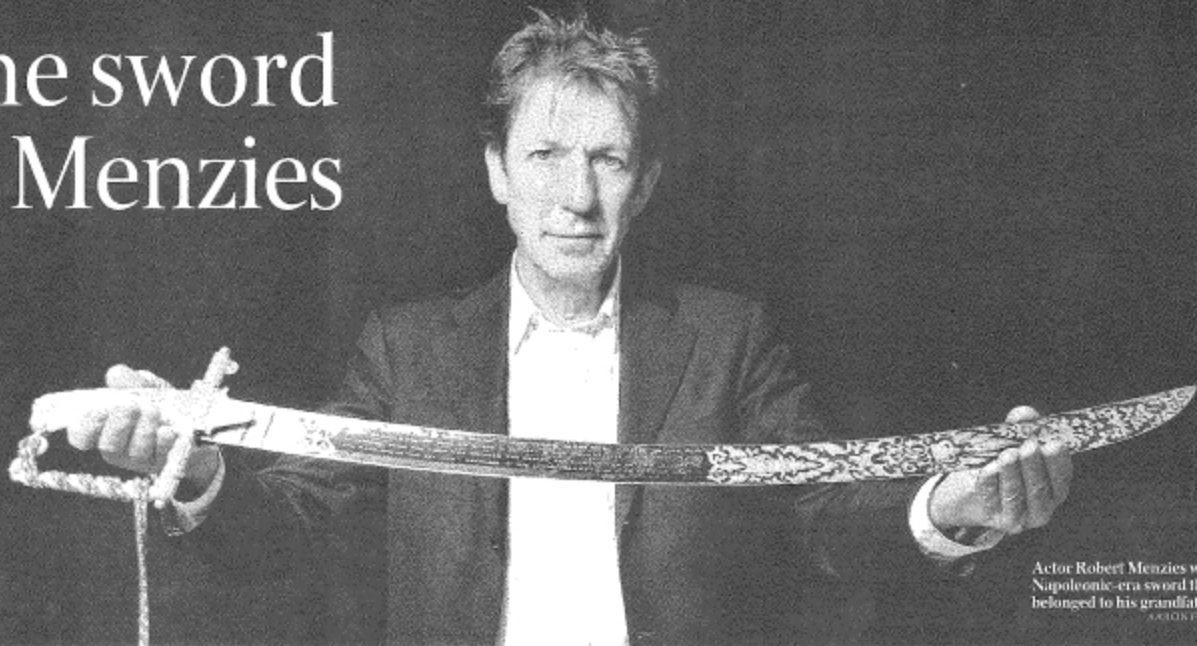


The sword of Menzies



Actor Robert Menzies with a Napoleonic-era sword that belonged to his grandfather

ARLON FRANCES

The former PM's grandchildren auction off his curiosities

MICHAELA BOLAND

THE grandchildren of Robert Menzies have decided to break with their past and release for public auction 10 significant items once owned by the nation's longest-serving prime minister.

In Melbourne on May 21, a solid gold coin produced in 1958

commemorating the papacy of John XXIII will go under the hammer with an asking price of more than \$3000. Valued at the same amount is a chair from the Queen's 1953 coronation for which Menzies and his wife Pattie travelled to London.

Giles Moon from Leonard Joel Auctions says he does not know precisely how the chair came to be among the former prime minister's personal possessions.

"The chairs were available for people to acquire following the inauguration," Moon says. "Pre-

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sumably that's what Menzies did."

Most valuable of the auction lots is a sword given to the prime minister in the 1950s by a relative who recently bought it at auction in London. The sword had been

presented to a British naval lieutenant Charles Menzies 150 years earlier, in 1806, in recognition of his bravery in the Napoleonic Wars.

Charles Menzies had been named inaugural superintendent of the town in Newcastle, NSW, in 1804 but finding himself unsuited to the role he had returned to Europe.

The prime minister's grandson and namesake, actor Robert Menzies, says he had not found any evidence linking his family with the naval lieutenant.

The sword is expected to fetch more than \$80,000. It was displayed for many years at his grandfather's Melbourne haunt the Savage Club, then after his grandfather's death it was housed at the actor's parents' home in Brighton.

"It's too valuable an item to be left to any one person so we decided to sell it and divide the income," the Melbourne stage actor says.

One of 10 grandchildren, Menzies spent his Christmas holidays at the Lodge until the age of 11

when his grandfather's 17-year leadership ended. He recalls a rambling property with a wire perimeter fence in those days regularly penetrated by local children who came to play cricket games.

The Lodge boasted one full-time staff member. Visitors dined on poultry, eggs and vegies grown on the grounds.

Menzies' grandmother answered the phone, did most of the cooking and much of the housework.

"It was a pretty frugal life as I remember it," he says.