

**'I am hungry for fame-after-death':  
Percy Grainger's quest for immortality through his museum\*  
Belinda Nemec**

**Abstract**

This paper examines the autobiographical museum established in the 1930s at the University of Melbourne by the Australian-born composer, pianist, folklorist and educator Percy Aldridge Grainger (1882–1961). The suicide in 1922 of his mother, Rose, served as the catalyst to Grainger's museum project. The paper discusses his attempts to create a museum that would both serve as a memorial to Rose and position Grainger himself for posterity as Australia's greatest composer. Grainger's attitudes to death, the past, nostalgia, memory and relics, as manifested through his museum collection, are explored.

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\* First published: *reCollections: Journal of the National Museum of Australia*. Vol. 2, no. 2 (September 2007). URL: [http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol\\_2\\_no2/papers/i\\_am\\_hungry\\_for\\_fame\\_after\\_death/](http://recollections.nma.gov.au/issues/vol_2_no2/papers/i_am_hungry_for_fame_after_death/). Reprinted with permission.

## Introduction

In the early 1930s the Melbourne-born, American resident composer, pianist, folklorist, educator and self-described 'all-round man', Percy Aldridge Grainger,<sup>1</sup> came to an agreement with the University of Melbourne. The university would provide a small parcel of land on its campus to accommodate an autobiographical Grainger Museum, while Grainger would pay for the museum's design, construction, contents and upkeep. Although Grainger never studied at the University of Melbourne, he wanted his museum to be located in the city of his birth. By the 1930s he was internationally renowned as a pianist, composer, educator, and collector of folk music, so the university probably felt that the association would bring it merit. Further, the university was not wealthy, so was no doubt pleased at the prospect of obtaining this cultural resource for little to no financial outlay.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The standard biography is John Bird, *Percy Grainger*, 3rd edition, Currency Press, Sydney, 1999. See also Kay Dreyfus, 'Grainger, George Percy (1882–1961)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 9, Melbourne University Press, 1983, pp. 69–72, available online at [www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090072b.htm?hilite=grainger](http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090072b.htm?hilite=grainger).

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, the Grainger Museum building is closed for conservation and repair works. These have been funded by the University with an anticipated re-opening date of late 2008. The collection is however available for researchers, and a major exhibition, *Facing Percy Grainger*, based largely on the collection, was held at the National Library of Australia in 2006. The website of the Grainger Museum is [www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/grainger](http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/grainger).



Percy Grainger, 1926

silver gelatin print, one of a series of promotional images for ABC Radio 3LO taken by  
Ruskin Studios during Grainger's 1926 tour of Australia and New Zealand  
Grainger Museum, the University of Melbourne

Design and construction of the museum took place in two phases: 1934–35 and 1938–39.<sup>3</sup> Numerous consignments of collection material were shipped over many years from Grainger's home in White Plains, New York, and from colleagues, family and friends. Grainger set up some of the displays in 1938 prior to an official inauguration in December of that year. He appointed curators Dorothy Nicholson Fowler (officially) and her husband Richard Hindle Fowler (unofficially), who carried out Grainger's instructions for

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<sup>3</sup> On the design and construction of the museum see George Tibbits, 'Building the Grainger Museum', in Kate Darian-Smith & Alessandro Servadei (eds), *Talking Grainger: Perspectives on the Life, Music and Legacy of Percy Grainger*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1998, pp. 45–70.

cataloguing, arrangement and preservation. Grainger and his wife Ella worked intensely on the exhibits during their last visit together to Australia in 1955–56.<sup>4</sup>

Grainger's stated aim for his museum was to illuminate the processes of musical composition (as opposed to performance) from about 1880 onwards, a period in which Grainger asserted that Australia had been prominent in music.<sup>5</sup> As this date appears to have been chosen for its proximity to Grainger's own birth, rather than to any other event in Australian musical history, this indicates both an autobiographical and a nationalistic agenda for the museum.

Although Grainger was obliged by the university administration to open the museum to the public, he was largely uninterested in attracting an audience of his contemporaries. He told Richard Fowler

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<sup>4</sup> See Helen Milton Reeves, 'The past-ward-house: A study of the Grainger Museum', unpublished thesis for Graduate Diploma in Material Culture, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1984, and Richard Hindle Fowler, 'The Grainger Museum: The first phase', typescript prepared at the request of the Grainger Museum Board, December 1967, in Grainger Museum Board, minutes 1967–74, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>5</sup> Percy Grainger (henceforth PG), 'The aims of the Grainger Museum', 'Museum legend' [museum wall panel text], October 1955, collection of the Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne (henceforth GMC), reg. no. 04.0351. All archival sources referred to are from this collection, unless otherwise stated. Bay and box numbers cited are those attached to the document boxes and are still in use despite the relocation of the archival collection from the Grainger Museum building into the Baillieu Library. My thanks go to the Grainger Museum staff, particularly the acting curator, Astrid Britt Krautschneider, for assistance in accessing the collection. Some quotations from Grainger's writings use examples of his invented form of 'Blue-eyed' English. The 'translations' of these terms were provided by Grainger himself, usually in the double parentheses used here. All emphases, anachronisms and misspellings are from Grainger's original texts.

that he 'did not care if it was not opened to the public for 100 years ... the museum was created for preservation of precious things for the scholars of the more distant future'.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this apparent reticence, Grainger intended both a didactic and a memorial purpose for the museum, arguing that:

the public should *never* be 'left to its own resources', but should be consistently treated to propaganda & admonishment likely to lead or frighten it into an acceptance of 'higher values'.<sup>7</sup>

Grainger wanted to leave an educational and memorial legacy, but his eye was on the *distant* future. That is, he was concerned with the generations (particularly of Australians) to follow after his death. In this paper I argue that this concern with mortality/immortality was a preoccupation of Grainger's from a relatively young age, is evidenced through his collecting generally and later more specifically through his museum project, and relates to the themes of many of Grainger's musical works. I contend that his museum plans, triggered by a bereavement,<sup>8</sup> were closely intertwined with matters of death, legacy and the preservation of truth in perpetuity. Although the content of Grainger's collection ranges widely, encompassing most aspects of his family history; personal and sexual life; musical education and

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<sup>6</sup> Fowler, 'The Grainger Museum'.

<sup>7</sup> PG, letter to Richard Hindle Fowler, 21 September 1946, GMC, folder 01.1095, bay 2, box 74.

<sup>8</sup> I agree with architectural historian George Tibbits, who states: 'It was the death in 1922 of Grainger's mother, Rose, which seems to have sparked the idea of a museum'. Tibbits, 'Building the Grainger Museum', p. 45.

career; linguistic, folkloric, literary and artistic tastes and pursuits; preoccupation with health, nutrition and fitness; the careers and achievements of fellow composers and rivals; racial hierarchies and nationalistic ambitions (topics too numerous to discuss in this paper), all came to be housed for generations to come in a permanent memorial that reflected a longer social tradition of collecting, preserving, nostalgia, and relic-making.

### **The death of Rose Grainger**

Collecting and preserving were significant in giving meaning to Grainger's life and to his sense of personal, artistic, racial and national identity. To Grainger, 'art & things are unsunderably twined together'.<sup>9</sup> Grainger claimed that from age 15 or 16 he had collected manuscripts, letters, photographs, clothes and other objects that shed light upon the personalities and working methods of the most gifted men of his racial group.<sup>10</sup> And from early in the twentieth century he saw significant *Australian* cultural innovation and leadership immediately ahead, indeed already happening, and himself at the vanguard. He considered this history worthy of preservation in a museum, and wasted no time in taking steps to preserve its physical evidence. In 1908, aged 26, he wrote to his Danish girlfriend Karen Holten:

So the little sweetie thinks she can take all my extremely interesting letters to the grave with her, if she dies. My letters shall be admired

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<sup>9</sup> PG, 'The Aldridge-Grainger-Ström saga', unpublished ms, September 1933 – January 1934, p. 65 (22 October 1933), GMC, bay 4, box 5.

<sup>10</sup> PG, letter to Percy Spender [Australian Ambassador to USA], 5 February 1953, GMC, bay 1, box 34. See also PG, 'The aims of the Grainger Museum'.

by a yet unborn generation; can't you see that I always write with an eye to a possible public? ... I always hope that my letters will be handed over to immortality one day.<sup>11</sup>

He was also concerned with preservation of his material and musical heritage at times of crisis such as war. For example, in 1918, upon learning that his American Army division might be sent to France, Grainger made Duo-Art reproducing piano roll recordings of 22 compositions,<sup>12</sup> to ensure that evidence of his musical greatness would survive him. By 1910 Grainger and his mother were referring to his collection of musical instruments and ethnographic items from various parts of the globe as his 'museum'.<sup>13</sup> This was a fairly typical type of domestic display for Grainger's time and social class.<sup>14</sup> It did not yet have the distinctive features of the Grainger Museum: an explicitly autobiographical and memorial objective; a building conceived, designed, built and fitted-out solely for the purpose; a professional staff; an academic setting; numbering, cataloguing and

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<sup>11</sup> PG, letter to Karen Holten, 12 February 1908, published in Kay Dreyfus (ed.), *The Farthest North of Humanness: Letters of Percy Grainger 1901-14*, Macmillan, South Melbourne and Crows Nest, pp. 187-8.

<sup>12</sup> PG, *Two Musical Relics of My Mother: 'Hermundur Illi' and 'As Sally Sat A-Weeping', Two Pianos, Four Hands*, Schirmer, New York, 1924, program note, n.p.

<sup>13</sup> PG, letter to Rose Grainger, 7 February 1910, quoted in Eric Charles Thacker, 'George Percy Grainger (1882-1961), professionally known as Percy Aldridge Grainger: A biographical estimate', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1970, 'Conclusions' p. 49; Rose Grainger, letter to PG, 20 January 1914, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>14</sup> See for example CA Montresor, *Some Hobby Horses and How to Ride Them*, WH Allen & Co., London, 1888, which encouraged young people to form a 'museum' in their home.

filing systems; and displays created for eventual public consumption and education.

Grainger's parents had also been collectors, although of a less nationalistic stamp than their son. His father John H Grainger (1855–1917), an architect and civil engineer, was a keen compiler of architectural and pictorial scrapbooks, both for his own professional reference and as gifts for family and friends. This practice of compiling and annotating scrapbooks was referred to in the family as 'Graingerising'.<sup>15</sup>

Grainger's mother Rose (née Aldridge, 1861–1922) retained Percy's belongings from his babyhood onwards, treasuring every early manifestation of her son's 'genius' such as his childhood drawings and letters. Rose also acquired fine and applied artworks, such as old furniture, Arts-and-Crafts metalwork, Meissen porcelain monkey orchestra figurines, Ottoman ceramics, japonaiserie, textiles, and African, Pacific and Native American beadwork and shellwork.<sup>16</sup> Percy shared many of these enthusiasms, the two happily entering into the

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<sup>15</sup> PG, 'John H. Grainger', *Museum Legend*, 15 March 1956, GMC, reg. no. 04.0330. 'Graingerising' is no doubt a play on the term 'Grangerising', meaning the extra-illustration of books, a popular practice between the 1790s and 1860s, of gluing related documents, prints, watercolours, portraits and other material into the pages of a published book, and named after James Granger (1723–76), an English clergyman and print collector whose publication *Biographical History of England* (1769) triggered this practice of extra-illustration.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Allison, *The Accidental Wunderkammer: Decorative Arts and Curiosities from the Grainger Collection*, exhibition catalogue, Grainger Museum, Melbourne, 2002; PG, *Photos of Rose Grainger and of 3 Short Accounts of her Life by Herself, in her own Handwriting, Reproduced for her Kin and Friends by her Adoring Son Percy Grainger, Also Table of Dates and Summary of Cultural Tastes*, The Author, Frankfurt, 1923, p. 6.

spirit of discovery of new styles encountered in their travels. After Rose's death Percy preserved such items both for their influence on his own artistic taste and as part of his mother's legacy.

Grainger had therefore been an enthusiastic collector since at least his teens, and had been consciously concerned with preservation for posterity since his twenties. But the catalyst to the establishment of the Grainger Museum occurred when he was nearly 40 years of age. This was the most tragic loss to occur in his life: the death of his mother. On Sunday 30 April 1922, Rose Grainger committed suicide by jumping from a high window in the New York City office building of Grainger's concert manager. Percy was away on tour in California at the time, and Rose had been anxious and physically debilitated for some months. For decades she had suffered from syphilis, contracted from her husband soon after Percy's birth. During the last year of her life Rose's physical and mental condition had deteriorated and she dreaded losing her independence and becoming a burden.<sup>17</sup> During Percy's absence in 1922 her distress was brought to a crisis by the circulation of rumours among some women friends that Percy and Rose's relationship was incestuous.<sup>18</sup>

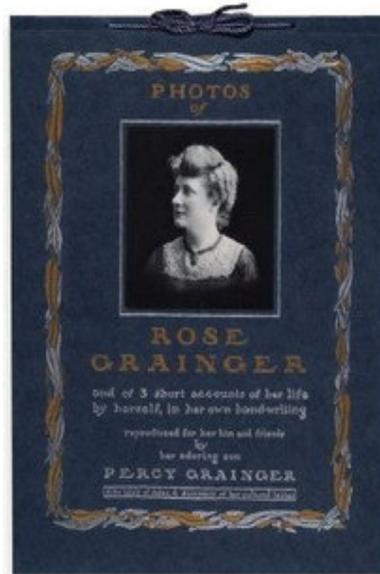
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<sup>17</sup> See PG, 'Mother's possible reasons for suicide', from PG, 'Bird's-eye view of the together-life of Rose Grainger and Percy Grainger', 1947, in Malcolm Gillies, David Pear & Mark Carroll (eds), *Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 2006, p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> For Grainger's account of this rumour-spreading, see PG, 'A rough sketch of my mother's nature', extracts from 'Grainger's anecdotes' dated 12 and 19 May 1954, in Gillies, Pear & Carroll (eds), *Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger*, pp. 55-6, note 106. See also PG, 'Mother championed the "under dogs" amongst her friends', in the same volume, pp. 75-6.

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*Photos of Rose Grainger and of 3 Short Accounts of her Life by Herself, in her Own Hand-writing Reproduced for her Kin and Friends by her Adoring Son Percy Grainger, also Table of Dates, & Summary of her Cultural Tastes*  
by Percy Grainger published by the author, Frankfurt, 1923

These rumours were false but Percy and Rose's relationship was unusually close. Grainger described it as 'the intense mutual love and devotion of her and my life together'.<sup>19</sup> Rose had directed every aspect of her son's education, career, social life and sexual relationships from his birth until her death. She concentrated her considerable energies on her 'genius' son, and he gave her the loyalty she expected. Despite this dominance, however, there was a strong filial and maternal love present, and the son's grief at his mother's suicide was overwhelming. This devastating loss led Grainger to feel

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<sup>19</sup> PG, *Photos of Rose Grainger*, p. 5.

that he, too, might die soon, reflecting his unusually close identification with Rose. His immediate emotional response was extreme but rather than dwelling only on his loss he had his eye firmly on the future. While still in a state of shock, and before making any of the usual practical arrangements following bereavement, he took steps towards confirming his place as Australia's first great composer through the publication of all his works, and the establishment of two museums. Journeying home from California to New York he wrote a detailed letter to his old friend, the English composer Henry Balfour Gardiner, setting out precise instructions in case he, Percy, died before he could get home:

My heart & head alarm me & I wonder if I can live thru it all. I *want* to come thru *so badly*, for I am all in life that remains of my beloved mother, & I wish to live so as to make her as sweetly remembered as possible

- 1       because of her unusual intensity of mother-love (I shall write her life)
- 2       how, thru her love of art & innate critical sense, she made me the first great composer of Australia
- 3       to show how terribly she struggled & suffered all her life (as none but I know), the intensity of the fight for my goodness she put up.

But to be able to do all that I must live many years longer and *prove myself* (as well as hint towards) the great artist & generous man she planned me, from the 1st, to be. But should my body break under

this strain, then I must rely on you *doing all you can* to have my unpublished works published in the right way.<sup>20</sup>

Grainger then wrote Gardiner a blank cheque to use for publishing his music. He instructed:

You understand the general need of bringing out everything ... that, together, could place me a[s] Australia's 1st great composer & make Australia & my mother's name shine bright. [Long list of compositions and tasks follows and includes:]

- 29 All very intimate letters or notes should be deposited in an Australian Grainger Museum, preferably in birth-town Melbourne.
- 30 Mother's ashes & mine (both cremated) to be placed beside her mother's in cemetery (which?) in Adelaide South Australia ...
- 31 Could plot of ground (owned by me) next to White Plains home be used for building small *fireproof* Grainger Museum?  
... I must think of Australia's fame & the brightness of my adored mother's memory before all else.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> PG, letter to Henry Balfour Gardiner, 3 May 1922, in Malcolm Gillies & David Pear (eds), *The All-Round Man: Selected Letters of Percy Grainger, 1914–1961*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 55.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 57–60.



Flowers preserved from the nosegay Grainger made for the cremation of his mother  
Rose Grainger, May 1922  
Grainger Museum Collection, the University of Melbourne

Once back in New York, Grainger went straight to the funeral parlour and had his mother photographed, as though sleeping among flowers in the casket. These photographs are now in the Grainger Museum, and some were later reproduced in the memorial book that Grainger produced at no small expense a year after Rose's death.<sup>22</sup> He preserved a lock of her hair,<sup>23</sup> pressed and framed part of the nosegay he made to be cremated with her (which included forget-me-nots and everlastings, and ferns and verbena to commemorate Victoria and Australia), and made a detailed inventory of the contents

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<sup>22</sup> PG, *Photos of Rose Grainger*.

<sup>23</sup> PG, envelope inscribed, 'May 6, 1922. Hair growing [on] my beloved mother's head & cut off for me before cremation by Mrs Treat who prepared my beloved mother's body. At Campbells Funeral House', GMC, bay 4, box 78.

of the handbag she had had with her on the fateful day.<sup>24</sup> Shortly thereafter, Grainger wrote a new will leaving the bulk of his estate to Balfour Gardiner,<sup>25</sup> the intention of which was to publish Grainger's and his friends' music and to support those friends financially if necessary. He acknowledged at this point that 'the museum side & the biography side will have to be shelved until later years',<sup>26</sup> but henceforth Grainger had a museum project in mind. This will of June 1922 contrasts with those made in 1910,<sup>27</sup> and February 1922,<sup>28</sup> in which he simply bequeathed everything he owned to his mother.

Grainger's compositional output suffered a creative fall-off after Rose's death, as he spent most of the latter half of his life reworking earlier creations rather than initiating new pieces (the principal exception being his Free Music), and on educational activities.<sup>29</sup> Grainger's expansion of areas of activity in the 1920s and 1930s, including the museum project, may have been in part an attempt to compensate for this decline as a composer and performer.<sup>30</sup> Rose's

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<sup>24</sup> PG, 'List of contents/*Beloved mother's shiney black bag*/left in Mrs Sawyer's office at time of death/Ap. 30, 1922', GMC, box: Grainger's original museum labels & descriptive notes/tags.

<sup>25</sup> PG, 'Last will and testament of George Percy Grainger', 21 June 1922, with codicil to Henry Balfour Gardiner's will, 22 July 1922, GMC, bay 4, box 78.

<sup>26</sup> PG, letter to Henry Balfour Gardiner, 27 June 1922, GMC, bay 2, box 75.

<sup>27</sup> PG, 'The last will of George Percy Grainger, 31a Kings Rd Chelsea London SW, dated 13.6.10', GMC, bay 4, box 78.

<sup>28</sup> PG, 'Will of George Percy Grainger Feb 28, 1922', GMC, bay 4, box 78.

<sup>29</sup> Gillies & Pear (eds), *All-Round Man*, p. 2; Malcolm Gillies & David Pear (eds), *Portrait of Percy Grainger*, University of Rochester Press, Rochester & Suffolk, 2002, pp. 109, 165.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Grogan, '[Review of] *The All-Round Man: Selected Letters of Percy Grainger, 1914-61*', *Music & Letters*, vol. 77, no. 2, August 1996, 296-9 (p. 298).

death caused Percy to redouble 'his already powerful emotional need to memorialize and preserve the sound world he conceived in his youth as a kind of living incarnation of his mother and their symbiotic relationship'.<sup>31</sup>

Collecting has been well-recognised as a way of continuing to relate to the deceased,<sup>32</sup> and the death of a loved one has been a catalyst for many prominent collectors, such as le Duc Jean de Berry, Sigmund Freud and J Pierpont Morgan.<sup>33</sup> Grainger's sense of obligation towards his mother had long been tinged with guilt, perhaps triggered initially by sympathy for her physical suffering.<sup>34</sup> His heavy guilt at Rose's death also related to his guilt and feelings of cowardice at having left England in 1914, at the outbreak of war:

I know that my music will bring more honor to Australia than any soldier-work I may have done in British armies ... /But I bitterly clear-see that my beloved mother had to die because of the shame

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<sup>31</sup> Mark N Grant, 'Review and essay: *Percy Grainger* by Wilfrid Mellers', *Grainger Society Journal*, vol. 12, no. 1, July 1994, 20–34 (p. 31).

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Gibson, 'Melancholy objects', *Mortality*, vol. 9, no. 4, November 2004, 285–99; Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, Routledge, London & New York, 1995, p. 238.

<sup>33</sup> Russell Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, Routledge, London & New York, 1995, pp. 28, 49; Janine Burke, *The Gods of Freud: Sigmund Freud's Art Collection*, Knopf, Sydney, 2006; Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994.

<sup>34</sup> PG, letter to Karen Kellerman, 8 May 1926, in Gillies & Pear (eds), *All-Round Man*, 76–82.

my cowardly selfslavement brought upon us. The war claimed one of us, after all.<sup>35</sup>

In this comment Grainger makes a link between his 'cowardly' avoidance of his own death, Rose's subsequent suicide, his guilt, and the need for atonement by bringing honour, through music, to Australia.

Rose's death also triggered in Grainger an autobiographical urge which henceforth ran parallel to his collecting, resulting in a large quantity of memoirs, essays and anecdotes, mostly incomplete, and all unpublished in his lifetime.<sup>36</sup> In these works he was seeking principally to understand his relationship with his mother and her family, to place himself and his musical circle in a position of primacy in the history of twentieth-century composition, and to explain his flagellantic sexual preferences.<sup>37</sup> These were also among the concerns of the Grainger Museum, which he founded during this more introspective period.<sup>38</sup> From 1926 his new romantic relationship with Ella Ström stimulated further autobiographical writings.<sup>39</sup> This alignment between his autobiographical, literary and museum

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<sup>35</sup> PG, 'P.G.'s remarks [of 14 March 1932] on Rose Grainger's letters of May 12, 1917 & June 26, 1917 to Cecil J. Sharp', in Dreyfus (ed.), *The Farthest North of Humanness*, p. 529.

<sup>36</sup> Simon Perry, 'Grainger's autobiographical writings: New light on old questions', *Australasian Music Research*, no. 5, Percy Grainger Issue, 2001, 125–34. Excerpts have been published in Gillies, Pear & Carroll (eds), *Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger*.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm Gillies & Bruce Clunies Ross (eds), *Grainger on Music*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 1999, p. xvii.

<sup>38</sup> Gillies & Pear (eds), *The All-Round Man*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> For example, PG, 'The love-life of Helen & Paris', ms, 2 vols, 8 November 1927 – 25 May 1928, GMC, bay 4, box 3; and PG, 'The Aldridge-Grainger-Ström saga'.

activities demonstrates how Grainger moved seamlessly between collecting, recording, preserving, analysing and promoting; all were integrated in his project of creative memorialising.

In all this work Grainger was concerned with preserving not only memory, but also the truth: 'When remarkable people die (such as my mother ...) no-one seems able or willing to describe them justly, faithfully ... There is some conspiracy going on anent the remarkable dead'.<sup>40</sup> Grainger wrote to his curator: '*I have a bottomless hunger for truth ... life is innocent, yet full of meaning. Destroy nothing, forget nothing, remember all, say all. Trust life, trust mankind. As long as the picture of truth is placed in the right frame (art, science, history) it will offend none!*'<sup>41</sup>

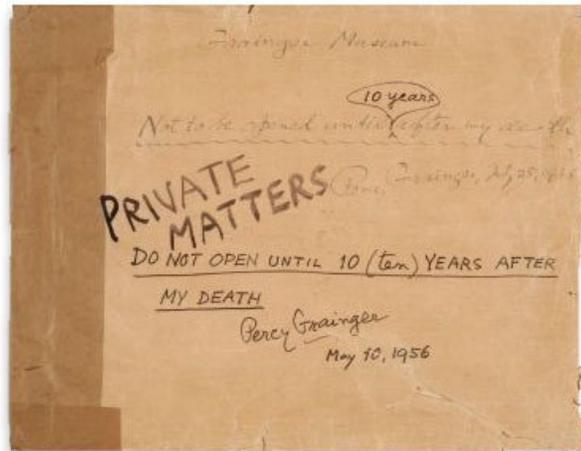
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<sup>40</sup> PG, 'Grainger's anecdotes', unpublished ms, 8 October 1949 – 6 November 1954, GMC, bay 4, box 2, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> PG, letter to Richard Fowler, 23 June 1941, quoted in Elinor Wrobel, *Percy Grainger's Gift to the Land of his Birth: The Grainger Museum: A Strange Heterogeneous Treasure-Hoard-House*, exhibition catalogue, Grainger Museum, Melbourne, 1995, p. 16; a slight variation of part of this same quotation is given, without source but dated 13 November 1936, in Bird, *Percy Grainger*, p. xxvi.

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Envelope inscribed by Percy Grainger, 'Do not open until 10 (ten) years after my death', 10 May 1956

Grainger Museum Collection, the University of Melbourne

And, true to his word, Grainger was an unusually comprehensive and self-revealing collector, including as he did material relating to every aspect of his life, no matter how apparently trivial or potentially scandalous, such as his flagellant sexual predilections. He did impose some censorship, however. In 1940 for example, while preparing material for the museum, he 'censored' his letters to Karen Holten, many of which were extremely intimate.<sup>42</sup> Further, understanding the importance to his career of maintaining the social proprieties in the eyes of the general public, in May 1956 Grainger put his designated 'lustbranch' material into a bank vault,<sup>43</sup> placing an embargo on opening it until ten years after his death.<sup>44</sup> His series

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<sup>42</sup> PG, Day-book 1940, entries for 22 & 23 August, GMC, bay 4, box 18.

<sup>43</sup> See David Pear, 'The passions of Percy', *Meanjin*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2003, 59–66.

<sup>44</sup> The university followed the letter, if not the spirit, of Grainger's instructions punctually. His package marked 'DO NOT OPEN UNTIL 10 YEARS AFTER MY DEATH'

of museum 'Legend' interpretive panels is much narrower in scope than the collection, and omits or mentions only in passing many aspects of Grainger's life and career, such as his significant work as a pianist, conductor and teacher; army service and other wartime activities; move to America and taking out American citizenship; politics; religion; sexuality, physical culture and vegetarianism; any romantic partners other than his wife Ella (and this relationship is only touched upon); and the real cause of his parents' illness and death.<sup>45</sup>

Grainger continued long after Rose's death to think and speak of his museum as, at least in part, a memorial to her, and he took steps towards establishing a series of Rose Grainger libraries.<sup>46</sup> In 1927, five years after Rose's death, he wrote that 'the feeble threads that still hold me to life' included:

The all-vital craving to write that book of my mother's & my life, unflinchingly true & uncompromising in all its details ... [and t]he forming of Aldridge-Grainger museums in White Plains & perhaps

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was opened at the first meeting of the Grainger Museum Board following the anniversary, but the contents were placed in the safe in the Grainger Museum rather than on public access. Grainger Museum Board, minutes of meeting held on 24 March 1971, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>45</sup> For a full discussion of Grainger's Museum Legends, see Belinda Nemec, 'The Grainger Museum in its museological and historical contexts', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2006, vol. 2: Appendix.

<sup>46</sup> PG, letter to Roger Quilter, 30 January 1935, GMC, bay 1, box 46; Bernard Heinze, letter to PG, 18 December 1935, GMC, bay 5, box 67.

Australia, & the publication of noncommercial works by me & other artists.<sup>47</sup>

Grainger mourned his mother for the rest of his life, and always remembered her birthday and her 'death-day'.<sup>48</sup> Rose's death divided Grainger's life into two parts. This is reflected in his later labelling of certain items of clothing and accessories in his collection 'Mors Tid', meaning 'Mother's time' in Danish.<sup>49</sup> But he tried to establish continuity between these two periods by carrying on his childhood traditions such as creating a birthday gift for her. On the first birthday after her death, Grainger created two watercolours of Barstow in California (where they had holidayed in 1920), inscribed 'In memory of my beloved mother/Birthday gift, July 3, 1922. Barstow, where we were happy'.<sup>50</sup> Material evidence helped Grainger deal with his loss: 'When I see my darling mother's handwriting before me ... I am quieted, am comforted, it is as if the sap within me begins to flow more normally [throughout] my system, more like it did before the tragedy.'<sup>51</sup> But he always felt the loss keenly. For example, 35 years after her death he wrote in his diary, 'Beloved mother would have been 95 today. I have felt the tragic influence of

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<sup>47</sup> PG, letter to Ella Ström, 9 April 1927, GMC, bay 4, box 3. It appears that this letter may never have been sent.

<sup>48</sup> PG, letter to Karen Kellerman, 8 May 1926, p. 76.

<sup>49</sup> Brian Allison, 'Secret signs and sleeping portraits', *University of Melbourne Library Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, July 2004, 7–9.

<sup>50</sup> PG, quoted in Kay Dreyfus (ed.), *Objects, Documents and Pictures to Reflect Upon, Selected from the Grainger Museum and the Archives Collections of the University of Melbourne*, exhibition catalogue, University of Melbourne Gallery, Melbourne, 1978, cat. no. 52.

<sup>51</sup> PG, 'Sketches for my book *The Life of my Mother & her Son*', unpublished ms, 11 July 1922 – May 1938, GMC, bay 4, box 3, p. 14.

her death more in this year, 1957, than in any other year'.<sup>52</sup> Rose's death also caused Grainger to reassess his ambivalent relationship with his father (who had died in 1917, probably also from the effects of syphilis):<sup>53</sup>

I love my father so much more since I have lost mother. Only since then do I realize that he, too, is dead, has had his waxing & waning like all living beings, that his poor blood runs within me as well as my darling mother's, & that if he is to achieve a few years more of memory (the moment that the 'immortality' of fame is in eternity) it must be thru my effort & achievements.<sup>54</sup>

Loss created in Grainger not only a need to memorialise but also a sense of obligation to do justice to the lives of the deceased, and preserve the truth for future generations. His museum was the key element in this project, which occupied much of his remaining life.

It took Grainger several years to recover from the immediate shock of his mother's death and enter into life with something approaching

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<sup>52</sup> PG, Day-book, entry for 3 July 1957, GMC, bay 4, box 18.

<sup>53</sup> Grainger refers to his father as 'crippled with arthritis' in his last years. PG, 'John H. Grainger', *Museum Legend*, 15 March 1956, GMC reg. no. 04.0330. John Bird argues that the cause of death given on John Grainger's death certificate — 'chronic rheumatic arthritis' — was a common medical euphemism at the time for tertiary syphilis. Bird, *Percy Grainger*, p. 184. The extant, although incomplete, 1916 correspondence between Rose and Percy Grainger and Nellie Melba and her sister Isabel Patterson (who were helping care for John H. Grainger in his final illness) implies that John was dying of the same illness from which Rose had long been suffering, GMC, bay 2, box 87.

<sup>54</sup> PG, 'Sketches for my book', extract dated 16 November 1923, p. 29.

his former energy and enthusiasm. The turning point occurred in 1926 when he met the Swedish artist and poet Ella Ström (1889–1979), whom he married in 1928. They discussed the Grainger Museum idea both before and after marriage,<sup>55</sup> although they did not always see eye-to-eye on the subject. Grainger was familiar with house museums and memorials to geniuses or what he called 'lifemasters' or 'oversouls', such as Goethe, Wagner, Beethoven, Dickens, Carlisle, Hans Christian Andersen, and Grieg, and believed that if he too was a genius he was equally deserving of a museum.<sup>56</sup> Ella at one stage objected to this idea, largely on the grounds that it was old-fashioned and unoriginal. She also felt that such museums should be located in the country of the subject's birth; for this reason she argued that White Plains was inappropriate.<sup>57</sup> But she eventually came round. Decades later Ella recalled:

Percy was always talking about having his house in White Plains as the museum, and ... both Percy and I were very museum-minded people. I was an art student in Sweden as a child and I went to museums every day, and Percy had been in Denmark and Norway, where there were museums scattered all over the country, with old houses containing the remains of older people of importance, or not so important, so we were very up to the idea that there should be a museum after Percy, with all his things.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See for example PG, letter to Ella Ström, 15 October 1927, GMC, folder 01.1009, bay 2, box 2.

<sup>56</sup> PG, letter to Ella Grainger, 15 July 1930, GMC, bay 2, box 33.

<sup>57</sup> Ella Grainger, letter to PG, 18 July 1930, GMC, bay 2, box 33.

<sup>58</sup> Ella Grainger, quoted in David Josephson, 'Conversations with Ella Grainger', *Grainger Society Journal*, vol. 11, no. 1, July 1993, 3–90 (pp. 63–4).

In June 1927 Grainger made a new will, specifying no public or religious funeral or service, that he be cremated and his ashes placed next to his mother's in Adelaide, providing for the publication of his musical and literary manuscripts, and proposing the establishment of a 'Grainger Memorial Association' funded by performing rights and publishing royalties, the two purposes of which were to give 'Grainger Concerts' in various countries, and to turn his house in White Plains into a public 'Grainger Museum', which would be presented:

as nearly unaltered as possible from which it was at the time of the death of my mother, Rose Grainger (Mrs. John H. Grainger), in 1922, and to display therein letters, manuscripts, pictures, native art works, clothes, utensils, works written, painted, drawn, collected, worn or used by said Rose Grainger, Percy Grainger, their kin, friends, sweethearts and fellow artists.<sup>59</sup>

At this time he informed his bride-to-be that he had bequeathed nothing to her or to his family; everything would go to a Grainger Museum, publishing his musical and literary works and holding Grainger concerts: 'All that deals with the time after my death enthralls me. I am hungry for fame-after-death.'<sup>60</sup> After their marriage in August 1928, Grainger wrote a new will, almost identical to that of June 1927 with the exception of providing for Ella during her lifetime.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> PG, 'Last will and testament of George Percy Grainger. Dated, June 11th 1927', GMC, bay 4, box 78.

<sup>60</sup> PG, letter to Ella Ström, 9 June 1927, GMC, bay 2, box 2.

<sup>61</sup> PG, 'Last will and testament of George Percy Grainger. Dated November 10th, 1928', GMC, bay 4, box 78.

The idea of locating a Grainger Museum in Melbourne, first mooted in his grief-stricken letter to Balfour Gardiner upon hearing of Rose's death, seems to have been revived in 1932–33 as a result of Grainger's contact with Bernard Heinze, Ormond Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne. Around this time, Grainger also toyed with the idea of every Australian house he had inhabited being preserved as a museum.<sup>62</sup>

In the late 1930s Grainger envisaged, in addition to the Grainger Museum at the University of Melbourne, a house museum in 'Claremont', the Adelaide home of his mother's family since 1879.<sup>63</sup> Grainger often visited Claremont, firstly as a small child with Rose and later alone or with Ella, and he held the place and its inhabitants (particularly Rose's sister 'Aunty Clara' and youngest brother 'Uncle Frank') in great affection. In April 1939, a few months after visiting Melbourne to supervise the second phase of the Grainger Museum project, Grainger wrote to Clara:

About 2 weeks ago I was passing through Hannibal, Missouri ... & while there looked into the newly set up 'Mark Twain Museum' .... No, it was not his birthplace ... but he & his parents, etc, came to live in Hannibal when he was about 9 & lived there some years. ... The whole thing is charming, very valuable & very touching. But in the Mark Twain house there is none of the original furniture, pictures, or anything ... I couldn't help thinking how much luckier we are going to be at 'Claremont', in having an *undisturbed* family museum, with (in the main) the same things in the house that grandmother & you had

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<sup>62</sup> PG, 'Aldridge-Grainger-Ström saga', pp. 125–7.

<sup>63</sup> Clara Aldridge & PG, 'Aunty Clara's "Aldridge History"', GMC, bay 4, box 1.

there over 50 years ago. I wonder if there is *any* family museum, *anywhere in the world*, where the contents of the house are *so undisturbed, so unchanged*, as at 'Claremont'? ... They will be a wonderful foil to each other: The *Grainger Museum* in Melbourne, dealing with manuscripts, & instruments, books, documents & various arts, & the *Aldridge Museum* in Adelaide, keeping family records & showing the lovely 'Claremont' life as it was & is. I am so thankful about it all!<sup>64</sup>

The Claremont museum was not intended to duplicate the Grainger Museum, but rather to be a true house museum, preserved in the state in which it had been left by the final inhabitants, because:

It is the only house, in which I spent part of my childhood, that has remained practically unaltered. In addition my mother (to whom I owe most of my musical attitude & training) spent some of her most impressionable years there. On that account I am SO VERY ANXIOUS to preserve my aunt's house as A HISTORICAL MUSEUM.<sup>65</sup>

Clara died in 1944 and bequeathed Claremont to Percy. He explained his intentions to her executor:

The artistic and esthetic history of Australia is young. And that is one reason why it is important to begin that history RIGHT — that is to say, truthfully and scientifically. Future generations of Australians should have the benefit of knowing OUT OF WHAT BEGINNINGS &

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<sup>64</sup> PG, letter to Clara Aldridge, 25 April 1939, GMC, bay 2, box 64.

<sup>65</sup> PG, letter to O Tipping [Elders Trustee and Executor Co. Ltd], 5 January 1944, GMC, folder 02.0509, bay 1, box 34.

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SURROUNDINGS & EARLY INFLUENCES their musicians, poets, artists have emerged.<sup>66</sup>

Grainger felt that it was of the utmost importance to preserve the actual physical fabric of the house, because this was evidence of the truth. For example he opposed the installation of electric light:

From a museum standpoint it is most important that my aunt never had electric light (which I presume is one of the reasons why she preserved her sight, without glasses, to the age of 86) or gas in her house.<sup>67</sup>

In 1954 Grainger was prepared to spend £1000 on repairs to Claremont,<sup>68</sup> but the museum plan did not eventuate owing to circumstances beyond Grainger's control.<sup>69</sup>

## **Relics**

Susan Pearce identifies three collecting modes that cover most collections: collections as souvenirs, fetish objects and systematics.<sup>70</sup> Of these, I believe Grainger's was primarily the first (although he did not generally use the word 'souvenir'), which Pearce describes as:

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> PG, letter to Mr Stace [Elders Trustee and Executor Co. Ltd], 22 August 1954, GMC, bay 1, box 35.

<sup>69</sup> Josephson, 'Conversations with Ella Grainger', p. 26.

<sup>70</sup> Susan Pearce, 'Collecting reconsidered', in Gaynor Kavanagh (ed.), *Museum Languages: Objects and Texts*, Leicester University Press, Leicester & New York, 1991, p. 139; Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, Leicester University Press, Leicester & London, 1992, pp. 68–9.

'objects which take their collection unity only from their association with either a single person and his or her life history, or a group of people'.<sup>71</sup> 'Souvenirs' are called by different authors 'relics', 'numinous objects', 'association objects', 'memorabilia', 'icons' or 'auratic objects'. The common factor is a real or imagined association with a person, event or place. Such an object has psychological rather than material significance, embodying an association sufficient to merit preservation. These objects are not usually collected as documents, or for their aesthetic qualities, but as a bridge between past or present, or as a talisman of the past or of continuity.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Pearce, 'Collecting reconsidered', pp. 139–41.

<sup>72</sup> Brooke Hindle, 'How much is a piece of the true cross worth?', in Ian Quimby (ed.), *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, Norton, for the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, New York, 1978, pp. 5–6; David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & New York, 1985, pp. xxiii, 43–4, 240–3; Rachel Maines & James Glynn, 'Numinous objects', *Public Historian*, vol. 15, no. 1, Winter 1993, 8–25; Douglas Rigby & Elizabeth Rigby, *Lock, Stock and Barrel: The Story of Collecting*, Lippincott, Philadelphia, 1944, pp. 38–42.

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Fob watch and chain, originally belonging to Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), and given to Percy Grainger by Grieg's widow Nina in 1907  
made by L Döring, Leipzig  
Grainger Museum Collection, the University of Melbourne

While Grainger also collected systematically, for example by acquiring comprehensive sets of his own and his musical contemporaries' manuscripts and printed scores, many of the objects in his collection, particularly those which I would argue had the greatest emotional significance for him, can be characterised as relics. As Pearce explains, the common meaning of 'relic' is something left behind, with implications of lifeless debris, but in an earlier age it signified 'the living dead at work amongst us, a voice from a past not left behind but entering into present life'.<sup>73</sup> This is clearly the sense in which Grainger used this emotive word. For example, he particularly treasured a pocket watch that had belonged to Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), given to him by Grieg's widow Nina and accompanied by her note: 'Take it, keep it, and never forget him'.

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<sup>73</sup> Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, p. 197.

Grieg's fame as a composer meant that the numinous significance of this item was more widely appreciated than many of Grainger's possessions, and people would ask to see it.<sup>74</sup> Many collectors like to bask in the reflected glory of an object's association with its famous maker or former owner, and this 'magical' connection gives the object a sense of sacredness.<sup>75</sup>

The relic embodies rather than illustrates the past, through its own longevity transcending the passage of time itself.<sup>76</sup> This embodiment or physicality is crucial to the relic's meaning; its effects are enhanced by touch, so absolute originality of material is crucial. As in a religious relic, a replica or substitute will not do.<sup>77</sup> Grainger understood this need for authenticity, and the significance of apparently trivial matter, recalling in 1951: 'When I was in Frankfort I heard that someone had preserved in a bottle the water in which Bismark had washed his hands after signing the Treaty of Frankfort &

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<sup>74</sup> PG, 'Ere-I-forget: jottings-down (for use in 'Aldridge-Grainger-Brandelius saga') of close-ups ((details)) that otherwise might go un-writ-hoarded ((unrecorded))', unpublished ms, 1944-47, GMC, bay 4, box 3, p. 65.

<sup>75</sup> Russell W Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, Routledge, New York & London, 1995, p. 96; William McIntosh & Brandon Schmeichel, 'Collectors and collecting: A social psychological perspective', *Leisure Sciences*, vol. 26, no. 1, January-March 2004, 85-97 (p. 92).

<sup>76</sup> Teresa Barnett, 'Tradition and the individual memory: The case of Christian C. Sanderson', in Leah Dilworth (ed.), *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick & London, 2003, 221-35 (p. 226).

<sup>77</sup> Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 16-17, 22.

I saw nothing strange in such an act of preservation'.<sup>78</sup> Relics or numinous objects are simultaneously both past and present, but they are also mute, unable to stand alone without interpretation;<sup>79</sup> their *numen* will only survive as long as there is someone who knows their associations.<sup>80</sup> Grainger appreciated this and documented his collection in great detail (although unmethodically), in shipping lists and letters, and on swing tags, wrappers, boxes and display labels. For example, another of Grainger's 'relics' comprised four commercially published copies of his composition *Marching Tune*. The presence of his mother's inscriptions transformed these machine-printed copies into highly personal 'relics'. He described them in a shipping list: 'with R.G.'s writing on each copy, "sing whatever part suits your voice" (relic of chorus meetings at 31a Kings Road)'.<sup>81</sup> Two years after Rose's death, Grainger published two folk-song arrangements as *Two Musical Relics of My Mother*, arranged for two pianos, suggesting Percy and Rose performing together (which was indeed the case with the release of a similarly-named piano roll that the pair had recorded in 1918).<sup>82</sup>

Grainger's perception of continuity between past, present and future, his disinclination to rank old objects over new or new over old, and his enthusiasm for the creative manifestations of many different

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<sup>78</sup> PG, letter to Cyril Scott, 10 & 11 December 1951, in Gillies & Pear (eds), *The All-Round Man*, p. 255.

<sup>79</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, p. 243.

<sup>80</sup> Maines & Glynn, 'Numinous objects' (pp. 10–11).

<sup>81</sup> PG, 'Sendings to Grainger Museum, Melbourne University, 1936', unpublished ms, 1936, GMC, bay 1, box 55.

<sup>82</sup> Duo-Art roll nos. 6760–4, Æolian Company, New York, 1924, referred to in PG, *Two Musical Relics of My Mother*, program note, n.p.

places and historical periods, are all reflected in his museum collection and the way he documented and displayed it. Grainger treasured many things which happened to be old, but not simply because they were old. He treasured them for their associations and their signification of the past for the present and the future. The emotions they excited in him were immediate and strong. Many of his object labels or descriptions recount past incidents with which the object was associated, but at the same time are often connected with something recent or even yet to eventuate: a model boat from childhood influenced his futuristic 'Free Music' which occupied him in his final years; relics or mementos of his mother — although tinged with sadness and nostalgia — acted upon Grainger until his own death. Grainger combined his musical creativity with collecting in order to fulfil his yearning for immortality. At the age of only 27 he wrote:

My own compositions I undertake largely as a kind of artistic life insurance against my coming death. Let there be no records wanting, I say, of any folk, language, song, history, not even of myself; or perhaps; least of all of myself.<sup>83</sup>

Many individuals collect and preserve material culture in order to cope with the prospect of death, and to psychologically control the relentless passage of time.<sup>84</sup> We often preserve keepsakes of the recently deceased; the beloved is being left behind, in our past, but

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<sup>83</sup> PG, letter to Karen Holten, 2 May 1909, in Dreyfus (ed.), *Farthest North*, p. 290.

<sup>84</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'The system of collecting', trans. Roger Cardinal, in John Elsner & Roger Cardinal (eds), *The Cultures of Collecting*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 7–24.

by holding onto some remnant or symbol of them — a souvenir — they remain, in one sense, with us now and in the future.<sup>85</sup> This also occurs at the institutional level: in natural history museums, for example, animal skins appear to be resurrected, given an illusory life by the skills of taxidermists and diorama-painters.<sup>86</sup> Perennially popular exhibition types such as dinosaurs and Egyptian mummies can speak of both death and immortality. Even the religiously-informed architecture characteristic of many nineteenth-century museums, inspired by Greek temple or Gothic cathedral, makes the link between death and immortality. Carol Duncan characterises art museum visiting as a ritual which tries to afford 'communion with immortal spirits of the past'.<sup>87</sup>

Given this context, I contend that Grainger was neither unusual nor unpredictable in responding to actual bereavement (the loss of his mother) by concentrated and deliberate acts of collecting, preservation and display. But he took this to a greater extreme than most individuals, by creating a large and catholic collection which focused on himself and his family, racial, national and artistic inheritances, and by building a dedicated autobiographical museum to preserve and display it for the benefit of future generations.

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<sup>85</sup> Pearce, 'Collecting reconsidered', pp. 139–141; Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, pp. 69–73; Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1984.

<sup>86</sup> Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory: Evolution, Museums, Colonialism*, Routledge, London & New York, 2004, p. 12; Donna Haraway, 'Teddy bear patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936', *Social Text*, vol. 11, Winter 1984–85, 20–64 (p. 25).

<sup>87</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, Routledge, London & New York, 1995, p. 17.

### **Grainger on the past, memory and forgetting**

It was not only when faced with actual bereavement that Grainger thought about death, and of ways in which his memory and reputation could be posthumously preserved and even enhanced. For years prior to Rose's suicide, death and immortality in an abstract sense had occupied his thoughts, not as a finality or conclusion, but as a catalyst for action:

My manifold amateurish interests lead me to myriads of graves that other fellow talents never tread. The whole being of folk art is closely akin to all manner of racial & artistic burials. Dead ideas, words, myths, plots, occupations flit about thro the dying rhymes. And folksingers too; in them I'm hoarding up a wealth of dead friends soon to go. All the languages I potter about with are hornets nests of new births & old deaths, passing away & coming forward, full of wistful suggestions to the loving & sympathetic mind ... / Sorrow is fine & productive for me. Fear of death & loss, destruction & forgottenness spur me to compose, collect, preserve & embalm. May I live long & not accomplish all too little! Not for my own silly sake, but because there is so much awaiting doing, & my heart really feels loving & feelingly & there ought to be some record of it. Also there must be someone to sit mourningly & hold the cold hands of dead races, men, & languages, lost battles & failed enterprizes.<sup>88</sup>

Many of Grainger's folk-song arrangements were on morbid subjects: 'hangings, drownings, murders, jailings, death-for-love's-sake,

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<sup>88</sup> PG, letter to Karen Holten, 2 May 1909, pp. 289-90.

knights mouldering in ditches, the sad fates of young men killed before their time'.<sup>89</sup> Grainger saw 'culture' as the 'storing up & study of records of life & thought & skill ... *the surest form of deathlessness*'.<sup>90</sup> While serving in the army Grainger wrote to his mother: 'I like to see all the leavings of the band boys, the khaki clothes & overcoats hanging on the walls ... Especially when they are all away ... I prefer the evidences of life to life itself, perhaps'.<sup>91</sup> In writing of death and suicide some years after his mother's demise, Grainger stated:

This all-too-good understanding of the self-killing mood is all part of my all-round in-tune-ness with 'dead' things — the sea (which is dead from man's slant, altho teeming with sea-life), the sand-waste ((desert)), art (which is just a dead form of life), past-hoard-mindedness ((museum-mindedness)), lewdness instead of love, mind-stirs ((interests)) rather than feelings. All these choices of mine are away from life towards death, away from more-ness towards less-ness.<sup>92</sup>

But Grainger was by no means a morbid personality. All contemporary accounts, as well as his own correspondence, show that he was a remarkably energetic, curious, vital, lusty and athletic man, well into his senior years.

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<sup>89</sup> PG, 'My wretched tone-life', ms, 1951, printed in Thomas C Slattery, *Percy Grainger: The Inveterate Innovator*, Instrumentalist Co., Evanston, 1974, p. 259.

<sup>90</sup> PG, 'Sketches for my book', p. 35.

<sup>91</sup> PG, letter to Rose Grainger, 1 July 1917, GMC, bay 5, box 22.

<sup>92</sup> PG, 'Ere-I-forget', p. 23.

### **Museums as mausoleums**

Grainger claimed to like the 'steady lastingness' of cemeteries, but he entertained the idea of displaying his and Ella's skeletons in the museum, as this would be 'so much jollier & braver & more heathen & more scientific ... so free from mawkishness' compared to the graveyard, 'much as one yearns to lie there'.<sup>93</sup> While this seems a bizarre wish, and Ella promptly backed away from what had been only a joking suggestion on her part,<sup>94</sup> Grainger may have seen entire or partial skeletons, skulls and other human remains in museums, particularly those of Indigenous people. For example, the Museum of the Royal Society of Tasmania in Hobart displayed the articulated skeleton of the Aboriginal Tasmanian Truganini until 1947<sup>95</sup> (Grainger visited Hobart in 1926). The National Museum of Victoria actively collected Aboriginal remains from the turn of the twentieth century until the 1970s.<sup>96</sup> Grainger probably visited this museum during some of his visits to Melbourne, particularly as he met its director, Walter Baldwin Spencer, in Melbourne in 1909, and he encountered the man whom he invited in 1938 to be curator of the Grainger Museum, Richard Hindle Fowler, at the Industrial and Technological Museum which shared a site with the National Museum (the two institutions later merging as the Museum of Victoria).

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<sup>93</sup> PG, letter to Ella Grainger, 24 January 1935, GMC, bay 2, box 7.

<sup>94</sup> Ella Grainger, letter to PG [16 February] 1935, GMC, bay 2, box 35.

<sup>95</sup> Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory*, p. 191 (note 3).

<sup>96</sup> Gaye Sculthorpe, "'A place for perpetual preservation": Collections from Aboriginal Victoria', in Carolyn Rassmussen, *A Museum for the People: A History of Museum Victoria and its Predecessors 1854–2000*, Scribe Publications in association with Museum Victoria, Melbourne, 2001, p. 190.

In 1954, after discussing cremation, Grainger wrote to Ella:

All this business of having one's ashes strewn to the wind, or into the sea, or over the fields — what does it mean, but that the death-confronted sentimentalist [is exposed to any whim]. He has no plans for facing the future. And the future of bones is a specially long one ... People who came together as culturistically as we & who have stuck together so wisely on every point as we have, must not be bodily sundered in death. That was one of the best of yr many splendid ideas, that our skeletons should be willed to the museum.<sup>97</sup>

Grainger did not hold Christian or any other religious beliefs, and found the idea of occult contact with the dead repugnant.<sup>98</sup> Grainger's last will — signed on 29 September 1959, when he was suffering painfully from cancer — included the following clause: 'I request that there be no public or religious funeral, funeral service or ceremony of any kind or nature. I direct that my flesh be removed from my bones and the flesh destroyed. I give and bequeath my skeleton to the University of Melbourne ... for preservation and possible display in the Grainger Museum'.<sup>99</sup> The explicit reference to removal of flesh from bones brings to mind Jeremy Bentham's similar instructions for the creation of his posthumous 'Auto-Icon'.<sup>100</sup> Perhaps Grainger knew of the Auto-Icon, displayed at University College London, since 1850.

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<sup>97</sup> PG, letter to Ella Grainger, 14 August 1954, quoted in Eileen Dorum, *Percy Grainger: The Man behind the Music*, IC & EE Dorum, Melbourne, 1986, p. 204.

<sup>98</sup> PG, letter to Cyril Scott, 21 October 1922, in Gillies & Pear (eds), *The All-Round Man*, pp. 61–2.

<sup>99</sup> PG, Will, 29 September 1959, in Slattery, *Percy Grainger*, pp. 287–90.

<sup>100</sup> CFA Marmoy, 'The "Auto-icon" of Jeremy Bentham at University College London', *Medical History*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 1958, 77–86.

When Grainger died, however, Ella arranged for Percy's remains to be buried with Rose's in Adelaide. If Grainger's wish had been realised, his museum would not have been the first or last to serve as its creator's mausoleum. For example, a significant element of the Dulwich Picture Gallery designed by Sir John Soane in 1811–14 was a mausoleum for the gallery's founders.<sup>101</sup> The founder and designer of Yale University's Trumbull Gallery, a former aide-de-camp to George Washington and nationalistic American history painter Colonel John Trumbull (1756–1843), was eventually buried with his wife in the basement crypt, surrounded by relics such as his palette and brush.<sup>102</sup> The Danish neoclassical sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844) had agreed for his ashes to be prominently interred in the courtyard of the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, a museum which he had helped create.<sup>103</sup> Giles Waterfield argues that such projects were not only about self-memorialisation but also shared (like the Grainger Museum) a patriotic, nationalist agenda.<sup>104</sup> Similarly some 'Great Men' house museums, such as George

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<sup>101</sup> James Stevens Curl, *Death and Architecture: An Introduction to Funerary and Commemorative Buildings in the Western European Tradition, with some Consideration of their Settings*, Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2002, pp. 184–7; Giles Waterfield, 'Dulwich Picture Gallery: An artist's shrine?', in Giles Waterfield (ed.), *Soane and Death: The Tombs and Monuments of Sir John Soane*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, 1996, pp. 53–69.

<sup>102</sup> Germain Bazin, *The Museum Age*, trans. by Jane van Nuis Cahill, Universe Books, New York, 1967, p. 245; Helen Searing, *New American Art Museums*, Whitney Museum of Art & University of California Press, New York & Berkeley, 1982, pp. 23–4; Waterfield, 'Dulwich Picture Gallery', p. 56.

<sup>103</sup> Berte Lange, *Thorvaldsen's Museum: Architecture — Colours — Light*, Danish Architectural Press, Copenhagen, 2002, pp. 71–5.

<sup>104</sup> Waterfield, 'Dulwich Picture Gallery', pp. 55–9.

Washington's Mt Vernon, include the tomb of the men they commemorate.<sup>105</sup> The art museums established by several American collectors accommodate the physical remains of their creator-donor.<sup>106</sup> Apart from the Thorvaldsen Museum, which Grainger probably visited at his mother's urging during some of his frequent trips to Denmark,<sup>107</sup> we do not know if he knew of or was influenced by such examples, or only by the folk museums and posthumous birthplace-museums mentioned earlier by Ella Grainger. Grainger may possibly have heard of the highly nationalistic *Vittoriale degli Italiani*, the resting place and extravagant autobiographical museum-shrine of the Italian writer, wartime hero and proto-fascist, Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863–1938), through their mutual acquaintance Arnold Dolmetsch. Edvard Grieg had been a major figure in Grainger's early career. In 1919 Nina Grieg shocked her friends by selling their beloved summer house at Troldhaugen (where Grainger had visited in 1906), and most of its contents. After Nina Grieg died in 1935

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<sup>105</sup> Charlotte Smith, 'Civic consciousness and house museums: the instructional role of interpretive narrative', *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, July 2002, 74–88 (p. 76).

<sup>106</sup> Those that preceded Grainger's death include the Huntington Art Gallery in San Marino (Henry Edwards Huntington (d. 1927); the William Hayes Ackland (d. 1940) Memorial Art Centre at the University of North Carolina; the Sterling (d. 1956) and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts; Bernard Berenson (d. 1959) and his wife Mary are buried in a chapel at their villa I Tatti near Florence. Subsequent examples include the J Paul Getty (d. 1976) Museum at Malibu; the remains of Robert Woods Bliss (d. 1962) and Mildred Barnes Bliss (d. 1969) are buried on the grounds of Dumbarton Oaks in Washington D.C., as are Peggy Guggenheim's (d. 1979) in the garden of her Venetian palazzo. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, pp. 77–88, 154 note 31.

<sup>107</sup> Rose twice urged him to see it in 1904. Rose Grainger, letters to PG, 27 September 1904 and 14 October 1904, GMC, bay 5, box 14.

Grainger contributed to efforts to return Edvard's remains to the place and open it as a museum.<sup>108</sup>

Grainger probably died too early to learn of the Australian artist and writer Norman Lindsay's (1879–1969) plans to bequeath his home 'Springwood' to the National Trust, which Lindsay modified in his last years for its posthumous opening as a house–museum–memorial.<sup>109</sup> Grainger was certainly aware of one Australian great-man house–museum cum shrine, although not an autobiographical one: Captain Cook's cottage, which was relocated to Melbourne by businessman and benefactor Russell Grimwade in 1934,<sup>110</sup> the year in which Grainger commenced working on the design of the Grainger Museum.<sup>111</sup>

Grainger's apparent childlessness (he never acknowledged fathering any children) perhaps added to his imperative to preserve the past; as an only child who had no children to whom he could transmit his

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<sup>108</sup> Bird, *Percy Grainger*, p. 210; PG, 'Nina Grieg's clever naughtiness' in 'Ere-I-forget', p. 63. Trolldhaugen opened to the public in 1928. Julie Anne Sadie and Stanley Sadie, *Calling on the Composer: A Guide to European Composer Houses and Museums*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, pp. 184–6.

<sup>109</sup> Although perhaps the influence ran in the opposite direction, as Lindsay and Grainger had admired each other early in the century and in the 1930s Lindsay gave Grainger a series of his etchings for the Grainger Museum: Richard Hindle Fowler, letter to Robert Hynder, 23 August 1966, GMC, folder 01.1099, bay 2, box 74.

<sup>110</sup> Maryanne McCubbin, 'Cooked to perfection: Cook's Cottage and the exemplary historical figure', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 33, no. 1, Summer 1999, 35–48.

<sup>111</sup> PG, postcard of Cook's Cottage, sent to Sigurd Fornander, 1 August 1935, GMC, bay 1, box 67. Grainger was personally acquainted with Russell Grimwade by at least 1938. PG, Day-book 1938, entry for 23 August, GMC, bay 4, box 22.

cultural and racial legacy he saw himself as the sole bearer of his mother's heritage, which he perceived as fragile, or 'life-dodging'.<sup>112</sup> In his museum, Grainger wanted to create a permanent and unchanging autobiography and record of his career, his musical and extra-musical beliefs, and the careers of his compositional fellow-spirits; a memorial to Rose; and a family history, particularly of the maternal line.

Above all, Grainger wanted to ensure that his legacy would survive *permanently*. He was an enthusiast for making multiple copies of photographs and documents by various techniques, including the use of a hektograph (gelatine) method as far back as 1908 to copy and distribute folk-songs he had collected.<sup>113</sup> He had an early copying machine installed in his White Plains basement; used the early twentieth-century proprietary name 'Photostat' to describe some of his copies; used carbon paper for his own typed correspondence; and encouraged his friends to write to him on a transparent paper to facilitate copying for the museum. But the practicalities of preservation remained a cause of anxiety:

I have taken upon myself the gathering and compiling, the preservation and handing down to other generations, the folk-songs of various countries and races. But I can find nothing on which to notate them permanently. I try to buy ink that will stand the erasure of Time. No one knows how long this or that ink will remain distinct. I visit one manufacturer of paper after another — not one can assure

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<sup>112</sup> PG, 'Bird's-eye view of the together-life of Rose Grainger and Percy Grainger', unpublished ms, 5–9 January 1947, GMC, bay 4, box 3.

<sup>113</sup> David Tall, 'Grainger and folksong', in Lewis Foreman (ed.), *The Percy Grainger Companion*, Thames Publishing, London, 1981, pp. 59–60.

me that his paper will not of itself become dust one hundred years from now.<sup>114</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Percy Grainger's urge to collect, record, preserve and memorialise strengthened as the years passed; it grew from a sense of duty and was integral to his way of dealing with the uncertainties of life, the inexorable passage of time, the loss of his mother, and the prospect of his own eventual death. As a non-believer in religion or afterlife it was important for Grainger to create a permanent, secular memorial, and for this purpose he chose a museum: a type of institution long associated with ideas of the past, death, mortality and immortality. I have demonstrated that this association was deep-seated in Grainger, illustrated by his immediate response upon learning of the death of his beloved mother, and by his life-long dwelling on death and immortality and their relation to his musical output. To Grainger, death and the past were also sources of creative inspiration, and he created the Grainger Museum in order to ensure that his music, ideas and reputation would live on forever. In 1954, in deteriorating health, Grainger wrote: 'It makes one realize that old age is a gradual rotting to bits. Nevertheless I still feel I will live for ever & my fury to leave my mark on the future was never keener'.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> PG, quoted in Deborah Beirne, 'Percy Grainger meets Deborah Beirne in Paris', *Grainger Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, August 1984, 21–6 (pp. 24–5).

<sup>115</sup> PG, Round letter, 31 August 1954, GMC, bay 1, box 65.