939–45 War: successes and lost opportunities', *Australian Physicist*, vol. 27, no. 3, March 1990.
- 2 Dr Ed Muirhead, retired lecturer from the University of Melbourne School of Physics who is largely responsible for the revival since the 1980s of the Physics Museum, is also the author of *A Man Ahead of his Times: T.H. Laby's contribution to Australian science*, Richmond, Spectrum Publications, 1996.
- 3 Chris Briggs and Tony Goodwin, 'Melbourne's new anatomy and pathology museum brings reality to a 19th century vision', *UniNews*, vol. 13, no. 7, 3–17 May 2004, pp. 4–5.
- 4 For a discussion of other links between Kelly and the University of Melbourne, see Michael Piggott, 'Ned Kelly and the University of Melbourne', *University of Melbourne Library Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, December 2000, pp. 3–5.
- 5 Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1920; 2nd edition 1930.
- 6 Rachel Kent and Elizabeth Aders, *Art, Industry and Science: the Grimwade legacy, works of art from the Russell and Mab Grimwade bequest* (exhibition catalogue), Parkville, University of Melbourne Museum of Art, 1997.
- 7 My thanks to Professor Emeritus Henry F. Atkinson MBE, Honorary Curator of the Dental Museum, for information on this collection. Thanks also to managers of other collections mentioned, for their assistance.