I visited Melbourne in 2005, 2007 and 2008, and on this third visit, I was able to devote time to examining the Grainger Museum collection. I spent two weeks at the end of November and beginning of December taking almost 1000 photographs (493 to be precise, plus some duplicate(s) of primary source material relevant to Grainger’s concert activities in the 1930s and 1940s) and to his teaching activities at New York University in 1932–1933. It has been said many times that Grainger, like Wagner (and for many of the same reasons), was his own worst enemy. Grainger’s writings are an amalgam of the brilliant and the bizarre. In order to escape the power of his obsessions in my writings on Grainger and democracy I used little of ‘Democracy in Music’ (1913), and in my writings on Grainger and democracy I relied almost all on ‘Can Music Be Debunked?’ (1941). It is not that these are not interesting and relevant sources. They are. But that doesn’t mean we must accept what they say at face value. In short, while almost 1000 pages of documents relating to my current research activities seems like a lot, it’s the unguarded and private motivations behind these documents that will ultimately prove most illuminating.

Grainger’s life and art were—again, as many have asked before me—confusing, contradictory, and conundrums, not least of which was the care beyond the grave) came to light in the course of research. Grainger’s recital in San Francisco on 27 September 1942, that involved commentary by music critic Olaf Downes, elicited more than 24 pages of correspondence from Grainger to Downes, some of it incredibly detailed, beginning with program suggestions and ending with an invitation to the event. Grainger met his match in Downes, who responded with more than 15 pages of his own. When all was said and done, a single event generated more than 60 pages of correspondence, involving the principal players as well as publishers, potential representatives, and venue management and staff.

Grainger’s New York University teaching is another case in point. In conjunction with his duties during the 1932–1933 academic year, the Grainger Museum houses a 45-page typed summary of lectures, two complete typed lectures, some handwritten notes, and a great deal of correspondence, including 67 typed pages of ‘Thoughts to the Dean’ written at the end of the semester. Grainger’s activities for the Summer Session of the NYU School of Education in 1933 are documented in a 30-page scrapbook, plus miscellaneous notes and jottings. Although he may have found the role of the learned professor, like that of the licensed pianist, a bit of a stretch, he was incapable in his preparation and documentation.

Teaching activities, Grainger’s teaching at NYU in 1932–1933 and his collaboration with Olaf Downes in 1942, are two of several major Grainger projects with which I am currently occupied. My 2008 research trip was planned to coincide with the Musicales Society of Australia’s conference, at which I presented ‘Percy Grainger: Another ninetooop like Sir Thomas Beecham?’ On a December. I will advise House readers when this article, which concerns Grainger’s role as performer of other people’s music, appears in print.

Dr Glen Carruthers
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Lomas met Charles Seeger and Henry Cowell around 1933. Grainger wrote to both Seeger and Cowell at The New School for Social Research at that time. Cowell was enthusiastic about Grainger’s suggestion that ‘something that was well outside his comfort zone.

Grainger Museum Redevelopment Project Update

E ver since the fencing went up around the Grainger Museum in January this year, I have made walking past the site special part of my daily routine. The conservation building works being undertaken are fascinating to watch. Seeing all this construction activity going on never fails to make me think about what it would have been like for Percy Grainger back when his museum was originally being completed in 1938 and how thrilling it must have been for him to watch the final bricks being laid.

As many of our readers will know, Grainger had taken an active part in the design of the building, working closely with architect John Gawler throughout all stages of its evolution. Unfortunately, almost immediately after the Grainger Museum was built, the onset of World War II put a stop to any further developments. And after the war was over, a number of circumstances conspired to prevent Grainger from making it back to Australia. It was not until 1955, 17 years later, that he finally saw his museum again. So much time had elapsed that Grainger had almost forgotten what it looked like. In any (some would say characteristically effusive letter, Grainger wrote to John Gawler on 22 October 1955:

... what a delight your building is to us, in every way. It is so truly lovely in design & in colour & seems to us much larger than we remembered it. In every respect it realizes all our hopes & meets all our practical needs. We were extremely lucky to have you as our architect for the museum & thus have every detail of its design so original & unusually & with such wonderful taste in all respects ... gracefully & admiringly yours, Percy Grainger.

In 2009, thanks to the wonders of modern technology, everyone with a computer can watch the progress of the Grainger Museum renovations online. The University’s Property and Campus Services division has created a building project webpage in order to keep Grainger Museum stakeholders and interested members of the public up-to-date on the planning, preparation for the exhibitions that will be installed in the Museum to coincide with the building’s public re-opening in early 2010. The project to design new exhibitions for the Grainger Museum is currently nearing the end of the conceptual development phase. Museum staff have been working closely with exhibition designer Lucy Bannyan (from the highly regarded exhibition design firm Bannyan Wood P/L) and are now finalising writing the basic narrative for each of the six new galleries, and have chosen the objects and documents with which to illustrate the storylines. It has been a challenge making these selections as the Museum’s collection consists of more than 100,000 items — so many of which have their own captivating story to tell.

The items not on display will be housed within our offline, climate-controlled storage facilities and remain accessible to researchers upon request. For the first time in the history of the Grainger Museum, therefore, visitors will be able to access the entire building and see in detail the unusual and innovative design that Grainger so unreservedly praised architect John Gawler for in 1935.

Grainger Museum
Redevelopment Project Update

Percy Grainger’s wife Ella working on the exhibits in the Grainger Museum during their 1925–1938 visit, photographer unknown. Grainger Museum

Perry House

In 1932-1933, Grainger met Charles Seeger and Henry Cowell around 1933. Grainger became such a close colleague of Lomax’s? Grainger corresponded for many years. In the 1930s she supplied him with the folk dance ‘Country Gardens’. Grainger corresponded for many years. In the 1930s she supplied him with the folk dance ‘Country Gardens’.
Duke Ellington in lecture notes from when he was an associate professor at New York University in 1932, when he invited Ellington and his orchestra on stage to musically illustrate aspects of his lecture. Bird even goes so far as to make what appears on first reading to be a slightly apoplectic statement: “To open the lecture Grainger jumped onto the stage and said, “The three greatest composers who ever lived are Bach, Delius and statement: ‘To open the lecture Grainger jumped onto the stage and said, “The three greatest composers who ever lived are Bach, Delius and
delighted to find that Duke Ellington and Percy Grainger, possibly taken in 1932 at New York University, photographer unknown, Grainger Museum.

References

Looking for Alan Lomax
The Grainger Museum contains many traces of Percy Lomax, preferably of the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Grainger donated generously to this Irishman’s life and career.

Personal library with handwritten dedications from the authors, correspondence, notes from his university teachings and invitations to write for publications. Many of the major figures in folkology collecting are represented in the Museum’s collections, including Lacy Broadwood, Cecil Sharp, Maud Karpeles, Natalie Curtis, Frances Densmore and Charles Seeger. However, anyone familiar with the field will notice at least one major omission—Alan Lomax.

Alan Lomax (1915–2002), along with his father John A. Lomax, began making field recordings in the 1930s throughout the American South and West. He went on to contribute thousands of recordings from the 1930s throughout the American South and West. He went on to contribute thousands of recordings from across the United States to the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress. It seems likely that Grainger and Lomax would have met or at least corresponded. However, a search of the collection came up empty handed.

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