

# News from the collections

## Cultural Treasures Festival

Susie Shears

The third biennial University of Melbourne Cultural Treasures Festival was held on 28–29 July 2012. This is the major event on the cultural collections calendar and it is well supported across the university. The chief purpose of the festival is to showcase the university's outstanding array of museums and collections to new audiences including the wider Melbourne community, prospective students and potential supporters. This year the festival dovetailed with two other important events on campus: Open House Melbourne and the 39th ANZAAB Rare Book Fair. Approximately 3,000 visitors participated in the program.

University Hall in the Old Quadrangle was the hub for the weekend. Its location at the historic core of the university, its capacity to hold more than 200 guests at the



launch on the evening of 27 July, its practicality as information centre and starting point for guided tours, and its proximity to Wilson Hall's Rare Book Fair, ensured that it was a superb venue. The 2010 exhibition *Wilson Hall: Centre and symbol of the university* was also reprised at University Hall.

The Cultural Treasures Festival offered the opportunity to view material from 16 cultural collections, visit 12 exhibitions, participate in 46 guided tours and attend 11 lectures, curators' talks and workshops. The Dax Centre at the Kenneth Myer Building provided an additional destination in the program of guided tours of medical collections.

Tours led by subject experts, mostly academics, were a popular element throughout the weekend. Each lasted one hour and started and finished at University Hall. The curators of two library-based exhibitions, Professor Wallace Kirsop and Kerriane Stone, presented floor talks, and Helen McLaughlin and Katie Wood spoke about the University of Melbourne Archives collections, including some genealogical gems. Trisha Downing presented workshops on how to make herbarium specimens, while staff and students of the art history program in the School of Culture and



Communication delivered a series of six lectures on aspects of the cultural collections. These presentations, with others given over the weekend, are to be published in the refereed journal *Cultural Treasures Festival Papers*, vol. 1.

## Emeritus Professor Henry F. Atkinson MBE

For some people, retirement is not an option they ever really consider. Although retiring officially in 1978, Emeritus Professor Henry Forman Atkinson has since maintained a close association with the Melbourne Dental School—as honorary museum curator—and with the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne—as honorary historian.

In August this year Professor Atkinson reached a remarkable milestone by celebrating his 100th birthday.

**Previous page lower left:** Guests gathered in University Hall for the launch of the Cultural Treasures Festival and the 39th ANZAAB Rare Book Fair on the evening of Friday 27 July 2012. Photograph by Daryl Snowdon.

**Previous page:** Visitors enjoying a tour of the University of Melbourne Herbarium during the Cultural Treasures Festival. Photograph by Daryl Snowdon.

**Right:** Professor Emeritus Henry F. Atkinson MBE at a celebration for his 100th birthday, held at the Melbourne Dental School. Photograph by Chris Owen.



Originally from Lancashire, Henry Atkinson held teaching and research positions at the University of Manchester, as well as various hospital appointments. In World War II he served as an oral surgeon with the British Army in England, north Africa and Italy, where he was awarded an MBE. With his family, he arrived in Australia in 1953 to take up the chair of dental prosthetics at the University of Melbourne. He worked in the departments of biochemistry and physiology, was appointed lecturer in histology and embryology, was a member of the Dental Faculty, College Council, Dental Hospital Committee of Management, Professorial Board and the university's Research Committee, and was for some years Dean of Dentistry.

While teaching at the Australian College of Dentistry, Professor Atkinson developed an enduring interest in the school's museum, which he discovered dated back to the founding of the earliest dental society in Victoria. Upon his retirement he began cataloguing the collection and researching and writing about the history of dentistry in Australia. For over 30 years now he has worked at the museum each week, giving generously of his time to support all its activities. His knowledge of the history of dentistry has brought

him radio and television exposure, where he presents in an easy yet authoritative style, as a historian who has a passion for explaining how dentistry has evolved in the context of broader changes in Australian society. In 2006 the then School of Dental Science officially recognised Professor Atkinson's contribution by naming the dental museum of the University of Melbourne the Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum.

'Atki', as he is affectionately known by the dental fraternity, has been a great mentor to generations of graduates and dental academics; he continues to hold a special place in the hearts and minds of all who know him.

### **Percy Grainger's early years**

Dr David Pear, London-based musicologist and Grainger scholar, has been awarded the 2012 Redmond Barry Fellowship. This is jointly funded by the University of Melbourne and the State Library of Victoria and supports research using the collections of both institutions. Dr Pear's project is to explore the cultural milieu of Melbourne in which Percy Grainger (1882–1961) grew up. In describing his research, he says:

In the early 1900s, Australian artists and musicians had a tendency to flit between one

hemisphere and the other, between the Old World and the New. Torn between the desire for creature comforts and the yearning for adventure, they were often unable to choose between what they perceived as the narrow, culture-starved, glorified country-town of their upbringing (wherever in Australia that might have been) and the enticing mirage of a progressive, spontaneous, creative and anything-is-possible Europe. While nearly all such individuals identified strongly with Australia, they also harboured an unreconciled relationship with that nation. It might have been 'home', but it wasn't 'Home'.

My research will consider the formative years of Percy Grainger, scrutinising the character traits that he believed marked him specifically as an Australian, despite the British passport he carried and the American one he was later to adopt. It will also question the assumption that 1890s Australia—and Melbourne in particular—was the cultural backwater that drove the culture-seeker overseas in the first place. Myriad cultural activities were springing up around Melbourne and Victoria. Along with diverse visiting artistic groups (a significant number of which left



J. Douglas Hicks, *Old Wilson Hall fire*, University of Melbourne, 25 January 1952, 35 mm Kodachrome colour transparency. UMA/I/1877, accession no. 1993.0058, University of Melbourne Archives. Dr Hicks took this photograph from the roof of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute.

members behind on their return home), the tradition to make music yourself and with family and friends was not merely a social grace, but almost a necessary courtesy to share with your guests, no less than the tea, coffee or sherry that accompanied it.

So, although it constituted a frontier society in many ways, the colonial gem of Melbourne possibly exhibited more hands-on cultural participation than its imperial capital, where such activities were already severely professional, or increasingly private.

### *Architectural ornament*

Wilson Hall has been an integral part of the University of Melbourne landscape since the first building to bear this name was completed in 1882. Made possible through a generous donation by wealthy pastoralist Samuel Wilson, the original hall was designed in the perpendicular Gothic-revival style by architectural firm Reed & Barnes. When the hall was badly damaged by fire in 1952 the university community was polarised by the debate over whether to restore or build anew. Eventually the university succumbed to financial realities, and the Gothic splendour of the original hall gave

way to the modernist 1950s building that we know today.

The story of the hall, from its conception in the 1850s to its replacement in the 1950s, has been chronicled in a richly illustrated publication written by Jason Benjamin and Emily Wubben and launched during the university's Cultural Treasures Festival in July 2012. Titled *Architectural ornament: The history and art of Wilson Hall at the University of Melbourne*, this book explores the history and art associated with the hall through a wealth of photographs, artworks, archival records and objects in the university's cultural collections.

Inspired by the exhibition *Wilson Hall: Centre and symbol of the university*, curated by the authors in 2010 and re-staged in July 2012, *Architectural ornament* highlights the numerous artworks held by the university that were either inspired by, or have adorned, the building. Works by artists such as Victor Cobb, Napier Waller, Wolfgang Sievers, Douglas Annand and Tom Bass are illustrated in this exploration of the grandeur, beauty and significance of the two buildings.

*Architectural ornament* is available from the Co-op Bookshop at the University of Melbourne and Reader's Feast Bookstore at 162 Collins Street.

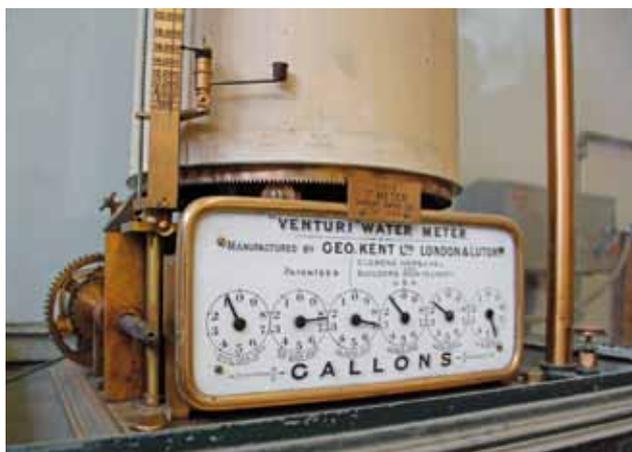
### *Treasures revealed* mobile app

Donna McRostie



The University of Melbourne Library has released *Treasures revealed*, its first app (application for use on portable devices such as the iPhone, iPad and Android phones and tablets). This makes it possible for anybody possessing one of these devices to 'visit' our collections from anywhere in the world. The app gives a tantalising taste of the diverse range of treasures that are held in the university's cultural collections.

Items have been hand-picked from the library's Special Collections, Grainger Museum and University of Melbourne Archives, providing the opportunity for interaction with these treasures at home, on the move or within the library itself. Each is presented through high-resolution images, allowing the viewer to zoom in and explore in extraordinary detail. Alongside these images, the app includes a sound recording and short video, all WiFi-enabled.



Venturi water meter, made by George Kent Ltd of London and Luton, early 20th century (detail). Melbourne School of Engineering. Photograph by Jenny Smith. The meter measures water flow-rate by using the Venturi effect: the change in pressure that occurs in a fluid when it flows from a larger-diameter pipe into a smaller-diameter pipe. This type of meter was invented by Clemens Herschel in around 1887. George Kent Ltd began making water meters in 1893.

The current version of the app showcases a number of collections including Australiana (convicts, gold-miners, 1854 Melbourne directory); rare books (a leaf from the Gutenberg Bible, book of hours, Middle Eastern manuscripts); Baillieu Library Print Collection (etchings and engravings by Callot, Piranesi, Hogarth, Goya and Lionel Lindsay); University of Melbourne Archives (Frank Macfarlane Burnet's hiking diary, John Henry Austral audio recordings, 'Catching Ned Kelly'); Grainger Museum (towelling clothing, museum sketches, kangaroo-pouch machine) and much more. The library plans to develop *Treasures revealed* in the future with further enhancements and regular content updates.

The *Treasures revealed* app is available globally for free download on iPhone and iPad at the iTunes App Store and for Android devices at the Google Play Store. More information can be found at <http://bit.ly/wp6IRA>.

## Engineering collections

Jenny Smith

The Melbourne School of Engineering is undertaking an audit of its cultural collections, following on from work done in 2011, the 150th year of engineering at the University

of Melbourne. The collections are valued for teaching as well as for their historical significance, the intellectual endeavour that they embody, and in many cases their beauty.

The School of Engineering houses several of the university's 30 cultural collections: the Electrical Engineering Education Collection, Surveying and Geomatic Engineering Collection, A.G.M. Michell Collection and the Venturi water meter associated with the Michell Hydraulics Laboratory. Besides these, it has several collections and individual items that also form an important part of the material history of the school and the history of engineering in Australia.

Associate Professor Peter Thorne and the computer science history team, including several members of the original group who worked on CSIRAC (Australia's first digital computer, and the world's oldest surviving first-generation electronic computer, now donated to Museum Victoria), have catalogued more than 700 pieces of computer equipment, media, hardware, software, photographs and literature, all recording the development of computing since the 1950s. Model hulls of yachts in the Department of Mechanical Engineering document the development of yacht designs by Professor Emeritus Peter Joubert.<sup>1</sup>

That department also houses several measuring devices of international importance. A rheogoniometer in the Chemical Engineering Department was used to classify complex fluids from the mid-1980s. Like many of the artefacts in the already documented collections, these ancillary items are examples of the aesthetic beauty of high-precision instruments.

Textbooks belonging to some of the first professors, a large collection of student magazines documenting the lively tradition of student clubs and societies, films and photographs, and continuing collections of theses, round out the engineering-related holdings of the university. Much exciting work remains to be done on all these collections. The Melbourne School of Engineering is unanimously proud of this invaluable resource for students of both history and engineering.

Thanks are due to all of those current and former students and staff who are taking an active role in auditing, documenting and preserving the collections. The school also thanks the Cultural Collections Unit and University of Melbourne Archives for their generous support and advice.

<sup>1</sup> Greta Harrison, 'Peter Joubert looks back', *The Melbourne Engineer*, 30 May 2012, <http://themelbourneengineer.eng.unimelb.edu.au/2011/05/peter-joubert-looks-back/>, accessed 20 August 2012.