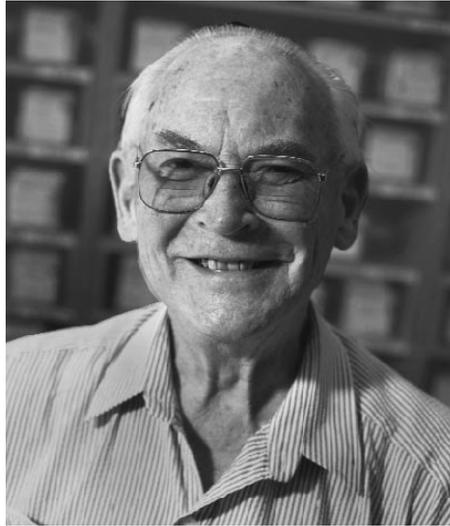


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Pat Boland 1921–2006



The museum curator, numismatist and military historian Major H P (Pat) Boland OAM ED (Efficiency Decoration) died on 16 December 2006, just days after his 85th birthday. During 45 years of service to the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Pat fostered the development of its numismatic collection, skilfully overseeing the expansion of its holdings from 15,000 items to more than 30,000 covering all aspects of world history. In the process he made many friends and gained countless admirers.

It must be remembered that Australia has really only had two museums in which numismatics was an active part of their collections: the Museum of Victoria and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) now the Powerhouse Museum. Today, only the Powerhouse Museum still maintains an operational numismatic

collection. Its survival here in Sydney is due in no small part to Pat Boland. Since joining the Museum in 1961 he had been a steady presence continually urging the importance of Australia's numismatic heritage and maintaining the key role which the Museum had to play in ensuring that this heritage was not lost. The MAAS was not the first Sydney museum with a collection of coins and medals; that honour belonged to the Australian Museum. However, numismatics sat uncomfortably within the natural history and anthropology collections that were that institution's core and in a consolidation of the state's numismatic material, the MAAS was the obvious choice. Pat believed that one of his key missions on joining MAAS was to audit this donation. But he also had plans to expand the 'empire'. His dream was to

create a working department, one staffed by paid curator(s), which vigorously collected and actively participated in all the activities of a modern museum.

Pat was one of a small group of enthusiasts and collectors in Sydney, which included a very colourful bunch of numismatists, such as Tom Hanley, who took an active interest in the city's public collections during the 1960s and 70s. Tom Hanley had focused his efforts on helping the NSW State Library get its important Australian collection into order. But the famous Dixon and Mitchell collections of the library were not active collections; the job here was to catalogue what had been given to the state. Pat's brief at the Museum was certainly to catalogue and maintain the collection but also to accept new material. We doubt if the Museum trustees had any idea of the plans that Pat had for new material!

Pat had a very broad definition of the term 'numismatic material'. In this he undoubtedly shared the holistic vision of material culture favoured by social historians in the Museum. In more prosaic words we can say that at heart he was a collector who saw the numismatic value in just about anything. Coins and medals were obvious, as well as the dies and equipment that produced them, banknotes and promissory notes, also badges, and pins, trade tokens, convict love tokens, colonial medals and in fact anything struck with a die in a press or engraved! Getting his hands on these treasures delighted him and Pat had a number of strategies for capturing the older items as well as modern products. Just 'having the doors open' meant that the Museum might attract the occasional donation of rare

material but usually he had to raise funds to purchase valuable items at auction, and then encourage people to donate the less expensive material. So how was it done? At one stage each museum department had a small purchase budget (his portion of which Pat would manage with glee) but the historical material which he coveted were usually expensive.

The numismatic exhibitions organised by the staff of museums, such as Pat and also John Sharples in Melbourne, as well as the informed publications of researchers such as Les Carlisle and Bill Mira, were educating a growing number of collectors. They were prepared to pay a lot of money for significant pieces. Many recognised the investment value of Australian coins and medals. To have a chance in purchasing important items at auction (mostly Spinks in Sydney which later became Noble Numismatics) Pat had often to go cap in hand to the director of the Museum and try and obtain special funds. It took a lot of effort: he had to research the topic and then present a well argued plea to the Museum backed up with all the usual official forms completed in triplicate. It was, of course, impossible to predict the final price. Very often he was out-bid. It would be fair to say that the Museum was not often prepared to pay the amounts that collectors now believed the numismatic heritage of Australia was worth, and Pat himself was often staggered by the figures. He was nonetheless stoic and always dogged; sometimes he would have a quiet word with the successful buyer suggesting that before they died they might like to think of the Museum in their will, or even consider a donation at some date before this unfortunate but

inevitable event.

The acquisition of recent material was certainly Pat's main concern when it came to developing the collection. He wrote tirelessly to public bodies urging them to donate examples of their medals (there was a great deal of medal production for state and federal departments at the time of the Bicentenary). He solicited medal and badge producers, notably Amor Sanders, and the result was a constant stream of numismatic paraphernalia which greatly enriched the collection. He persuaded the Canberra mint to donate samples of their current products (though perhaps his most spectacular achievement here was to persuade them to donate old dies, once used at the Sydney Mint, to the Museum), and in the 1970s wined and dined Reserve Bank executives into parting with an almost complete set of extremely rare specimen notes.

After his 'retirement' in the late 1980s Pat was employed as numismatic consultant, heading a collection management team to identify problem pieces and ensure accurate data was entered into the then new database. He also acquired the vast numbers of numismatic objects donated by

WD Bush, an American who had been charmed by Pat while briefly in Australia in the early 1980s. Bush was so impressed with Pat and the collection that he began a stream of donations to the Museum, ultimately valued at more than half a million dollars. Such results were second-nature to Pat and his employment as consultant numismatist continued until his formal resignation in November 2006. It speaks volumes that he was the first staff member to be honoured with the Life Fellow award, in recognition of his enhancement of the national and international standing of the Museum in the field of numismatics.

The numismatic collection will endure as Pat's legacy, but his colleagues will remember his warmth and generosity. Pat was a true gentleman and will be sorely missed. He is survived by Jean his wife of 55 years, four children, Ian, Kathleen, Jeanette and Michael, and ten grandchildren. In his honour, the high-security coin room that houses the collection has been named the H P (Pat) Boland Numismatic Room.

Paul Donnelly and Kenneth Sheedy.