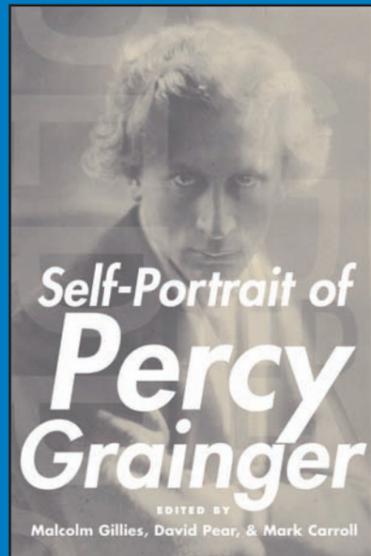


New Book: Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger



Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger was published in 2006 by Oxford University Press. Image courtesy of Oxford University Press

A great deal of myth surrounds Percy Grainger. Much of this has been sustained by a generous serving of Grainger's high opinion about himself. Indeed, Grainger was one of the first 20th century 'spin doctors'. The element of truth in such stores, however, is equally hard to ignore. It is tantalising, intriguing, confusing, amusing. Above all, it is challenging. Grainger's autobiographical writings present the reader with a completely unexpurgated version of the composer. It's not a pretty sight. In our neat 21st century world of categorisation, Grainger spills over into so many areas of accomplishment, character and trait that it is hard to identify with certainty exactly who he was, and what values he represented. Yet if you read enough of his autobiographical writings, you find revealed a vulnerable, insecure man who, while he manifested a host of contradictions and evaded every possible attempt to be categorised, nevertheless left a self-portrait which quickly becomes identifiable. Like the photograph characters depicted in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Grainger still seems to be waving at us from the past. I find it hard to imagine him dead, given the vitality of his opinions. How refreshing this is. And how refreshing it is to present this for the general public, the social historian, or the musicologist.

Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger, which was jointly edited by Malcolm Gillies, David Pear and Mark Carroll, has attempted to present a kaleidoscope of Grainger's autobiographical musings. Given the sheer volume of Grainger's writings, pruning had to take place, yet we hope that the selection isolated for publication provides an accurate representation of a very unusual man. Grainger would have sought honesty: anything less was anathema to him. Of course he 'tidied up', culled and edited his writings about himself. Not to have done so would surely have been impossible. He actively attempted, however, to minimise the damage such imposition might inflict on a genuine portrait of his beliefs and values. Whether he succeeded in the attempt or not is for today's reader to decide. Either way, his musings provide a wonderful mechanism through which we can view 1890s Australia and Germany, Edwardian England and the Belle Époque, and an America of the First World War, the Second World War, and the Cold War.

Dr David Pear, co-editor, *Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger*

The A.E.H. Nickson Collection

My research on Arthur E.H. Nickson (1876–1964) is based principally on his papers, which are housed at the Grainger Museum. After winning the Clarke Scholarship in 1895, he studied the organ at the Royal College of Music under Sir Walter Parratt until 1899, and returned to Melbourne after gaining the Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists in 1901. During his time in England Nickson experienced the musical renaissance and the Catholic Revival in the Church of England at their height; his embrace of Anglo-Catholicism and his engagement with Neoplatonism can be traced back to this period.

After a return visit to England in 1911, Nickson became an advocate for the organ music of Karg-Elert through recitals at St Peter's Eastern Hill — the leading Anglo-Catholic parish in Melbourne — where he was organist (1901–1916, 1928–1948). Nickson corresponded about his recitals with Karg-Elert both before and after World War I; this resulted in the dedication of a major work — *Seven Pastels from the Lake of Constance* (Op. 96), which Nickson played at St Paul's Cathedral in 1924.

My interest in Nickson was first kindled when I was the assistant organist at St Peter's (1998–2001). Colin Holden wrote a history of the parish in which Nickson's influence on the liturgical music was given some necessarily limited discussion, while Peter Tregear's centenary essay on the Conservatorium considered Nickson's influence there. The Nickson Papers showed that there was considerably more to Nickson than the



Sepia-toned postcard print of A.E.H. Nickson with his goddaughter, flautist Margaret Piesse in Hobart, 1940s. A.E.H. Nickson Collection

literature so far had revealed. In my thesis I focussed on the published essays, which constitute a distinctive group of writings that display Nickson's principal influences and preoccupations. His view of aesthetics presents an interesting synthesis of Neoplatonist creation narrative and Anglo-Catholic sacramental theology, and it is these ideas that form the central theme in his essays and lectures. Further work remains; the limits of my project meant that I was not able to examine Nickson's music criticism in *The Age*.

This collection includes an eclectic range of materials. Apart from personal and family documents, there is a representative sequence of lecture notes. Some correspondence survives, notably the letters from Karg-Elert to Nickson; very few of Nickson's own letters are preserved and in this area the collection is perplexingly incomplete. Nickson's essays survive mostly in their printed editions, and some scrapbooks contain some of his early newspaper writings, although his articles for *The Age* from his period as music critic (1928–1948) have not been collected in this way.

Ian Kieran Crichton

Ian Kieran Crichton completed his Master of Music thesis, *The Most Divine of All Arts: Neoplatonism, Anglo-Catholicism and Music in the Published Writings of A.E.H. Nickson*, at the Australian Catholic University in 2004.

A.E.H. Nickson's music, books, and personal papers were donated to the Grainger Museum by his family in the 1970s.

Hoard House

NEWS FROM THE GRAINGER COLLECTION

Facing Percy Grainger's Future

Afficionados of Percy Grainger have been richly rewarded recently with important events celebrating his great contribution to Australia's cultural heritage. On 6 July 2006 an exhibition titled *Facing Percy Grainger* opened at the National Library of Australia in Canberra. When this closed on 15 October some 20,000 people had viewed it,

making a most successful Library exhibition indeed. Curated by David Pear and Brian Allison, the displays of over 200 items were mostly treasures from the Grainger Collection at the University of Melbourne. Seeing favourite pieces in a new setting, however, was an extraordinary experience, both for the spaciousness in which the items were placed and for the relatively rare opportunity to view the collection with people who knew little of Grainger and his uniqueness. It was particularly pleasing to see the Panormo guitar, restored with funds from the Friends of the Grainger Museum, in a prominent position beside Grainger's soprano saxophone and the Hardanger fiddle.

On 12 August 2006 the folk music of Grainger was performed at a delightful concert broadcast live on ABC Classic FM from the Iwaki Auditorium in Melbourne. Titled 'A World Beyond Country Gardens', the concert featured the nine voice vocal ensemble e21 (four female, five male), directed by Stephen



Professor Warren Bebbington addresses a capacity crowd at the opening of Facing Percy Grainger. Photo courtesy of the National Library of Australia

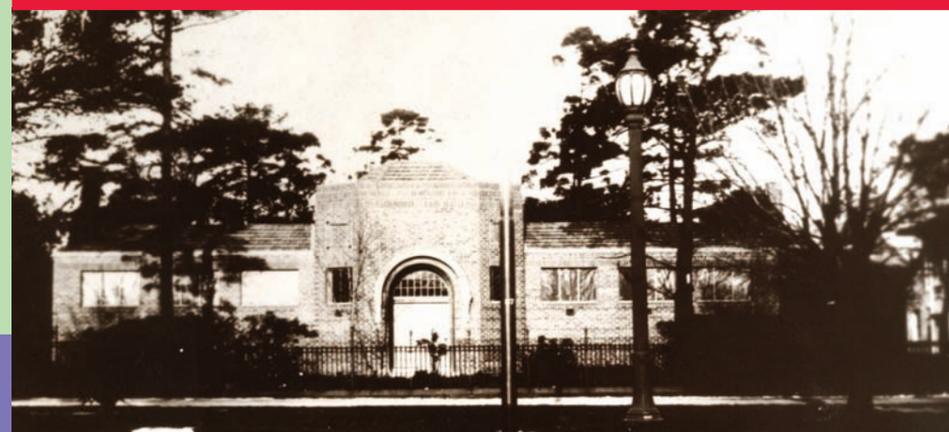
Wooden guitar, c.1800, featuring substantial 1830s-1840s modifications by the Panormo Workshop, London. Photo by Lee McRae

Grant, and the Grainger Ensemble, a 15 piece chamber orchestra formed by Glenn Riddle. Vincent Plush was the concert curator. A capacity audience heard Grainger's arrangements of folk music from Britain, Denmark, Russia, China, Africa, America and the Faeroe Islands, as well as sea-chanties including my favourite work of the night, 'Shallow Brown', 'for solo male voice and unison male chorus with room-music ensemble'. It was thrilling to hear over two hours of Grainger's arrangements sung and played so beautifully and to know that these sounds were being broadcast throughout Australia.

Of real excitement was the announcement in June by Pro-Vice Chancellor (University Relations), Professor Warren Bebbington, that the University was prepared to spend \$1.9 million refurbishing the Grainger Museum. All Friends will be heartened to know that the University is committed to restoring the building as a space envisaged by Grainger, a

commitment that hopefully will silence those who believe that the Museum is under threat. It should be pointed out that the refurbishment will take another two years, however by the end of 2008 at the latest, it is likely that the Museum will once again be a place that celebrates the life of Percy Grainger and his contemporaries, as well as a setting for performances and displays. To this end, the Friends of the Grainger Museum will shortly put into place a plan that will see it converted into a Members' group, one that will provide strong support for Grainger's legacy yet still represent his many admirers.

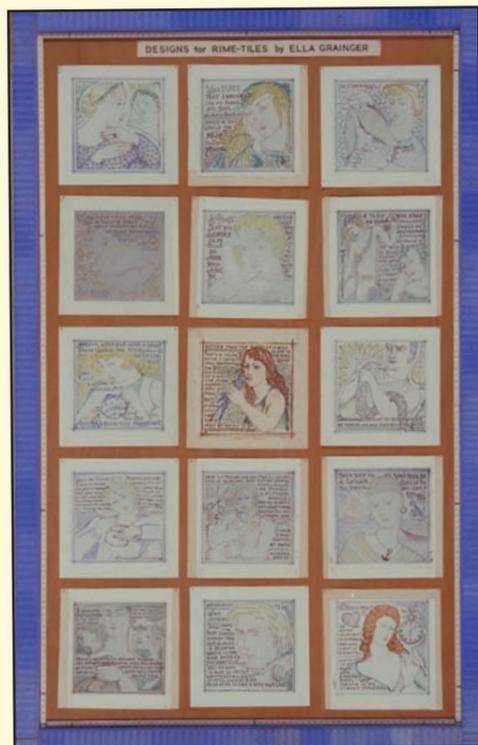
Dr Ros McMillan
President of the Friends
of the Grainger Museum



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



Grainger's Museum Legends on Composers



In 1941 Grainger wrote 'Most museums, most cultural endeavors, suffer from being subjected to TOO MUCH TASTE, TOO MUCH ELIMINATION, TOO MUCH SELECTION, TOO MUCH SPECIALISATION! What we want (in museums & cultural records) is ALL-SIDEDNESS, side-lights, cross-references' (letter to H. Balfour Gardiner, 7 June 1941). But despite his frequent claims to 'universal' values, and the all-inclusiveness of his collection, Grainger in his Museum Legends, a series of 58 display panels with texts, pictures and small objects, created mostly in 1938 and 1955–1956, attempted to shape and control his narrative legacy. He restricted and interpreted the Museum's public face, focussing on his maternal family inheritance, childhood cultural influences, the Frankfurt Group, Grieg and Delius, blue-eyed

composers, Arnold Dolmetsch, and folk-song collecting. Many significant elements and people from Grainger's life are omitted altogether or mentioned only in passing: his work as a pianist, conductor and teacher; the move to America and taking out American citizenship; army service and other wartime activities; politics; religion; sexuality, physical culture and vegetarianism; his sweetheart Karen Holten or any romantic relationships other than his wife Ella (and this is only touched upon obliquely); his parents' marital breakdown and the real causes of their illness and death.

Even within the series of Legends dealing with individual composers, Grainger's interpretation of history was far narrower than was his collecting activity. Grainger described the main intent of his Museum as 'throwing light upon the processes of musical composition (as distinct from

performances) during the period in which Australia has been prominent in music — say from about 1880 on'. But he focusses on the Frankfurt Group, Grieg and Delius, and a group of 12 British composers who had relatively little influence on him. No Australian composer other than himself is the subject of a Legend. (G.W.L. Marshall-Hall is discussed in passing but as a conductor and patron rather than as a composer). Nor is there a Legend dedicated to any Dutch, American or Canadian composer, even though these fell within Grainger's favoured 'Nordic' group. Ultimately, through his Legends Grainger presented himself as not only the first Australian composer, but the only Australian composer. Even Australians whom he admired and whose scores he acquired, such as his student Katharine 'Kitty' Parker whom he described elsewhere as 'one of Australia's most gifted and inspired composers', and Alec Burnard whom he had called 'the 1st real Australian tonebirther after me — many tangled as I', and whom he had considered appointing as Museum curator, have no Legend.

In 1960, in writing to the University Architect about enlarging the Museum building, Grainger acknowledged that 'There are already several Australian composers whose music is known and prized all over the musical world — men such as [John] Antill & Arthur Benjamin. In my opinion their works should be accessible to Australian music students & music-lovers'. If the proposed second storey had eventuated and Grainger had lived beyond 79 years he may have made Legends on these and other Australian composers, and he certainly did collect their scores for his collection, but I think it is significant of his intentions that he omitted them both in 1938 and 1955–1956. Despite his desire to be remembered as an Australian composer, Grainger saw himself as having achieved his greatness as the inheritor of a European musical tradition, to which he was exposed at its source, and which he subsequently influenced through his own compositional innovations. The parallel history of Australian composition was of relatively little interest to him.

Dr Belinda Nemeč
Cultural Collections Co-ordinator

For full documentation of Grainger's 58 Museum Legends see Belinda Nemeč, *The Grainger Museum in its Museological and Historical Contexts*, PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2006, Appendix.

Celebrities Shooting Celebrities



Ernest Walter Histed, Lilith Lowrey, silver gelatin print, London, n.d.



Henry Walter Barnett, Margot Harrison, platinotype print, London, 1913.

Recent research into a photograph of Percy Grainger's first lover, Lilith Lowrey, has brought attention to the richness and breadth of the photographic collection Grainger amassed throughout his lifetime. It has also highlighted a particular subsection within the collection — sophisticated studio photographs of celebrities by 'society' photographers.

The studio portrait of Lowrey by London society photographer, Ernest Walter Histed (1862–1947), is a beautifully crafted example of its type. Formally posed, the sitter is lit with flattering diffuse lighting. The background is devoid of detail, focussing the viewer's attention on the subject's almost sculptural profile and the diaphanous material of her dress. The print (and/or negative) has been subtly retouched including the bleaching of skin-tone highlights on nose-bridge, cheekbones, chin and forehead, giving the sitter's skin a milky marble smoothness.

By the Edwardian era, camera lens technology and increased film speeds meant that the subject of a portrait did not have to endure the multiple second exposures common throughout most of the Victorian era. This had required the use of body clamps to keep the sitter rigid and therefore the image sharp. By the late-19th century, it became very fashionable for the moneyed classes to have formal portraits made by well-recognised studios which were then circulated among their families, friends and admirers.

As a performer, Grainger recognised the power of image in the activity of self promotion. He also recognised that the signature or studio logo of a fashionable photographer added a certain cachet. Of the approximately 15,000 photographs in the Grainger Collection, some of the most arresting portraits were taken in the

same decade as the Lowrey portrait, by art photographer Baron Adolph Edward Sigismund de Meyer (1868–1949). Considered to be the world's first fashion photographer, de Meyer was one of the most sought after photographers of the Edwardian 'glitteratti'.

Grainger was probably introduced to de Meyer by French society portrait painter Jacques-Emile Blanche around 1902–1903 and the two men became friends. Baron de Meyer produced very elegant promotional photographs of Grainger as well as a series of quite intimate — almost adoring — soft-focus portraits in the then current Pictorialist Style.

Commissioning a society photographer was an expensive undertaking. When Grainger's lover Margot Harrison ordered a photograph of herself by Australian photographer H. Walter Barnett (1862–1934) as a gift in 1913, she acquired a very expensive present.

Despite humble beginnings alongside a youthful Tom Roberts (the Heidelberg school painter) in the studio of Stewart & Co. in Melbourne, Barnett combined a brilliant business mind with an extraordinarily gifted photographic eye, to become one of the most fashionable society portraitists in Melbourne, New York and London respectively.

Jack Cato (who worked for Barnett) records in his book *The Story of the Camera in Australia*, that in 1909, a single portrait sitting with Barnett cost £37. This was at a time when the average weekly working-class wage in Australia would have been a little over £3.

Other celebrated photographers represented in the Grainger Collection include Gertrude Käsebier, Count Jean de Strelecki, Arnold Genthe, Mina Moore and Aimé Dupont.

Brian Allison
Curator, Exhibitions and Partnerships