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OBITUARY

JOHN GARTNER 1914-1998

by Maurice Keain

The death of John Gartner on 2 February 1998 at the age of 83 years is a loss to numismatics indeed, as well as in other fields of collecting.

John Gartner was born in Melbourne 14 July 1914, the son of a compositor in the printing industry. However, his father was to die at an early age when John was 13 years old. John's three sisters were also to die young and his mother was left to provide for John and his younger brother.

After his schooling John became an apprentice in the printing industry and keenly learnt the trade. His spare time was involved in extra study of printing, particularly at the Melbourne Public Library where he became a firm friend of the Assistant Director, Albert Foxcroft. Realizing John was someone to be encouraged Foxcroft showed him the rare works held in the Victorian State collection of early and master printers. John graduated and became a master printer. He purchased a hand model platten press and commenced his own printing works, which he named after the Melbourne suburb in which he lived, Hawthorn. His enthusiasm for printing lead him to establish the Printing Industry Craftsmen's Association in 1934, and he was the printer and editor of their journal. The first publication to bear the imprint of the Hawthorn Press was dated 1936 and in 1937 commenced in business with his own establishment, doing much private presswork. In 1945 he acquired the Morris Press in Melbourne to become a larger commercial

operation, while still doing some private press work. Increased output of the press resulted in the need for larger premises and so its location was moved from Guildford Lane to Little Bourke Street in 1968.

John Gartner's enthusiasm for fine things lead him to become a collector. He became a bibliophile, a philatelist, a numismatist, and a book-plate collector. In each field he showed an outstanding desire to perfect his knowledge in his interests and amass very fine collections. His stamp collecting was specialized in fields such as Papua New Guinea, the south Pacific, Hong Kong among others, and his outstanding collection of Western Australian stamps included the famous inverted fourpenny swan. His later collecting included a highly specialized collection of Zanzibar, collected in part because its initial "Z" was the initial of his wife Zelma.

John's interest naturally lead him to collecting coins. He set about to find excellent quality, ahead of quantity, specializing in Australian and English, but with a world wide interest including ancient Greek and Roman. The realization that a serious collector of coins needs the appropriate reference books meant that John also had an excellent library of numismatic books, amongst his extensive and magnificent book collection.

At the time the Wills Collection became available, John and another collector were given the opportunity to acquire it for £2,000, subject to valuation. It was arranged that John go to Sydney to value

the collection. At the end of the second day he rang his fellow collector to say that the collection was worth some £2,400 plus "and still counting". His fellow collector tried to talk John into not being prepared to go above the £2,000 originally discussed and refused to pay more the half of that amount. John refused to offer less than the amount the collection was worth and thus he was in a difficult situation. John had no alternative but to go the bank to secure a loan for the extra money and thus pay for the entire collection. This was only one instance when John showed that he was a principled person of utmost integrity and honesty, which he displayed throughout his whole life.

Ill health caused John to sell his numismatic collection in the mid 1960's. However, once his health improved John was back collecting again and built up a second excellent collection. Unfortunately the Ash Wednesday bushfires which devastated the Mount Macedon area of Victoria totally destroyed John's coin and other collections. It was not long before John recommenced to build up his third collection of numismatic items, which he maintained until his final bout of ill health caused him to dispose of this collection.

John, apart from being a foundation member (number 4) of this association, was a member of the Numismatic Association of Victoria and served as their President in 1957-58, and was an Honorary Life Fellow of the Numismatic Society of South Australia. Inc. John was the first chairman of the Paul Simon Memorial Award Committee. and one of the first recipients of this Award for outstanding

services to organized numismatics in Australia. As a publisher John Gartner gave magnificent support to numismatics. He published James Hunt Deacon's *The Ingots and Assay Office Pieces of South Australia*; Selwyn Mort's *The Coins of the Hapsburg Emperors*; G. W. Tomlinson's *Australian Banknotes*; Ron Greig, together with Harry Robinson and Bill Woodside's *Communion Tokens*; Roger McNeice's *Tasmanian Promissory Notes*; Alan Nicholson's *Australian Banknote Catalogue* John Dean's *Australian Coin Varieties Catalogue*; Reg William's *The Victoria Volunteer Long and Efficient Service Medal*; and his own *Australian Coin Catalogue* which ran into eight editions. He founded the *Australian Coin Review*, as a monthly magazine, and *Numisma*, an occasional publication.

In 1959 Michael Meszaros, the son of the internationally known sculptor and medallist, Andor Meszaros, was given his first commission work by John. The cast uniface medal that appears on the cover of this issue is the result of the commission.

John was recognized world wide as an outstanding philatelist, in which field he was an international judge, author and publisher. He was the inaugural recipient of the Australian Federation of Australian Philatelic Societies' Fellow of the Australian Philatelic Order.

John was always ready to encourage other collectors, generous with his time and always interested to help. His fellow collectors will miss an outstanding friend, but his contributions will be remembered even long after his friends pass on.