Arthur Grenville’s new velocipede galop
Rare Music Collection, University of Melbourne Library

From the hobby-horses that appeared in 1817 to the penny-farthings of the 1870s, different versions of the bicycle were around for much of the 19th century. By the final decade, the ‘bicycle craze’ had taken off around the globe. The machine’s mobility, safety and affordability opened up the world to its users, with women especially discovering a freedom of movement beyond the neighbourhoods in which they lived.

The bicycle craze coincided conveniently with the late 19th-century popularity of songs written about new inventions, and led to tunes that are still known today, like Harry Dacre’s Daisy Bell (bicycle built for two), written in 1892.

Arthur Grenville’s new velocipede galop is a precursor to the end-of-the-century craze, published in 1869 and celebrating the invention of the three-wheeled velocipede, pictured on the front cover. This handsome lithograph shows riders streaming down a hill, a woman leading the way, and embodies the early freedom associated with cycling. In the background, two figures tumble off their velocipedes, while the male rider in the centre of the image crashes through the title text at full speed, reminding us that the ‘new velocipede’ brought, along with freedom, excitement and danger.

‘Florian Pascal’ (Joseph Benjamin Williams, English, 1847–1923, also known as ‘Arthur Grenville’)
Teaching ideas
The University of Melbourne’s curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, contact a collection manager.

Music History 2: 19th-Century Music and Ideas
Study the craze of music written about new inventions in the second half of the 19th century, in particular during the 1890s. Explore the University of Melbourne’s Rare Music Collection for more examples, and discuss their influence on future music.

Exhibition Management
Consider the challenges of exhibiting objects from a music collection, and ways to display objects that have related aural components. Explore the Rare Music Collection and discuss these questions. Also consider varying interpretations of this material and discuss the different didactic texts that could accompany it.

Sex, Gender and Culture: An Introduction
Discuss the invention of the bicycle and how it changed the lifestyles of women in the 19th century. Explore the manner in which women lived before and after the bicycle’s emergence into the mainstream.

Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction
‘The bicycle, the bicycle surely, should always be the vehicle of novelists and poets.’
(Christopher Morley)
Consider the effects of the invention of the bicycle on literature in the 19th and early 20th centuries. An invention that became particularly popular among writers, it opened up the world to them. Also, search for examples of the incorporation of other new inventions into literature at this time.

Knowledge, Learning and Culture
Use objects from the University of Melbourne Collections to paint a picture of the cultural scene during the 19th century, using New velocipede galop as a starting point. In particular, find objects that refer to new inventions, and discuss the knowledge that can be gained from them.
Intersecting objects

Conrad Liebmann
The cycle waltz
Melbourne: Allan & Co., 1897
Rare Music Collection
University of Melbourne Library

Percy Grainger (Australian/American, 1882–1961)
Bicycle belonging to the artist, 1897
watercolour on paper
19.6 × 26.2 cm
Grainger Museum
University of Melbourne
0000.5051

To learn more, visit the websites of the Rare Music Collection and the Grainger Museum.

Further reading