Understanding John Grainger through the prism of an architectural rivalry
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This article discusses the intersections in the careers of two important Australian architects: John H. Grainger (1854-1917) and John James Clark (1838-1915). Their professional paths crossed in Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth, resulting in a rivalry that spanned 25 years and three colonies. The author speculates on the level of personal antagonism that may or may not have resulted, and on the ultimate effects of these circumstances on Grainger’s level of professional achievement.

It is common to read of Percy Grainger’s father as a man whom history forgot or as an aside in the narrative of his famous son. Despite efforts by Percy to rediscover him and some more recent scholarship aimed at resurrecting his memory, there are still plenty of gaps in our knowledge of the life and work of the architect John H. Grainger.

I want to add some details to our understanding of the man who designed Melbourne’s Princes Bridge and who worked across every Australian colony during his 40-year career. John Grainger was a complex character, both accomplished and flawed. His body of work is now being reassessed by architectural historians and becoming appreciated anew, and along with this there is growing interest in his architecture and in his life story.

But like others, who have tended to approach his story through the prism of his son, I came across John Grainger through the work of another person, John James Clark, the man Grainger probably considered his nemesis and who appeared repeatedly to humiliate him professionally. This is therefore a particular, or specialised, view of the subject and one that may be premature, coming as it does before a dedicated substantial biography of John Grainger lays a foundation of knowledge on which to build and debate. And because this research is based on a series of encounters between Grainger and Clark, it is necessarily limited and misses many of the seminal moments and achievements in Grainger’s life that a more general account might include.

There is another qualification that I must make before we begin. This is a story based largely on circumstantial evidence. Despite this, I am prepared to proffer a conclusion based on my reading of the evidence. But I encourage the reader to treat it with scepticism and to remember that I cannot prove the thesis that there was long-term enmity between the two protagonists. While
there are several occasions when it seems safe to assume that Grainger was aggrieved by Clark, there are no telltale documents that prove he was actually embittered about the person who kept winning architectural competitions at his expense. As historians we can either suspend judgement about the matter until such evidence emerges, or we can opt to consider the material at hand and speculate about its meaning. In this paper I will present the case—within the limitations already described—in the hope that the reader will form his or her own conclusions.

John Harry Grainger was an accomplished engineer and architect. In a career marked by bouts of alcoholism, serious physical illness and erratic behavior he managed to produce fine works in every Australian colony or state, and in New Zealand. He trained in London, travelled widely on the continent and finally arrived in South Australia in February 1877, where he initially worked as a draftsman for the Public Works Department. In 1879, after several successful projects, such as the elegant Albert Bridge on the River Torrens, he won two bridge commissions in Victoria: the Sale Swing Bridge and the Princes Bridge in Melbourne. 2

The Princes Bridge commission was significant in both a physical and symbolic sense. Replacing two earlier incarnations, it was the principal means of crossing the Yarra River and served to unite the city’s northern and southern halves. While Grainger’s bridge was an engineering challenge, it was also conceived as a statement of civic pride that would reflect the aspirations of ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ with its projections for future prosperity and growth. Grainger moved to Melbourne to begin the project and briefly joined the Public Works Department in March 1881. But it would be another seven years before the bridge was finally opened.

Grainger therefore missed out on working alongside J.J. Clark, who had left the Public Works Department in 1879 after 27 years as its most accomplished designer. Clark had arrived in Melbourne on an immigrant ship in 1852 at the age of 14 and immediately began designing Melbourne buildings. He had mastered almost every building type, as well as virtually every Renaissance style. His works included Government House, the Royal Mint, the asylums at Kew, Ararat and Beechworth and the Geelong Supreme Court. His masterpiece was the grand Treasury Building in Spring Street, which he designed at the age of 19.

Clark was retrenched from the Public Works Department in January 1878 during the budget crisis known as Black Wednesday. He returned to the department to oversee work on the Melbourne Supreme Court, but by the time John Grainger arrived in Melbourne Clark had cut his ties to take up private practice in Sydney. Although Clark had left town, Grainger would have felt his presence all around him in the built environment of Melbourne.
Grainger shared an appreciation for Renaissance revivalism and would have been acutely aware of Clark by reputation, as well as through examples of his work.

It appears that the two men’s careers first intersected in 1883, when they both vied for the commission to design the Brisbane Public Offices (later called the Treasury and now better known as the Brisbane Casino). In the middle of that year several prominent architectural commissions were on offer in Queensland. The chief prize was the post of Queensland colonial architect, which had been vacant since the departure of its long-serving incumbent F.D.G. Stanley. At the same time, public competitions were announced for a new Brisbane Town Hall and for a new Masonic Temple, as well as for the Public Offices. It was a measure of Clark’s skill that he eventually won all three commissions, as well as the post of colonial architect, which he took up in September of that year. This success certainly came at the expense of Grainger, but it would also prove to be Clark’s undoing as he struggled to meet the demands of such an onerous workload.

The Brisbane Public Offices

The competition for the Public Offices closed at the end of November 1883. As the new colonial architect, Clark was required to sit on the Competitions Board to help assess the various entries. He dutifully revealed that he had a conflict of interest and wrote to the secretary for public works, William Miles, to excuse himself from the board. In his letter he made the contestable claim that he had ‘made a design’ for the Public Offices before he was ‘appointed’ to the position of colonial architect. Technically this may have been correct but Clark failed to mention that much of the design work had in fact been conducted after he became aware of his appointment as colonial architect and that a great deal more was done after he had taken up the post.

The Competitions Board decided in mid-December to award first place to John Grainger’s firm of Grainger & D’Ebro. The second place was awarded to Smith & Johnson of Melbourne and third place to Grainger & Naish of Adelaide—where John Grainger was still listed as a principal, even though he had left South Australia three years earlier to join D’Ebro in Melbourne. The stage was set for a public brawl between the competitors, many of whom were annoyed that at least two entries, including Clark’s, had been eliminated because the judges believed that they had exceeded the cost ceiling of £100,000. Clark had estimated the cost of his design at £90,000. Some of the unsuccessful competitors rallied behind Clark’s design while condemning Grainger & D’Ebro’s as inadequate. They were joined over the ensuing weeks by the press, which openly backed Clark in what often looked like an organised campaign.
The commentators seemed to agree that Clark’s plan made the best use of the site, allowed scope for a grander building over time, met the government’s current office requirements and arguably its budget as well. All ten entries were displayed in the committee rooms in Parliament House following the decision. After viewing the designs, the *Brisbane Courier* concluded that Clark’s submission was ‘infinitely superior both in design treatment and general effect’ and, as the only three-storey building among the entries, would be a ‘really splendid edifice such as would be a credit to Brisbane probably a century hence’. The newspaper questioned Grainger & D’Ebro’s use of ‘architectural devices’ such as dormers and a mansard roof, arguing that these represented an unsuccessful attempt to give the structure ‘a more imposing appearance’. The design was also considered too similar to Charles Tiffin’s Parliament House and the newspaper feared that the surrounding buildings of a growing colony would soon dwarf the Public Offices. Needless to say, the

**Figure 1:** Grainger & D’Ebro, Plan (unexecuted) for first floor of Brisbane Public Offices. Queensland State Archives, file WOR/219.
firm of Grainger & D’Ebro was unimpressed by the criticism of its winning design and the adulation for the work of a competitor whose entry had not even ranked among the top three.

Grainger was, by one description, a man with ‘a lateral, even combative way of thinking and arguing’, which may explain the firm’s reaction as it became increasingly apparent that Clark and his design were winning over the people of Brisbane. The firm wrote to the Brisbane Courier, advising that ‘the unsuccessful competitors may rest thoroughly assured that these gentlemen (on the Competition Board) have done their work faithfully and well and that the best men have won’. The firm described Clark’s perspective drawing as a ‘showy perspective arranged to suit the eye’ and ‘one of the best we have ever seen in execution and in the principal object of architectural perspectives, namely to mislead’. Grainger & D’Ebro claimed that Clark’s ‘deceit’ was intended to make the building look taller.

Figure 2: Note from Grainger & D’Ebro accompanying their winning—but unexecuted—design for the Brisbane Public Offices. Queensland State Archives, file WOR/219.
These were extraordinary accusations, considering Clark was, by this stage, established as Queensland’s colonial architect. Soon others were backing Clark. The Brisbane architectural firm of Brown & David argued that Grainger & D’Ebro had ‘cooked’ its elevations, while a writer under the pseudonym ‘A Brisbane Architect’ described Grainger & D’Ebro’s roof design as a ‘top hamper’ which should be paid for by that firm and not the citizens of Queensland. Another competitor, J.S. Nightingale, who had also sided publicly with Clark against Grainger & D’Ebro, filed an official protest against the decision of the Competitions Board on 12 January 1884. Clark followed suit two days later. The press was enjoying the spectacle, reporting every twist and turn. It is tempting to conclude that Clark had a hand in orchestrating this coverage as it so clearly served his interests. But the one person who was absent from the public debate was Clark himself. There are several possible explanations for this. Perhaps as colonial architect he opted to maintain a dignified silence, confident that his case was already well represented. Perhaps he played a more calculating game, backgrounding reporters while appearing aloof. This appeared to be the case when an article was published discussing the construction in stages of Melbourne’s Registrar General’s Office as a useful model for Brisbane’s Public Offices. The inference was clear to anyone in the know: Clark should be trusted with the Public Offices given he had also designed the Melbourne building. Or perhaps Clark was simply absent during this period, a theory made plausible by the fact that his mother died in Melbourne on 4 January.

Sometime between mid-February and mid-March 1884 Clark was summoned to a meeting with Premier Samuel Griffith, to explain his design for the Public Offices. Griffith liked Clark’s vision, apparently agreeing it would be a great pity to ‘destroy’ such a site with a two-storey building. When he asked Clark whether he would be happy if his plan were adopted, Clark replied: ‘nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see my design carried out’.

Grainger & D’Ebro soon became aware of the decision and recorded the firm’s bitter disappointment in a letter on 26 March. The architects claimed that, in their wide experience, ‘an injustice like the present case is unparalleled’.

Griffith was untroubled, replying five days later that office requirements had changed and that consequently none of the original entries was now deemed suitable. Clark’s external elevations would be adopted but he would now need to prepare a fresh internal plan. The press noted that the unorthodox process meant the government did not own Clark’s drawings because his was not one of the premiated entries. But Clark was also disadvantaged, as the government would never pay him for his design.

Clark compounded Grainger & D’Ebro’s humiliation by effectively rubbing the architectural style Grainger was then championing. He did this...
in the general description accompanying his Public Offices entry. Although it is not written in Clark’s hand, it must have represented his views and was in all likelihood dictated by him: ‘The style adopted is free from any tawdry attempt to impose cheap imitation of French roofs as Architectural features and it depends solely on the massing of true Architectural forms’.

Figure 3: Brisbane Public Offices, now the Brisbane Casino. Photograph by Andrew Dodd.
This must have been partly directed at the Queensland Parliament House’s mansard roof, designed by the former colonial architect, Charles Tiffin. In fact, Clark believed that every example of what he called ‘roof effects’ in the colonies had been a ‘failure’ because each had fallen short of ‘incurring the necessary expense’ to ensure the work was executed properly. This helps explain the ambitious nature of his soon-to-be-completed design for the Brisbane Town Hall, which did involve mansard pyramidal vaulting. But perhaps there was also another intended target, as Clark’s derogatory comments about French-style roofing suggest that he had some inside knowledge of the design by Grainger & D’Ebro, which also featured a series of mansard roofs. In short, Clark believed Second Empire motifs executed cheaply were best avoided. He said, ‘the building is designed on the best Italian models as being good for all ages and not judged by the caprice of fashion’. Whether intended or not, this was an assault on Grainger, who had closely studied the French Renaissance and adopted much of its syntax in his own work.

**Brisbane Town Hall**

While all this was unfolding, vital decisions about Brisbane’s new Town Hall were being made. On 30 January 1884 the Brisbane Municipal Council met at a special meeting. There was a sense of urgency as elections were imminent and some aldermen feared the opportunity to erect a new town hall could be lost if the council did not move quickly to select a design. There were 26 entries, collectively described as ‘embracing every style of architecture’. One entry, entitled ‘Victoria Regina’, had been championed by Alderman Heal who described it as ‘sound, substantial, bold, attractive and yet not too elaborate’. He confessed he preferred its higher elevations because it better suited the low-lying site. He told the council that it would have received his vote if the £40,000 budget had been increased. Despite his enthusiasm for this entry, Alderman Heal moved to endorse a design submitted by Clark and his brother, George Clark.

When the councillors opened the sealed entries they discovered that ‘Victoria Regina’ was the work of Grainger & D’Ebro. The architects’ fates were now reversed. Grainger & D’Ebro had lost because the assessors believed their entry would exceed the budget, whereas the Clarks had succeeded because the firm had stayed within the budget. The difference, however, was that the Clark entry was not undermined by a negative public campaign.

The council voted to display all the entries in the Brisbane Town Hall. The Brisbane city engineer had arranged for all the available Public Offices competition entries to be displayed alongside them. The exhibition attracted
large crowds, no doubt bolstered by the publicity generated by the feuding architects. Grainger & D'Ebro were again insulted when the *Telegraph* declared the council had picked ‘undoubtedly the handsomest and most convenient building shown’. The Clarks’ design was described as ‘an ornament to Brisbane’ and a building that would ‘grace any city in the world’. Grainger & D'Ebro’s entry was dismissed as a grand building but one that ‘appears somewhat heavy’.15

Grainger & D'Ebro sent an angry letter of protest to the Brisbane Council but this strategy backfired when the letter was read aloud at the next meeting. The mayor described it as ‘very unprofessional’ while Alderman Porter said it ‘showed worse taste than he had ever heard of on the part of any professional man’.16 It was so venomous that the council voted not to dignify it with a response other than a perfunctory receipt accompanying the firm’s returned drawings.17

Grainger & D'Ebro did have a point. Although the council had opted for a cheaper design, it quickly set about increasing the building’s costs by making additional demands. Clark later claimed that he warned the council about the cost implications. At the council’s first meeting after accepting Clark’s design, it added an entire wing, increasing the costs from £40,000 to at least £70,000. But in truth, the council had no firm idea how it would procure the necessary funds. Bickering about the costs continued for months until eventually the entire project was stalled indefinitely.

The third blow for Grainger & D'Ebro came later that year when the Clark Brothers’ design was selected by the city’s Freemasons for the new Alice Street Masonic Temple. Grainger & D'Ebro failed to even reach the short list. George Clark was listed as the principal architect, but this was just a device to disguise J.J. Clark’s involvement. This was necessary because his heavy non-government workload was beginning to attract the ire of his minister. Several projects had been delayed and a perception was developing that the colonial architect was at fault. Despite a punishing schedule and the fact that the day-to-day work on his outside projects was largely handled by others, Clark was unable to change this perception. The Queensland government sacked him in December 1885.

The rush to Western Australia
The next known encounter between J.J. Clark and John Grainger took place 13 years later on the other side of the continent. Clark had spent the intervening years in Brisbane building a private practice with his son, Edward. Much of the work he had initiated as colonial architect, such as the immigration barracks at Kangaroo Point and the courthouses in Charters Towers, Mackay and Warwick, had come to fruition. Despite this, he had been
effectively barred from government work, even on projects that he had
designed, such as the Toowoomba Lunatic Asylum and the Brisbane Public
Offices. He did have success, however, at the Brisbane Children’s Hospital
where he designed a new pavilion-style wing, in partnership with Charles
McLay. These were lean times for architects outside government employment.
With Western Australia experiencing its own gold rush, Clark knew that
public works would surely follow. So he travelled across the continent to try
his fortunes in the West.

Meanwhile, Grainger was experiencing both success and failure. He had
designed churches, offices, town halls and bridges across Australia and New
Zealand. But his partnership with D’Ebro collapsed after just four years. He
managed to survive on his own with small commissions for houses, a brewery
and hotel alterations. In 1896 he tasted success when he beat 30 other
competitors with a magnificent design for the Maryborough School of Arts.

By 1888 Grainger was living in Melbourne. He was drinking heavily and
suffering from delirium tremens and nicotine poisoning. He had suffered a
‘serious breakdown’ and was in a state of personal ‘wilderness’. He had also
‘completely abandoned his professional work’. By 1891 he was broke and
back in Adelaide where he appears to have worked hard to control his
addiction. Two years later he was living in rural South Australia, surviving on
a small retainer and designing farm buildings, and by 1894 he became
involved in a scheme to design a crushing mill, although this ended with his
dismissal in 1896.

Clark arrived in Western Australia in May 1896, at the midpoint of Sir
John Forrest’s long term as premier, and at a moment of rapid expansion in
public works. Given his past experience with hospital and asylum
construction Clark was put in charge of the demanding health portfolio within
the Public Works Department. But, as a keen observer of civil administration,
Clark soon saw deficiencies in the way the department was run. He prepared a
report for his superior on the importance of appointing a chief architect who
was focused on planning for and designing public buildings and not distracted
by the myriad other functions of the department. He believed it was
important to take some of the load off the superintendent of buildings, who
was burdened with a difficult clerical and liaison role and had little time to
articulate an architectural vision for the colony.

The position of chief architect was duly filled and the appointee was none
other than John Grainger. It is not known whether Clark had lobbied for the
position in the hope that he would be appointed himself. However, it is likely
that Clark’s past in Queensland would have been known, and would have
counted against him. John Grainger began on 1 March 1897. There is no
record to indicate how Clark reacted to the news that Grainger had been
appointed, although it is tempting to conclude that the events of 1883–84 had not been forgotten. Unwittingly Clark had done Grainger a great service in lobbying for the appointment of a chief architect. The appointment salvaged Grainger’s career.

**Fremantle Town Hall**

Soon after his appointment Grainger fell ill with typhoid and was absent for some months, so it is not until later in 1897 that we see the first interaction between Grainger and Clark. This concerned the Fremantle Town Hall, which required extensive remodelling and additions. Clark and his son Edward submitted a design. But this building was rather special because it had been designed by the firm of Grainger & D’Ebro back in 1882. Not surprisingly, the Fremantle Municipal Council took advantage of Grainger’s return to Western Australia by co-opting him to assess the entries for the Town Hall additions.

Needless to say the Clarks’ entry won the competition. We do not know how Grainger reacted to the news that he had selected the Clarks’ anonymous design. But there was at least one clue that he might have missed. The Clarks had given their design the motto ‘Experience’, the same name Clark and his brother George had used on their victorious but troublesome design for the Brisbane Town Hall in 1883.

In his report to the Fremantle Municipal Council, written before the identity of the winners was revealed, Grainger noted, ‘I wish it to be distinctly understood that in making this selection, I do not recommend any of these schemes for ultimate adoption as now existing’. He suggested a meeting with the winning architect, when he would ‘suggest modifications’ that he considered ‘absolutely necessary to adopt to attain a satisfactory result’.20

Tellingly, J.J. Clark remained in the background while Edward met with Grainger to negotiate over the alterations. Judging by Edward’s report to the council, he accepted some, but not all, of Grainger’s suggestions and convinced the council to adopt his scheme with only five changes proposed by Grainger. Of these the most significant were the repositioning of the proscenium of the stage and the erection of the balcony facing onto High Street. In the end Edward was vindicated and Grainger insulted when the press concluded that ‘the general effect of the alterations and improvements has been to convert an unsuitable and somewhat gloomy structure into a convenient and pleasing one’.21
Figure 4: Fremantle Town Hall. Photograph by Andrew Dodd.
J.J. Clark had completely removed himself from the process. We can safely assume he was the principal designer but it was Edward who was acknowledged as the winner when the council judged the seven entries in December 1897. It was Edward who appeared before the council the following week and on several occasions over the next month to negotiate the exact scope of the extensions. It was also Edward who received the plaudits of the *West Australian* when the building was re-opened the following July. The work entailed an almost doubling of the size of the stage, the construction of a dress circle, the addition of a balcony facing onto High Street and the creation of a magnificent ceiling in the main hall. The ceiling’s rich detailing remains one of the building’s prized features and in all probability was the work of J.J. Clark, as it bears a remarkable resemblance to both the modelling and detailing of Clark’s ballroom at Melbourne’s Government House. The combination of demarcated bays and groin vaults stems from his unexecuted design for the Free Public Library in Sydney in 1862. The *West Australian* reported that ‘the ceiling work is especially good, and the pleasant aspect is materially heightened by the efficiency of the wall work’. The newspaper believed the hall had become perhaps the most ‘commodious’ and ‘convenient’ venue for entertainment in the entire colony. Edward’s contribution was described as ‘highly commendable’ while his father received no recognition whatsoever.

Without knowing something of the rivals’ history, we may see Clark’s decision to remain in the background as curious, especially as he had left the Public Works Department and was back in private practice by the time the Town Hall extensions commenced. Outside the constraints of the Public Works Department, Clark would ordinarily have been keen to put his name to his designs and he was always happy to be identified as a partner with his son whenever they worked together.

**Return to Melbourne**

Nearly a decade later Clark and Grainger met again in Melbourne, but not until after Clark encountered Grainger’s erstwhile partner, Charles D’Ebro. It was June 1905 and D’Ebro—as the president of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects—was asked to sit on the selection panel for the huge commission of the new Melbourne Hospital. The Clarks’ entry won second prize but D’Ebro could have been forgiven for a sense of déjà vu, because before long Clark was demonstrating how the conclusion of the public competition marked the beginning of the real contest.

The first prize of £300 was awarded to J.A.B. Koch & Son. However, the project was stalled until September 1907 when the hospital building fund was given £100,000 by the estate of the former *Argus* proprietor, Edward Wilson.
Under the terms of the donation the trustees had the power to suggest the architect. The trustees exercised this authority on 25 May 1908 when they wrote to the hospital recommending J.J. and E.J. Clark. As the donation was effectively dependent on the trustees’ choice, the hospital’s building committee had little option but to accept it, even though doing so deprived Koch of the work. This was especially embarrassing as Koch had a long-standing attachment to the hospital.

By late November 1906 there was yet another opportunity to reignite old rivalries when the Clarks submitted their design for the administration offices attached to the Melbourne Town Hall. John Grainger’s new firm of Grainger, Kennedy & Little won the competition in February 1907, but it would soon lose part of the commission to the Clarks, who managed only second place. The firm was asked to include several aspects of the Clarks’ proposed exterior in the design. Given the pattern of events already described, this must have been deeply humiliating. Nevertheless, in June of that year Grainger, Kennedy & Little began preparing working drawings and did absorb much of the Clarks’ design into their own.26

Conclusion
One reading of this evidence is that while there was professional rivalry between J.J. Clark and John H. Grainger, there was little or no enmity, or at least none of any significance. Architectural competitions in the 19th and early 20th centuries were rarely convivial and often resulted in disputes and public acrimony. Career architects were schooled in these rites and some, at least, managed to retain a degree of personal detachment. Although the stakes were high and the contests were intense, this does not mean the participants became embittered or revengeful.

Another reading is that Clark had in fact been the ultimate loser in some of these encounters. For example, winning the commission for Brisbane’s Public Offices eventually destroyed his chances of success as Queensland’s colonial architect. By chasing that large private commission he had taken on more than he was able to manage while also overseeing a frenetic department. To add insult to injury, he was never paid for his design. In Perth, Clark was not selected for the senior post that he had lobbied to establish. In fact his advocacy paved the way for Grainger’s return to mainstream architectural practice, leading to Grainger’s personal rehabilitation and the production of his fine body of work in Western Australia.

But the scope and nature of these encounters suggest there was something significant going on. Few architectural competitions have had the same intensity and ferocity as the contest for the Brisbane Public Offices. The disappointment of Grainger and D’Ebro was palpable and their writings at the
time convey a deep resentment of the process and the outcome. The fact that Clark stole the competition from under them must have hurt and must surely have been compounded by the outcome in the competition for the Brisbane Town Hall soon after. We know that Grainger and D'Ebro were incensed by the result. It seems logical that some of this anger was focused on the person who had captured the commission. The fact that Grainger and D'Ebro were prepared to criticise Clark, even though he was then colonial architect, suggests that the normal codes of decorum and deference had broken down and that this had gone beyond normal rivalry. In Western Australia, where the circumstances are more complex, and where Clark and Grainger worked together, we have little to work with other than the curious case of the additions to Grainger & D'Ebro’s Fremantle Town Hall. In that instance Clark’s decision to step aside in favour of his son suggests that the enmity of Brisbane had left a legacy. It appears that Grainger had unwittingly chosen the Clarks’ proposed additions to the Town Hall and that the media’s subsequent preference for the Clarks’ work (over the original design) must have been hurtful to Grainger. It is also difficult to believe that Grainger was not aggrieved and humiliated by the events in Melbourne, where a significant element of one of his greatest commissions was appropriated by Clark.

Grainger did have several successes throughout his career, just as long as Clark was not around at the time. In Melbourne John Grainger and Charles D'Ebro had created the Georges Building and Masonic Temple, both in Collins Street. In country Victoria he had devised water schemes for Benalla, Sale and Bairnsdale, and a system of bridges, floodgates and a weir on the Broken River. In Perth he is credited with a significant role in the design of the ballroom at Government House as well as the Supreme Court, Parliament House and elements of the art gallery, library and museum complex. Similarly in several regional Western Australian cities he has left significant buildings, including the Warden’s Court in Coolgardie. His influence had extended to New Zealand, Queensland and Adelaide, and even to Paris, where he designed the Western Australian court for the 1900 International Exposition. But in 1906 he had suffered the indignity of losing his bid for a fellowship of the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects following a ballot of his peers. It seems that his old partner, D'Ebro, who was then president of the institute, was a factor on that occasion. Interestingly Clark may have also been blacklisted because he joined the institute as a member only after D'Ebro’s resignation later that year. But Grainger did enjoy some respect. In 1909 he was asked to lead a successful inquiry into the architectural division of the Victorian Public Works Department.27

Grainger outlived Clark, but died much younger. According to one obituary,28 Clark was the oldest practising architect in Australia when he died
in 1915 at the age of 77. He was finalising one of the largest commissions of his life, the new Melbourne Hospital, in conjunction with his son, Edward. As discussed, that commission also came at the cost of the architect who had won the public competition, J.A.B. Koch. The Clarks had come second but were eventually chosen to undertake the work. By the time of Clark’s death, illness had crippled Grainger. He had been largely incapacitated after the strains of completing Elizabeth House (now demolished) in central Melbourne for the National Bank. By 1916 he was in great pain and could not write. He was only 62 when he passed away in April 1917.

Rivalries are not ephemeral things in architecture. By 1907 monuments in stone had been erected in three Australian cities to document the contests between Grainger and Clark. On each one the evidence of Clark’s success was plainly visible; on the exterior of the Melbourne Town Hall’s additions, throughout the interior of the Fremantle Town Hall and all over central Brisbane’s most prominent building. We can say with certainty that this rivalry had a material effect on Grainger’s output and that his life’s work was diminished by it. Perhaps a more interesting question is how it affected the personal character and emotional wellbeing of a man who was often compromised and enfeebled. I don’t feel qualified to speculate on that question, but I suspect the answer might be intriguing.

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NOTES


3 Brisbane Courier, 2 January 1884.

4 Brisbane Courier, 3 January 1884.


6 Brisbane Courier, 7 January 1884.

7 J.J. Clark, Queensland Public Works Inquiry, 1900, qu. 10500, p. 343.

8 Grainger & D’Ebro, Letter, 26 March 1884 (QSA 84/2360 and 84/3693 WOR/A390 item 108103).

9 Samuel Griffith (note in margin of letter from Grainger & D’Ebro), 1 April 1884 (QSA 84/2360 and 84/3693 WOR/A390, item 108103).

10 In May 1890 Clark applied unsuccessfully for £1,000 compensation for the use of his design for the Public Offices. He was advised that the Solicitor General believed that he had no claim. See QSA 90/1327 WOR/G46, also cited in Helen Bennett, ‘The competition, J.J. Clark and appointment as Colonial Architect’, unpublished report prepared for the Queensland Public Works Department, Brisbane, 1990, p. 19.


12 Clark, ‘Public Offices Brisbane, general description and specification’.

13 Brisbane Courier, 29 January 1884.

14 Brisbane Courier, 31 January 1884.

15 Telegraph, 31 January 1884.

16 Brisbane Courier, 26 February 1884.

17 Brisbane Courier, 26 February 1884.


19 Tibbits, ‘Percy Grainger’s father’, p. 10. Grainger became ill again in 1903, precipitating a return to Melbourne where he would recover once more and find work from 1907 until his eventual retirement in 1915.

20 Fremantle Municipal Council, Minutes, 7 December 1897, Minute book no. 7, p. 338 (Fremantle Library).

21 The West Australian, 7 July 1898, p. 4.

22 Fremantle Municipal Council, Minutes, 7 December 1897.


25 *The West Australian*, 7 July 1898, p. 4.


28 ‘Death of a leading architect’, *Argus*, 26 June 1915.


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