

## **THE ERNST MATTHAEI MEMORIAL COLLECTION OF EARLY GLASS**

### *Establishment and management of the Collection*

The Collection was established in memory of Ernst Matthaei, Microscopist, who died in 1966 whilst a member of the School of Botany, The University of Melbourne. Money subscribed to a Memorial Appeal was used partly to purchase a small, initial collection and the balance was invested. This investment has by University Resolution 7.75 (5) been established as a Trust Fund, “the income thereof to be used to add to the Collection”. By this means the Memorial will remain viable into the future, with money available for continuing purchases.

Both the University and University House agreed that “The House” should be the repository for the Collection and, at a small ceremony in May 1971, it was formally presented to the University and accepted by the then Chancellor, Sir Robert Menzies.

Ernst Matthaei had been closely associated with University House. He was a Foundation Member and, at the time of his death, a General Committee Member and first convener of the Wine Committee. In establishing as his memorial this important Collection for all members of the House and their visitors to enjoy, it was hoped to symbolise his belief in a dignified, comfortable and welcoming Staff Club for all Faculties. His life-long interest in glass and its application to optical problems is also obliquely reflected.

The Collection is part of The University of Melbourne Museum of Art. By agreement between the University and the Committee of University House, it is administered by a Sub-Committee of the House which is responsible to both bodies.

### *Development of the Collection*

From its inception until 1991, the Collection was developed with the advice, under the terms of the Will of the late Mrs Grace Matthaei, of the late Mr Rex Ebbott and Mr Max Marginson. Following Rex’s death in 1991, Mrs Pat Daniels took over his position as ‘recognised authority on early glass’.

The Collection is now a most significant one, and it has grown at an astonishing rate. The Firing Glass inscribed ‘GORVIN-HUNT TOAST-MASTER’, Catalogue No. 50, was acquired in 1978; this Catalogue now

contains 238 entries and 286 individual pieces. Much of this expansion has come from presentations from friends of Ernst Matthaei and Rex Ebbott, and friends of the University and University House: K.E.A. and J.R. Albrecht, Australian Decorative and Fine Arts Society, Mrs Jenny Barnfather, the Brine family, Pat and Roger Daniels, Dr Eric Cunningham Dax, Mrs Mary Raynes Dickson, Dr and Mrs F.H. Drummond, Mr Rex Ebbott, Mrs Una Fraser, Dr Joan Gardner, Mr Robert Garton, Mr Paul Hackforth-Jones, Mr and Mrs W.A. Hemmant, Dr Frank Curnow Jones, Dr Geoffrey Kaye, Miss Doris Kilburn, Mr Peter Masters, Mr and Mrs W. Pate, Mrs Robin Patton, Mr G.A. Richardson, Mr Wolfgang Sievers, Mrs V.A. Silberberg, Society of Collectors, Mr Campbell Thorn, Mrs Ethel Tiegs, Gilbert and Florence Vasey, and Dr Gwynne Villiers. Mrs Grace Matthaei made a number of gifts to the Collection; at her express request, they are not acknowledged in this Catalogue.

The University of Melbourne Museum of Art and University house are greatly indebted to Rex Ebbott. The following tribute to Rex was written by Pat Daniels in 'English and Irish Glass 1690-1840: The Rex Ebbott Collection' (Parkside Antiques, July 1991).

*Tribute to Rex Ebbott*

R.H. Ebbott OBE  
1908-1991

'Rex Ebbott was a man of good taste, diverse interests and many talents. These he used and developed with enormous energy and enthusiasm throughout his life, to his personal satisfaction and to the benefit of those around him. He had a great love for the Arts and an exceptional ability with his hands. He could use a needle as well as a chisel or a saw, as witness the tapestry of the Ebbott Arms and the superb Adamesque mantelpiece in his sitting room.

His talent with the pencil, acknowledged when he was awarded the Prize for Drawing in his final year at Wesley College, would have stood him in good stead in his chosen career of architecture had not the Depression interrupted his studies at the University of Melbourne. As an alternative he turned to the real estate business and was a Director and Partner in the firm of Abercromby and Beatty until his retirement in 1970. His integrity and personality were well remembered in December 1977 when he was referred to in 'Australian Property News' as '. . . one of the most outstanding auctioneers in the past 40 years'.

He enjoyed the conviviality of the Melbourne Club as well as the demands of fund raising for the Victorian Society for Crippled Children and Adults and for his many years of service on the Council of Management he was awarded the Queen Elizabeth Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977.

His great passion for glass, especially for 18th century English drinking glasses, was nurtured by the reputation of his grandfather's cellar, which from boyhood he vowed to emulate, and by an exceedingly attractive Cider Glass in the possession of an aunt.

Rex's long correspondence with Edward Barrington Haynes of Arthur Churchill Ltd commenced in the late 1930s and continued up to the time of Haynes' sudden death in 1957. His expertise and valuable contacts were recognised by Daryl Lindsay, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, who requested that he assess the modest holding then in the Gallery and devise a plan for developing the collection into something of significance. As a result of this, Haynes assembled an exhaustive schedule of stem types, together with a group of specialised vessels and another showing exceptional decorative techniques. Thus the first Beilby glass to enter the Melbourne Collection, a white enamel with landscape showing a plough in the foreground, was acquired, as well as a tall composite stem wine engraved with the Arms of the House of Brunswick, attributed to Jacob Sang. These two were part of a group of 123 pieces purchased through the Felton Bequest in 1947. In 1956 Rex was created Honorary Curator (later Honorary Consultant) of the Collection and he proceeded to vehemently support the acquisition of major items through the Department of Decorative Arts.

His contact with London Dealer, Howard Phillips, in 1948 led to a long and warm friendship. The excellent liaison and trust which resulted enabled the Gallery to acquire such masterpieces as the Royal Armorial Goblet by William Beilby, which must have been particularly satisfying to Rex in view of his love of Heraldry, in which field he gave generously of his knowledge to Institutions, dealers and friends alike.

Perhaps his most important contributions were his engaging personality, the ease with which he established and maintained lasting and real friendships and the way in which he was able to use these qualities for the public good. Thus the William and Margaret Morgan Endowment Fund was established, enabling the National Gallery to acquire 'from my very dear friend, Gordon Russell' a world renowned collection virtually at cost. Since then the Fund has made possible the acquisition of many historic specimens including, through Howard Phillips, such masterpieces

as the 16th century Venetian Wine Ewer with white filigree decoration and the 17th century Dutch calligraphic Goblet with diamond point engraving attributed to Willem van Heemskerck.

Rex Ebbott's Handbook of the Melbourne Collection 'British Glass' (Oxford University Press, 1970) is still in print and in 1976 he was awarded the National Gallery of Victoria Gold Medal for distinguished service to Art in Victoria.

For 23 years Rex guided the development of the Ernst Matthaei Memorial Collection of Early Glass which is housed in University House. His ability to encourage public spiritedness resulted in many donations to the University of Melbourne Museum of Art, not the least of which was the collection of glass, ceramics, silver and furniture of the anaesthetist Dr Geoffrey Kaye. He was chief adviser in the development of the Regency Room and, through the Collectors' Society, the Victoria Room at the House. In 1981 he was made an Honorary Life Member of University House.

He was elected member of the Glass Circle in 1959, was a foundation member of the Gallery Society and a prominent member of the National Trust. Geoffrey Edwards, Curator of Sculpture and Glass at the National Gallery, writes that Rex's death 'has deprived this nation's artistic life of a rare and remarkable presence' and Howard Phillips that he and his wife Enid 'already miss his radiating manner'.

These unique qualities and his considerable achievements were recognised in 1979 when Rex Ebbott was admitted to the Order of the British Empire.'

Peter Attiwill  
Convener  
Matthaei Sub-Committee  
of University House  
11 July 1997