

Hoard House

NEWS FROM THE GRAINGER COLLECTION

Photographs Aboard the S.S. Aorangi

In 1938 Percy Grainger was working long hours on the construction of the Grainger Museum. Days started at 5 am and continued until late at night. The Museum, his long-held dream, was proving to be a more difficult and exhausting reality, even for a man renowned for his energy and physical endurance.

After the opening of the Museum in December Percy and his wife Ella returned to America on the S.S. *Aorangi*, the very ship on which they had first met in November 1926. Grainger went through the ship photographing the places that held special significance for him. These photographs, with inscriptions written by Grainger in the borders, typify his obsessive habit of memorialising his private life.

On one photograph Grainger has written: "Table at which PG (1926) had just ended writing "PG unlucky with Swedes" when Ella, standing at threshold (here seen), said "You are always working!"". This one incident is referenced by Grainger a number of times. Originally he documented their first brief meetings under the title 'PG unlucky with Swedes'. Less than a page long, it describes the confusion when Ella mistook Grainger for a member of the ship's band and requested help with her 'bandolero (whatever that may be)'. Just after he finished this story Ella came to the doorway of the writing room and made a casual remark, leading to a deeper conversation.

A year later Grainger wrote about the incident in 'The Love-Life of Paris and Helen', an account of their romance, which includes 'PG unlucky with Swedes' as an appendix. Ella had made an immediate impact on Grainger, stirring him from a melancholy that had lasted the four and a half years since his mother Rose's death. He was attracted to her fiery spirit and independence, admired her 'pure Nordic' qualities and was comforted by the physical resemblance to his mother. 'The Love-Life of Paris & Helen' is dense and detailed, written with the uncompromising honesty Grainger displayed his entire life.

The fact that Grainger went back on board the *Aorangi* 12 years later and photographed the site of their fledgling romance is not surprising considering the intensity of his feelings for Ella. In December of 1926 he wrote to her:

It is a burning need with me to try to show you how warm is my fondness & admiration for you, how deep my thankfulness to you for the breath of emotional life that was rekindled in me thru seeing you & talking to you during those blessed days of travel on boat & train. You have proved to me that life can still be terrifyingly tempting, torturing, moving even to such a broken, hopeless, weary, sinful failure as I. I may be killed in a railway accident before I see you again. Can you not



Hand-coloured photograph of the S.S. Aorangi in Auckland, New Zealand.
Grainger Collection

Photograph of the writing room on board the S.S. Aorangi, 1938.
Inscribed by Percy Grainger. Grainger Collection

readily understand, in view of the uncertainty of life, that I long to slip some trace of myself, some undistorted record of my feelings for you, into your memory?

The drive to articulate feelings in love letters and stories is, of course, not unusual but Grainger combined this with an equally strong desire to share those feelings with the wider world, as articulated in a letter to Ella in November, 1927:

My feeling is this: That our whole lovelife should be as public a matter as possible. There is nothing in my whole life that I am more proud about than you yourself as well as my feeling for you ... I see no reason why anything should be hidden in our lovelife — let our lovingness go forth to the world, together with our art & our other deeds.'

By the time the Museum was built Grainger had gathered together every item of correspondence between he and Ella, along with autobiographical stories, art and photographs, some of the most intimate nature. The inscribed photographs from the S.S. *Aorangi* are just one example of his desire to make the personal public and are part of what makes the Grainger Collection so fascinating and multi-layered.

Monica Syrette
Curatorial Assistant, Grainger Collection

Placing Grainger on the National Stage

The first major exhibition investigating Percy Grainger's life and achievements will be launched in Canberra on 5 July this year. The National Library of Australia (NLA), in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, is presenting an elaborate biographical exhibition, titled *Facing Percy Grainger*, that plots Grainger's rise from Brighton-born (Melbourne) obscurity, to New York-based celebrity performer, composer and eccentric.

Except for sporadic small-scale exhibitions, Grainger's contribution to the arts in Australia, England and the US has never fully been acknowledged with an exposition at a major cultural venue. Grainger's reputation in Australia has battled with a combination of this country's discomfort with tall poppies (particularly self-proclaimed blooming luminaries) as well as a fundamental misunderstanding (due largely to ignorance or a lack of available information) of the complex mesh of contradictions that was Grainger's life. In Australia he is often popularly depicted as a whip-wielding mummy's boy, who composed *Country Gardens*. This exhibition is an enormous opportunity to present Grainger's story, with relevant warts, but in a balanced way. It will describe his involvement with the cultural



Wurlitzer, Knoxville (USA), Butterfly Piano, 1940s.
Small semi-circular piano adjusted by Grainger and tuned to sixth tones for use in his *Free Music* experiments.
Grainger Collection

heart of Edwardian London, his lifetime preoccupation with folk music themes, his natural talents as a designer and his unorthodox views on sexuality and race — just to name a few of the exhibition's sub-themes.

Over 200 items drawn from the University's Grainger Collection will form the

core of the exhibition with additional material sourced from the collections of the NLA and the National Gallery of Victoria. The project has been three long years in the making with creative decisions and logistical details being hampered by the tyranny of the distance between Melbourne and the nation's capital. This is no small undertaking. It is not like a neat travelling show of framed artworks. Pianos, furniture, costumes and free-music machines are being despatched to Canberra with utmost care. Many items had to be treated by conservators and restorers prior to embarkation, and specialist framing and crating has been fabricated to ensure this very significant material is protected in transit.

To parallel *Facing Percy Grainger*, a substantial catalogue edited by exhibition co-curator and Grainger scholar, Dr David Pear, will be published. Many of the exhibition items have been richly illustrated in full colour and will accompany essays on diverse aspects of Grainger's life.

Unfortunately the exhibition will not be touring to other centres. However, people unable to visit Canberra during the show's three month duration will be able to view a virtual exhibition linked to the NLA's website.

Brian Allison
Curator, Exhibitions and Partnerships
Cultural Collections, University of Melbourne

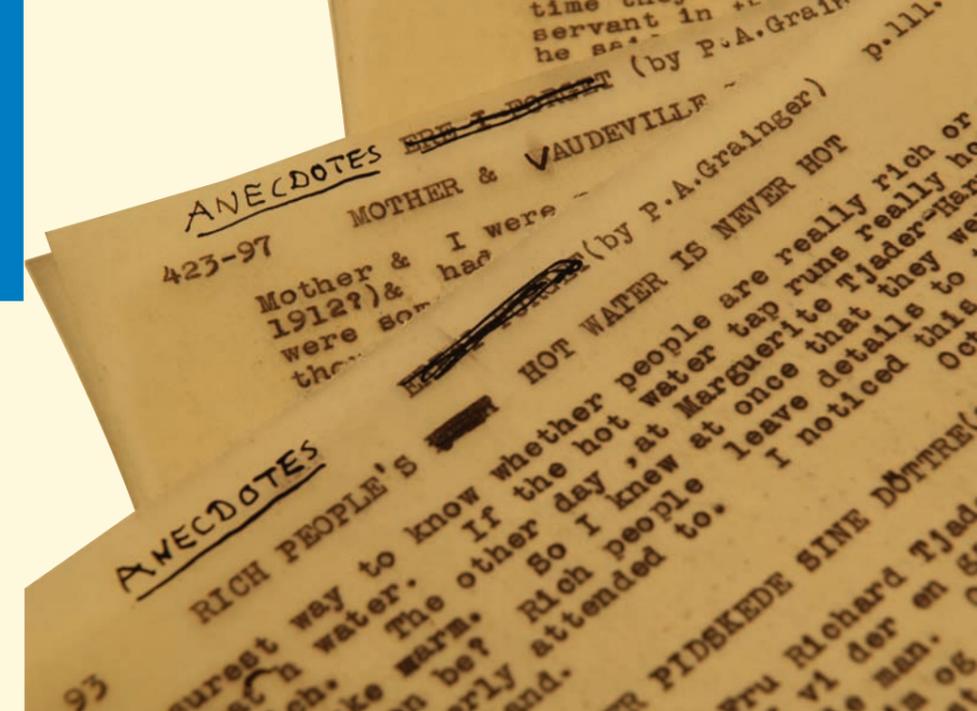


THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

The Exhibition the Grainger Collection and the University of Melbourne



Grainger's 'Anecdotes'



Sample pages from Grainger's 'Anecdotes', written between 1949 and 1954.

For the past three years, curators, authors, conservators, photographers, cataloguers, designers and many others have been applying their creativity and skill to bring the exhibition *Facing Percy Grainger* to life.

In a larger, though related, journey the University of Melbourne has been rethinking its strategic direction. Our aspiration remains, however, to be a public-spirited institution that is highly esteemed nationally and internationally for making distinctive contributions to society. Our focus will continue to be research, learning and teaching, and what we are now calling 'knowledge transfer'. Indeed these three strands are so intertwined and interdependent, like strands of a triple helix, that our future success will depend on pursuing them as a single integrated vision.

Melbourne has also reaffirmed the unique virtues of its campus locale, where face-to-face teaching remains the norm, where scholars gather from across the globe, and where learning communities embrace evolving technologies. The University has always enjoyed a strong sense of place, its centre bounded by Carlton and Parkville, the city and its general cemetery.

One of the many features which has made the campus distinctive has been the Grainger Collection. The Grainger supports each of the three strands of the triple helix. Set beside the Faculty of Music's Conservatorium and opposite the Centre for Studies in Australian Music, it supports learning and research including composition, performance and musicology. The Grainger also has strong relevance to programs across many of our other disciplines including art curatorship, design, education, history and museology.

By their very nature, universities are about much more than discovering and imparting knowledge. They naturally lend themselves to a two-way transfer of knowledge through their external engagement with government, industry and the community. As such, the Grainger Collection and *Facing Percy Grainger* are perfect examples of how to pursue public and community purposes. The exhibition represents a genuine partnership between professional and academic colleagues; it involves two renowned institutions; and it adds value through a wonderful publication and through additions to the National Library's national web-based gateway, MusicAustralia.

At the opening of the Sydney Olympic Games, a Grainger composition accompanied Cathy Freeman as she lit the Olympic cauldron. My hope is that this exhibition and its complements will be just as inspirational.

Glyn Davis, Vice-Chancellor, University of Melbourne

Adapted from the Vice-Chancellor's foreword to the *Facing Percy Grainger* exhibition catalogue.



Top: Unknown photographer, Percy Grainger 'In the Round', silver gelatin print, 1933. Grainger Collection
Bottom: A page from Percy Grainger's manuscript score *The Warriors*, performed at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Grainger Collection

Several recent research enquiries directed to the Grainger Collection have led to closer indexing of Grainger's 'Anecdotes' for the Collection's in-house catalogue. These 'Anecdotes', which run to well over 100 pages of typescript and autograph (in English and Danish), were written between 8 October 1949 and 6 November 1954. Grainger wrote them during a period of anxiety about his health followed by surgery, then diagnosis of the cancer that would eventually lead to his death.

While many of the 100 items found in the collection conform to the usual meaning of anecdote – a short account of an interesting incident – some of the others, especially the longer ones, suggest the related definition deriving from the Greek *anekdota*, meaning unpublished: 'secret or hitherto undivulged particulars of history or biography'. In some of the anecdotes Grainger is, perhaps, setting the record straight, recording his own version of events and his perceptions of those he knew. Grainger's own description, at the head of the collection, is simply: 'Things I have heard people say, thoughts I myself have had, gossip about people, things I have read, epigrams, aphorisms – in short, all sorts of aids-to-memory'.

While most of the anecdotes are relatively short, some no more than a sentence or two, there are a handful of extended ones, much cited by Grainger scholars. The first of these is headed 'Busoni & P.G.' (no. 42, 7 pages), Grainger's account of a less-than-harmonious relationship between the two composer-pianists, with a description of his two weeks of

study with Busoni in Berlin in 1903 at its heart, recalled 50 years on; other anecdotes mention Busoni as well. In the absence of other key sources, these constitute virtually all that is known on the subject.

The other four major anecdotes were written in 1953–1954. There is a 'Rough sketch of my mother's nature' (no. 86, 15 pages); 'The things I dislike', which begins 'Almost everything' (no. 87, 12 pages); the short, 'What is behind my music (a hasty account)' (no. 88, 2 pages), written on the way to the Mayo Clinic for surgery; and 'Why "my wretched tone-life"' (no. 89, 15 pages). Grainger biographer John Bird describes the latter three as containing '... the quintessence of his artistic and philosophical genius and madness cemented by his unique form of venom' (*Percy Grainger*, Sydney, 1999, p. 287).

There is indeed venom in these anecdotes, but there is an abundance of affection too, and moments of great charm; I enjoyed 'Mother learned hair-cutting in Norway', for example, and 'Mother shopping at Peter Jones's' (nos 64 & 78). There is also the quirkiness we associate with Grainger, in for example the brief, 'Rich people's hot water is never hot' (no. 93).

It is with the quirky that the collection concludes: 'The English are fickle friends, tho never vicious in their fickleness' (no. 102). This is a ramble about Grainger's friends of long-standing: Cyril Scott (who 'always seems relieved when he hears one is going to catch an early train'), the late Balfour Gardiner and Frederic Austin. Warm words about the latter close the collection: 'He couldn't have been nicer, or "younger" in spirit'.

Dr Jennifer Hill, Curatorial Assistant
Grainger Collection

Grainger in Frankfurt, 1895–1901



Percy Grainger, Bicycle Belonging to Artist, watercolour on paper, July 1897. Grainger Collection

In May 1895, George W.L. Marshall-Hall (first Ormond Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne) arranged a benefit concert to raise money for Percy Grainger to study music at the Hoch Conservatorium in Frankfurt, Germany. Armed with the concert proceeds of £50, Grainger and his mother Rose left Australia for Germany two weeks later.

In Frankfurt, Grainger encountered sharp criticism from

his appointed tutors James Kwast, who instructed him in the piano, and Ivan Knorr, who taught composition. Indeed, he became so estranged from the latter at one point that he refused to attend any further lessons with Knorr. Rose found a replacement in the person of Karl Klimsch, a lithographer-turned-musicologist whose kindly nature and energetic approach was to exert a great deal of influence over the young composer's musical ideas.

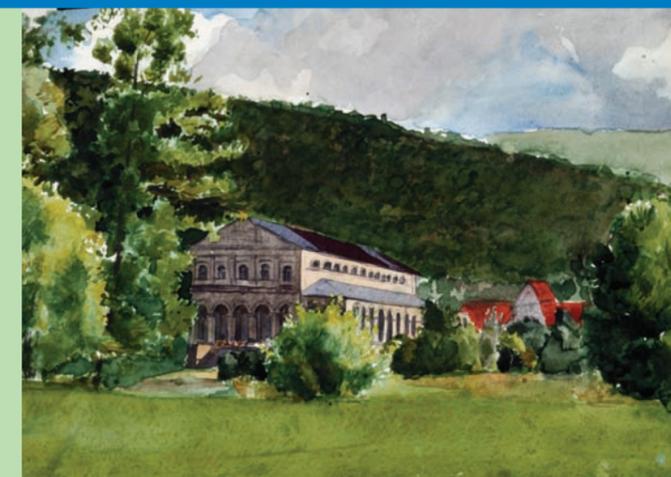
Grainger became acquainted

with a number of fellow students at the Conservatorium who have since become known as the 'Frankfurt Group'. As well as Grainger, the group included the British composers Roger Quilter, Cyril Scott, Balfour Gardiner and Norman O'Neill, and the Danish composer and cellist Herman Sandby. With the exception of O'Neill, Grainger was to remain lifelong friends with all the Frankfurt Group members.

Money was tight, but Rose bought herself and her son a

bicycle each, on which they explored the surrounding countryside. Grainger delighted in taking the opportunity during these expeditions to paint and sketch the beautiful old houses, castles and ruins which abounded in the region. His competence as a budding young artist is readily apparent in these works, many of which have survived and are now held in the Grainger Collection.

Astrid Britt Krautschneider
Assistant Curator
Grainger Collection



Percy Grainger, Kurhaus At Bad Bruckenau, Oberfranken, watercolour on paper, c.1898. Grainger Collection