

Leopold Hartley Grindon¹

1818 – 1904

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(With Portrait, Plate 4.)

Leopold Hartley Grindon was born in 1818 in the city of Bristol, where his father was solicitor and city coroner, and where Leo Grindon passed the first twenty years of his life. He went to school and “college” till the age of 15, though he never ceased learning, having an active and omnivorous mind. Instructed at school in the usual scholastic subjects, he acquired by his own reading a knowledge of Astronomy, Geology and Botany, his bent being evidently largely towards science. At an early age, he was drawn to the study of Botany, and when 13 he began a collection of dried plants, carefully mounting them on the then usual square sheets of letter-paper. A few years later he was concerned in starting the Philo-botanical Society of Bristol.

At the age of 18 he began the more ambitious plan of forming a herbarium which should not be limited to British plants, but which should comprise all plants found growing in Britain whether wild or cultivated. Many of these plants he obtained by buying the seeds and rearing the plants in his little garden. This herbarium of specimens carefully mounted on foolscap sheets he continued until 1853, when he decided to commence a third herbarium of specimens mounted on somewhat larger sheets (19 × 12 inches). He also commenced to develop a long cherished plan of incorporating in his herbarium whatever drawings and illustrations he could procure, especially of plants which it was impossible or extremely difficult to illustrate by actual specimens, such as Cacti and other succulent plants.

“I desired,” he says in a short account of his herbarium, “also to introduce every bit of printed matter referring to the plant that might come in my way, with descriptions alike of the individual species and of the Natural Orders, the uses and other particulars also have a place and seeing that Botany is wreathed also with all kinds of poetical and other human associations, everything that would illustrate these was also to go into the Herbarium so-called, which thus to be a Herbarium and a Botanical library fused into one.”

This project which he carried out with great thoroughness so as to render his herbarium a most valuable teaching instrument, was no doubt partly due to the fact that Grindon himself had by then become in his spare time a teacher of Botany and recognised the value of having not only his specimens, but his botanical illustrations and notes systematically arranged. All those who heard Leo Grindon give an address or lecture and those who were his private pupils will agree that he had a great aptitude for imparting information in a most attractive manner; he evidently had a real gift for teaching.

When Grindon moved to Manchester in 1838 at the age of 20 he became cashier in the firm of John Whittaker & Co., a post which he held until 1864. His first residence in Manchester was in No. 4 Portland Street, on what is now the Infirmary site opposite Aytown Street. In those days Portland Street was a mean street with only one large warehouse. Later he removed to Romford Street, chiefly because of the nice garden which he enriched with many rare plants. Here he lived for thirty years until in 1883 he moved to Cecil Street, where he spent the rest of his days. It was in the residence in Romford Street that Leo Grindon wrote most of his books, and considering that he had a daily professional occupation as cashier he must have worked very assiduously. Indeed, he never wasted time, and had the habit when kept waiting while collecting money accounts for his firm to occupy himself with reading or indeed with writing. This energy he put forth in spite of ill-health, from which he suffered most of his life; for in his manuscript notes he says “my life ever since I was 24 has been sadly distressed by an incurable constitutional malady, no suspicion of which has ever been entertained by my friends and acquaintances. Innumerable hours, yea days beyond the counting, have been rendered wretched by the said malady.”

Apart from many articles contributed to botanical and horticultural Journals and to the *Manchester City News*. His more substantial botanical publications are:—

Life, its Nature, Varieties and Phenomena. 1856.

Manchester Walks and Wild Flowers. 1858.

The Manchester Flora. 1859.

¹A lecture – the first of a series, entitled “The Manchester Botanists” – delivered at the Manchester Museum on November 23rd, 1929

British and Garden Botany. 1864.
Summer Rambles in Cheshire, Derbyshire, Lancashire, and Yorkshire, 1866.
The Trees of Old England. 1868.
Echoes in Plant and Flower Life. 1869.
The Fairfield Orchids. 1872.
The Pathway to Botany. 1872.
History of the Rhododendron. 1876.
Figurative Language. 1879.
Country Rambles. 1882.
The Shakespeare Flora. 1883.
Fruits and Fruit Trees. 1885.

It will be seen that a number of these books deal with Field Botany, and indeed country walks were always a great delight for him. They had indeed been so from boyhood, for after leaving school he took no other sort of exercise. In Manchester, Grindon was the founder in 1860 of the Manchester Field Naturalist Society, and throughout his lifetime its active President.

The first of his published books, *Life, its Nature, Variety and Phenomena*, was written under the stimulus and with the encouragement of Rev. J. H. Smithson of the Swedenborgian Church. It gives good insight into the theological and philosophical views of the author which colour much of his later writings. He was a believer in the unity of nature, and regarded man as the arche-type of the entire system of living things. He begins, therefore, with a physiological account of man and extends his consideration to other living organisms, animal and vegetable. He does not, however, confine himself to the physical aspects of human life, but discusses also spiritual matters though in his preface he recognises that "some readers may regard the combination of physiology, poetry and theology as detrimental to the value of the book." It did indeed meet with plenty of adverse criticism, but in spite of that, a second edition was immediately called for, and a few years later a third and fourth edition was published.

Mr Grindon's reference to poetry was due to his very characteristic and copious quotations from the most varied authors. He had, indeed, an astonishingly wide acquaintance with literature in general and poetry in particular and a most retentive memory, for his lectures and addresses were always full of quotations. His literary bent can best be understood by a perusal of his book, entitled *Figurative Language: its Origin and Constitution*, which, though not issued to the public until 1879, was a revised version of a book privately printed in 1850. and, therefore, really the first book he wrote. Though commencing with an account of figures of speech and the figurative meaning of many poetical phrases, amply illustrated by quotations, Mr Grindon goes on to discuss the etymology of many of our words and the changes they have undergone in their derivation from other languages. It is interesting to note how this etymological interest and his philosophical outlook, to which we owe his two books, coloured so much of his later purely botanical works, and also his lectures and addresses. Leo Grindon's mind did not work in watertight compartments, it passed with amazing ease and rapidity from science to speculation and from Botany to poetry. Indeed, he illustrates his Botany with poetical quotations, and made the difficult botanical terminology easy by etymological explanations. These were perhaps some of the reasons why he was so successful a teacher of Botany.

It was while he was still holding the post of cashier that Mr Grindon undertook to give private lessons in Botany, which had generally to be given in the evening. In this pursuit he was very successful, and though he did not advertise his courses, he was recommended from one pupil to another. There must have been at that time considerable interest in the subject, and under Mr Grindon's tuition it grew, as was clearly evidenced by the formation of the Manchester Field Naturalists' Society. An excellent miniature portrait of Mr Grindon, painted by Miss Helen Entwistle, has been given by the Field Naturalist Society to the Manchester University on permanent loan, and is on view in the University library.

Later, when he gave up his post with Messrs Whittaker, he devoted more of his time to the teaching of Botany and general Natural History, not only in Manchester, but in the surrounding towns, going as far afield as Southport and into Yorkshire. A lady in the latter county asked him to begin with heraldry and then to go on with Cathedral architecture, to be followed by Botany. The two former subjects were concentrated into the half year, and were allowed to be quite what the lady wishes; after making some little way in Botany, she thought it would be of no use to go on, for it was plain that it would never end.

To assist his pupils in their studies and also for the instruction of those who desired to study Botany privately, Grindon published *The Pathway to Botany*, which was an enlargement of the Introduction to *The Manchester Flora* and the *British and Garden Botany*. These two books, as well as the *Manual of British and Foreign Plants*, established Grindon's

reputation as a botanist. Other botanical publications like the *Summer Rambles in Cheshire, Derbyshire, etc.*, and *Manchester Walks and Wild Flowers*, indicate his love of rambling, while *The Shakespeare Flora* illustrates his devotion to literature.

It is well that Grindon has put on record in his books on the Flora of Manchester and of the surroundings, the plants that existed there about the middle of the last century, for many, alas, have since disappeared by the inevitable outward extension of the city. As he tells us even in his day many were no longer to be found. In 1840, "the fields by St George's Church, in Chester Road, were blue every March and April with the spring crocus." How many of the plants found in and near Manchester in 1860-80 have gone the same way? Grindon's authority as a botanist and his excellence as a teacher were recognised by his appointment as lecturer in the Manchester Royal School for Medicine in 1852, a position which he held for 25 years, in fact until the School of Medicine became incorporated with the Owen's College in 1877. In the earlier part of his connection with the School of Medicine, he had to fix the time of his lectures in the dinner hour as he was still engaged in his duties as cashier of Messrs Whittaker & Co. After his connection with that firm had ceased in 1864, Grindon had more time to devote to teaching and to writing, and continued both with great activity, until he was nearly 70, the majority of his books being published in that period. But shortly after he had passed the three score year and ten, he was taken seriously ill and never recovered his former vigour. In 1890, his friends and admirers, including many of his former pupils, subscribed to present him with a sum of £350 to show their appreciation of the work he had done in promoting the study of Botany and the love of flowers. A similar manifestation of esteem on the part of his friends caused £500 to be subscribed as a present to Mr Grindon on his 80th birthday in 1898. An armchair was also presented to him on one of these occasions, and after his death Mrs Leo Grindon presented it to me to be used as Professorial Chair in the University.

Some years after Mr Grindon's death his widow presented to the University his valuable herbarium collected during his long life-time, and to which reference has been made at the beginning of this article. No better memorial could exist of one whose life was so largely devoted to botanical teaching, for it is now permanently devoted to aid in the instruction of the botanical students, who frequent the University, and is also open to consultation by all qualified students of botany. Interleaved as it is with drawings and descriptions taken from many old and standard works of botany, it is at once a herbarium and botanical library. One is spared laborious consultation of appropriate Floras by finding by the side of the dried specimens a figure, often a coloured plate and a detailed account of the plant in question. The fullness of this documentation may be gathered from the fact that these cuttings have been made from some 50 standard botanical works, including such ancient tomes as Fuchs' *De Historia Stirpium*, 1542, and Parkinson's *Theatrum Botanicum* of 1640, as well as more recent books like Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle des Vegetaux*, Curtis's *Botanical Magazine* and Brandis's *Forest Flora of N. W. India*. In addition numerous cuttings from botanical journals such as *Gardener's Chronicle* give interesting information concerning the cultivation of various plants and their horticultural varieties. In this direction Grindon's work has been continued since the herbarium has come into the hands of the University. It is indeed a most valuable teaching instrument.

During the later years of Grindon's life, when he was no longer able to indulge in his customary walks, the strip of ground at the back of his house in Cecil Street, Greenheys, a mere yard, was transformed by Mrs Leo Grindon into a pleasant green abode, with an open-air lounge where meals were taken every day during summer, and where Leo Grindon could gratify his love of the beauty of plants. The transformation of the backyard into a green pleasance inspired Mrs Grindon after her husband's death, to develop a Leo Grindon Flower Lovers' Association, by the aid of which many backyards in Manchester were similarly changed, and much joy and beauty were introduced into the hard lives of many city dwellers. How pleased both Mrs Grindon and Leo Grindon would have been by the opportunities offered to-day on the Corporation Housing estates to the tenants, to cultivate both useful and ornamental plants around their houses. What a change for the better time has brought about.

It was in 1904, in the 87th year, that Leo Grindon passed peacefully away, regretted by a large number of friends and admirers, many of them his pupils, whose life he had enriched by showing them the beauties of Nature's handiwork. His own life too, in spite of constant sickness and latterly of infirmity, had more than the usual fullness of attainment and effectiveness, and his life's work continues through the constant usefulness of his beloved and treasured Herbarium.
