

# NUMISMATIC COLLECTIONS

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## AUSTRALIAN NUMISMATIC COLLECTIONS

### *New South Wales*

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1. Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (ACANS), Macquarie University. Ancient coins (notably the Gale Collection of coins from South Italy, Roman Republic and Hadrian).
2. Nicholson Museum, University of Sydney. Ancient Coins
3. Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS; formerly known as the Powerhouse Museum; the numismatic collection once held by the Australian Museum). Ancient coins; Australian and world coins, medals and badges.
4. State Library of New South Wales. Mitchell and Dixson collections of Australian numismatic material.

### *Victoria*

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1. The Ian Potter Museum of Arts, University of Melbourne. Ancient coins.
2. Museum Victoria. Ancient coins; Australian and world coins, medals and badges (notably the collection of the Melbourne branch of the Royal Mint).

### *Tasmania*

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1. The John Elliott Classics Museum, University of Tasmania. Ancient coins.
2. Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery. Ancient coins; Australian and world coins, medals and badges.

### *South Australia*

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1. Art Gallery of South Australia. Ancient coins; Australian and world coins, medals and badges.
2. University of Adelaide. Department of Classics, Archaeology and Ancient History. Ancients (small collection).

### *Western Australia*

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1. Western Australian Museum (Maritime Museum). 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century European silver coins from shipwrecks.

### *Queensland*

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1. University of Queensland. Antiquities Museum. Ancients (small collection).

### *Australian Capital Territory. Canberra*

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1. Royal Australian Mint. National Coin Collection. Australian and world coin collection (notably the coins, dies and archives of the RAM).

## **Background**

Australia was colonized by Britain in 1788 and the Commonwealth of Australia was established in 1901. The early growth of educational institutions and museums was modest, but the population was small (by 1970 it had reached only 12.5 million). Australian libraries and museums developed without the assistance of those royal and aristocratic collections which, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, passed into the public domain in Europe. Australian colonial art collectors, private and public, usually had a taste for copies.<sup>[1]</sup> If they were at all interested in ancient coins, for example, they were likely to purchase electrotypes of famous examples held in the British Museum rather than originals of lesser significance.<sup>[2]</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there were some notable efforts to build collections of Australian numismatic items together with contemporary material (mostly from Britain and its former colonies) by the Melbourne branch of the Royal Mint and by a small group of private collectors (such as Mitchell and Dixson) and these passed to libraries and museums. The collections of Australian universities typically had their origins in small scale teaching collections of ‘ancients’. Outside of those collections largely made up of material created in Australia or of world coins and medals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, we might note only two important collections: the Maritime Museum of Western Australia and the Gale Collections at the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies.

J.J.E. von Guerard, the first Master of Painting at the National School of Art in Melbourne also became the first curator of the numismatic collection of Victoria’s Public Library in 1871.<sup>[3]</sup> He produced a three volume catalogue

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[1] Alison INGLIS, “A Mania for Copies”. In: A. GALBALLY & A. INGLIS with C. DOWNER & T. LANE, *The First Collections. The Public Library and the National Gallery of Victoria in the 1850s and 1860s*. Melbourne, 1992, p. 31–37.

[2] Alison INGLIS, “Coins, Medals and Impressions of Seals”. In: GALBALLY & INGLIS, *op. cit.*, p. 93–98.

[3] John SHARPLES, “The Numismatic Collection of the Museum of Victoria”, *Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia* vol. 2 (1986), pp.37–52. K.A. SHEEDY, “Ancient coins

of his own collection (unpublished but held by the Library).<sup>[4]</sup> In 1881 von Guerard sold his coins to the Public Library of Victoria; the Library's collection now rose to a total of 3,387 pieces (1,171 of which were ancient). Although usually modest in value, von Guerard's ancient coins evidently constitute the first collection of antiquities to reach the colonies; it was certainly the first to be recorded, though it was soon overtaken by the much more impressive collection of Charles Nicholson, acquired during a grand tour in 1856–7 and presented to the University of Sydney in 1860 (it had few if any coins). It went against Museum policy, however, which was to buy replicas; the early administrators of the Library had been urged by Professor McCoy of Melbourne University to purchase 'sulphur casts of the great European collections of coins for historical study', and among the first purchases (10<sup>th</sup> April 1862) were casts of Roman coins.<sup>[5]</sup>

There were some important private collections but the great majority were later sold. The most significant was J.R.B. Stewart's collection of medieval Cypriot coins, arguably the finest in the world for this topic. James Stewart (1913–1962) was the Edwin Cuthbert Hall professor of Middle Eastern archaeology at the University of Sydney.<sup>[6]</sup> For many years he laboured over a study of Lusignan history and coinage covering the years 1192–1474, eventually published by the Bank of Cyprus in 2001.<sup>[7]</sup> At the time of his death he had amassed a collection in excess of 1,500 Lusignan coins; this was in large part due to his purchase of specimens from four important hoards found on Cyprus.<sup>[8]</sup> Stewart died in 1962 at the age of 48. He was arguably the first important Australian numismatist but in reviewing the 2001 publication, D.M. Metcalf noted that his work showed signs of 'numismatic isolation'.<sup>[9]</sup> The greater part of Stewart's medieval Cypriot collection is today shared by the Fitzwilliam and Ashmolean Museums. More recently (2014), the important ancient numismatic collection of the Museum of Old and Modern Art in Hobart, Tasmania, was sold by its owner David Walsh (Numismatica Ars Classica Sale 77).

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for the colonies: Hellenism and the history of numismatic collections in Australia", *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* Special edition, 2012, pp. 109–122.

[4] SHARPLES, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

[5] A. INGLIS in GALBALLY & INGLIS, *op. cit.* (n. 2), p. 93.

[6] C.E. BLUNT, "Jim Stewart as I knew him". In: J.R. STEWART, *Lusignan Cyprus and its Coinage*. Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, 2002, p. XXXI–XL. See also R.S. MERRILLEES, "Professor James R. Stewart, Near Eastern Archaeologist", *Ancient Society: Resources for Teachers*, vol. 14, no 1, 1984, p. 17 and R.S. MERRILLEES, "The Ordeal of Shaving in a Frozen Lake, Professor J.R. Stewart and the Swedish Cyprus Expedition". In P. ÅSTRÖM *et al.*, *The Fantastic Years on Cyprus*. Jonsered, Sweden, 1994.

[7] J.R. STEWART, *Lusignan Cyprus and its Coinage*. Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, 2002.

[8] D.M. METCALF, "The Making of a Numismatic Monograph". In: J.R. STEWART, *op. cit.*, p. XI–XXIX.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. XXIII.

Few Australian numismatics collections have published their holdings, but digitization programs are underway and it is hoped that a significant amount of material will be available online within the next decade. With the exception of the collection now held by Museum Victoria and more recently the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (though today both are without curators), few Australian libraries, museums and universities have employed professional numismatic curators; most have relied on honorary staff (or teaching staff in the universities).

### Australian Coins, Medals and Tokens

The numismatic collection of Museum Victoria, formerly held by the Science Museum of Victoria, contains the collections of the State Library of Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria and especially the valuable and historically important collection and records of the Melbourne branch of the Royal Mint (which was built up by men such as A.M. le Soeuff, the Deputy Mint Master). The history of the collection is recorded by its last curator, Mr John Sharples.<sup>[10]</sup> The Museum Victoria collection, the best general numismatic holdings in Australia, is very largely unpublished; it consists primarily of Australian, British and British Colonial coins, medals and tokens from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Alfred Chitty was instrumental in attracting a number of significant donations, including the Alexander Isaacson collection of British war and Napoleonic medals. Museum Victoria holds an important collection of British hammered coins, largely acquired through the Felton Bequest. The Australian numismatic holdings of the State Library of NSW comes from the bequests of two notable local Sydney collectors, David Scott Mitchell (1836–1907) and Sir William Dixson (1870–1952). These very largely unpublished and inaccessible collections are now being digitally recorded. The Art Gallery of South Australia also holds an important Australian collection; perhaps the most interesting element lies with the dies and products of the Adelaide Assay Office (*fig. 1*).



*Fig. 1 – Joshua Payne, die-sinker and stamper, born Britain 1810, arrived Australia c.1849, died Adelaide 1889 Adelaide Assay Office ingot, 1852, Adelaide, gold, irregular rectangle, 4.2 × 2.8 cm uniface. Purchase 1912, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide*

<sup>[10]</sup> SHARPLES, *op. cit.*, p. 37–52.

The collection of the Australian Museum in Sydney was transferred to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) which holds a significant Australian and world currency collection that includes part of the collection of D.S. Mitchell (originally given to the Australian Museum in 1935-37). The Royal Australian Mint (Canberra) is currently developing a numismatic collection around its own archives and products.

### Spanish American and European 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century silver coins

The Western Australian Museum (Department of Maritime Archaeology) holds over 50,000 silver coins, mostly from three ships belonging to the Dutch East India Company wrecked along the Western Australian coast during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the *Vergulde Draeck*, *Batavia* (fig. 2) and *Zuytdorp*, but also a substantial number from the *Rapid* (a Boston trader) and the *Correio da Asia* (a Portuguese mail ship).<sup>[1]</sup>



Fig. 2

The importance of this collection stems from the context in which the coins were found. For example, some 10,000 silver coins were recovered from the wreck of the *Batavia* which sank in 1629, containing mostly German thalers and Dutch daalders, but also some fractional thalers and daalders not to be found in many European collections. The identification

<sup>[1]</sup> This section was written with the assistance of the museum's honorary curator, Prof. Walter Bloom.

of the *Zuytdorp* was based largely on the coins found on the wreck, in particular the two *stuiver* and *schellingen* (six *stuiver*) pieces of 1711 from the Middelburg Mint in Zeeland as the ship contained the entire mintages of these (previously unknown) pieces. The Museum has an online database of wrecks (<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/maritime-archaeology-db/wrecks>) and an online database with currently over 1,000 coins: <http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/maritime-archaeology-db/numismatics> which is being added to gradually

### Ancient Numismatics

A small but interesting teaching collection of ancient coins (approx. 300) was largely created for the University of Melbourne by Charles Seltman between 1927 and 1930. An collection of 173 Greek, 47 Roman Republican and 278 Roman Imperial coins at the John Elliott Classics Museum, University of Tasmania, a collection mostly bought by Eliot in 1959 and typical of many unpublished small ancient coin collections in Australian universities, has been fully published by K.H. Waters.<sup>[12]</sup> The 1972 donation from the estate of Lord Talbot de Malahide (Ireland), added interesting examples of Greek, Roman (gold), Indo-Scythian, Indian and English coins to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (all unpublished). The Nicholson Museum at the University of Sydney also has ancient coin holdings, in good part derived from the donation of the Triggs collection in 1938.<sup>[13]</sup> A.B. Triggs (1868-1936) commissioned a printed catalogue (unfortunately unillustrated) in 1924 from Spink & Son, probably the main source of his material.<sup>[14]</sup> This was a noteworthy collection (with 149 Greek coins) but in 1962 the most important pieces were lost when the museum was robbed.

The most important collection of ancient coins in Australia is held by Macquarie University. Dr William. L. Gale (1934-2007) was the key figure in the emergence of ancient numismatics as a research focus supported by Australian universities.<sup>[15]</sup> He was also the first major donor of Mediterranean antiquities to an Australian institution since Nicholson in 1860. In 1999 Dr Gale provided the funds to establish an endowment at Macquarie University in order to fund the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies (ACANS). At the same time he lent the Centre his collection of some 3,000 coins; this collection was given to the Centre after his death

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<sup>[12]</sup> K.H. WATERS, *Greek Coins in the University of Tasmania*. Hobart, 1981, and *Roman Coins in the University of Tasmania*. Hobart 1982.

<sup>[13]</sup> G.P. WALSH, "Triggs, Arthur Bryant (1868-1936)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 12, p. 263-264.

<sup>[14]</sup> Anon. *Catalogue of a Collection of Greek, Roman and English Coins in the Possession of A.B. Triggs* – Yass, New South Wales. London, 1924.

<sup>[15]</sup> K.A. SHEEDY, *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum Australia I*. Adelaide, 2008. K.A. SHEEDY, "Obituary W.L. Gale Founder of the Australian Centre for Ancient Numismatic Studies", *Journal of the Numismatic Association of Australia* 18, 2008, p. 58-60.

in 2007. Bill Gale's undergraduate studies in ancient history at Macquarie University gave him the knowledge necessary to build up a world class coin collections in his chosen fields. A family fortune derived from property development in Sydney gave him the means to purchase coins from auctions and sales around the world. He confined his collecting efforts to three areas that were linked by his passion for Italy. These were the Greek cities of South Italy, Roman Republic Coinage and the issues of the Emperor Hadrian; each of the collections is of outstanding size and quality. The coins from South Italy (a total of 1,267) were published in 2008 as *Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum Australia I* by the Centre's first director, Kenneth Sheedy. Gale himself published one small monograph on these mints: *The Sacred Tripod. Kroton and its Coins* (Sydney 1995). The Republican coins and those of Hadrian will be available online shortly. ACANS has continued to build its collection and now has some 5,000 coins. It has obtained a number of important pieces, such as this archaic Corinthian overstrike of an Athenian *Wappenmünzen* didrachm with an obverse gorgon type (fig. 3).



Fig. 3