

### “Frank Clark - His Legacy”

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#### INTRODUCTION

This paper will describe Frank Clark’s training, work for both private clients and public commissions, his teaching and writing. Two case studies will follow, the first showing how his early life and travels influenced his later designs especially of the York University campus. The other case study will show his interpretation of another designer’s landscape.

Frank Clark didn’t come to landscape architecture until he was in his thirties. He was born Herbert Francis Clark, in 1902, in Manila in the Philippines and educated at Marlborough College and Clare College Cambridge. After Cambridge he returned to the Philippines as a clerk for Smith Bell & Co, copra importers, where his father had worked before him. As the clerk’s pay was low and prospects of promotion unlikely for many years he decided in 1925 to travel to the west coast of America travelling from San Francisco to Alaska. He returned home to the UK in 1932.

#### CLARK’S CAREER IN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE :

Clark’s involvement with landscape architecture began when he became articled to Percy Cane, the well-known landscape

designer. It was there he met his fellow pupil, Christopher Tunnard.

His early professional life began (in 1936) assisting Christopher Tunnard on a number of projects including Bentleys Wood, Sussex for Serge Chermayeff in 1937 producing planting and costing lists. To increase his drawing skills he took evening classes at St John’s Art School. He helped to research Tunnard’s book ‘Gardens in a Modern Landscape’ published in 1938. It is thought by some that the chapter/section ‘The Planters Eye’ may have been written by Clark. This period has been well documented in David Jacques’ recent book on Christopher Tunnard.

Tunnard left to work in America in 1939 and Clark worked briefly for Russell Page and later for Jellicoe, Page and Wilson. He also produced a design for Paul Nash’s garden in Hampstead in the late 1930s.

During the war Clark worked in the Civil Defence. Between shifts he researched in the British Library for what became his book ‘The English Landscape Garden’ published after the war in 1948.

He and Marjorie Clark, his second wife, lived in Hampstead, a very artistic community, throughout the War and into the early

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1950s. They were members of the Organising Committee for Hampstead Artists Council, founded in 1944, for the exhibition 'Hampstead Seen by Artist, Architect and Camera' held in 1949.

Clark's post war career was a mixture of private commissions, public landscape design, teaching and writing. Clark began teaching at the Institute of Park Administration at the Grotto from 1940s.

From 1946 he taught in the Department of Civic Design, Liverpool University and taught Landscape Architecture at Reading University. In the 1950s he began his long association with the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies Summer School, run by Patrick Nuttgens at Kings Manor, York, teaching at the annual summer school. In 1951 he was elected to the Institute of Landscape Architects.

Clark's work for local authorities began when in 1947 when he was appointed Consultant Landscape Architect to Holborn Borough Council for the reinstatement of the Bloomsbury Squares (not executed), and St Giles Churchyard. The brief was to 'reconstruct an overgrown churchyard as a sitting place for city dwellers and workers and children's playground in a very busy part of London. More trees were planted and the existing trees preserved, some of the old gravestones were laid flat and others on sarcophagus-like pedestals (as described by Peter Shephard in his book *Modern Gardens* in 1953.)

More public work followed as in the late

1940s plans were being made for the 1951 Festival of Britain. Clark was appointed landscape consultant for the whole site, assisted by Maria Shephard-Parpagliolo), Peter Shephard designed the area downstream of the railway bridge; upstream the concourse area was by Clark and Shephard and the rest of the site by Peter Youngman.

The garden of the Regatta Restaurant (by Clark and Shephard) was within the central well of the Restaurant overlooked by diners at ground level. It was described by Jane Brown in her book *The Modern Garden* as a 'dramatically sinuous island, wholly abstract and Picasso inspired' A sculpture by Lynn Chadwick was 'of abstractly furled 'sails' of green bronze' surrounded by 'ground-covering foliage, highlighted with clumps of majestic *Ligularia*'. At the back of the Festival Pavilion and as a background to a section on pre-history Clark and Shephard created an illusion of primeval forest with a dramatic mass of foliage lit by eerie light from above in the cave-like space.

Clark and Shephard worked on a number of private commissions. In addition to the partnership private work, Clark was appointed to his first new town as Consultant Landscape Architect for Stevenage Development Corporation which had been designated on 11 November 1946.

Clark had begun writing poems while in America, and had continued to write during his research in eighteenth century landscape. His first article 'Eighteenth Century Elysiums' was published in 1943 in the *Journal of the*

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Warburg & Courtauld Institute. His first article published in the *Architectural Review* (A.R.) was 'Lord Burlington's Bijou or Sharawaggi at Chiswick' in 1944. Other articles for A.R. followed 'Parks and Pelargoniums' in 1946 and 'The Landscaping of Stockholm's parks' in 1947. His book, *The English Landscape Garden* was published in 1948.

In the 1950 Clark co-wrote with Brenda Colvin and Sylvia Crow 'Landscape Architecture in the New Towns' for the *Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects* (ILA).

His exhibition work had begun in 1939 when with Tunnard he designed panels for Research is still to be done on his landscape and planting plans. A book is planned which will bring together the many strands of his professional life. The Institute of Landscape Architect's exhibition, 'The Man-Made Landscape'. He contributed an article on planting to Misha Black's book on Exhibition Design. He had written an article on 'Indoor and Exhibition Planting' in the *Architecture Yearbook* in 1949. He designed decorative planting for the exhibition at the ICI Stand at York and the decorative planting design for the Basil Spence stand at the International Exhibition of Landscape Architecture at County Hall in Westminster.

*Indoor Plants* had been published in monthly instalments in 'A Special Number of The *Architectural Review*', May 1952. It was written by Clark with his sister, Margaret Jones, edited by Patience Gray and illustrated by Gordon Cullen. His sister was by this time running a nursery garden. In 1952 the book 'Indoor Plants and Gardens' was published

in book form by the Architectural Press.

Clark's work for local authorities continued as he and his family moved from London to Berkshire then Oxfordshire. There was a great expansion of school building all over the country as the numbers of school children grew. In 1955 Clark had a contract with London County Council to lay out the landscape for some primary schools in the County of London including Kidbrooke Park and Clapham Park Primary schools.

More design work on schools in Oxfordshire followed including his landscape work on Ickneild Secondary School in Watlington for Oxfordshire County Council commissioned in 1956 and completed in 1958. It was described in the *Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects* in 1959 as follows 'The main siting of the building and path system was decided by the architects before the landscape architect was briefed. The design consisted of ' a belt of trees along the southern boundary to screen a rather indeterminate landscape of cottages, kitchen garden and back gardens; school entrance court, pupil gardens and a school garden lay along the south east boundary. The dominating feature of the site was a line of large elms along the south east boundary and the open character of the surrounding landscape which determined the scale of the planting.'

Clark's interest in education and landscape teaching is shown by the articles he wrote including 'Principles of Landscape Design' for *Architectural Design* from 1953 to 1955. Other articles included 'The Schools, A Series

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of Articles on Existing University Courses' for the Journal of Institute of Landscape Architects. In 1959 Clark was appointed President of the Institute of Landscape Architects, giving as his presidential speech 'The Education of the Landscape Architect'.

In the late 1950s, Sir Robert Matthew, Professor of Architecture at Edinburgh University set up a post-graduate course in Landscape Architecture in the Architecture Department and in 1959 Clark was appointed as Senior Lecturer for the course. He taught full time, teaching architecture students as well as the landscape architecture students who came from all around the world.

While at the University he also taught extra mural classes as well teaching the horticultural students at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. In 1960 he was elected Associate of the Institute of Park Administration.

Clark continued his public design work including the Gorbals redevelopment in Glasgow (1961) for which he did landscaping and planting plans. Other housing development work included Broomhill in 1962 for Scottish Special Housing and the Ladywell Redevelopment in Glasgow in 1963. He also designed the landscape plan, landscape layout and planting plan at Ninewells Teaching Hospital in Dundee.

Clark worked with Douglas Sampson in 1963 on design proposals for the Blackburn-Seafield, West Lothian, rehabilitation of shale bings (coal spoil heaps). The bings, now covered in vegetation, are still very evident in the West Lothian landscape, both

as 'hills' and wildlife areas.

In 1961 he produced planting plans for the Bannockburn Memorial in Stirlingshire and in 1963 he worked with Robert Matthew & partners on the plan for Cockenzie Power Station at Port Seton near Edinburgh. In 1966 he worked plans for the Prestonlinks Electricity Generating Station. In 1962 the Institute of Landscape Architects' Conference was held in Edinburgh entitled 'Towards a Landscape Policy'

Clark was appointed as Consultant Landscape Architect for the University of York which designed by Robert Matthew Johnston Marshall & Partners was to be built in phases. This will be discussed in the case study. In 1964 Clark worked again with Sampson this time on the River Ouse Survey Report commissioned by the York Civic Trust. The Report 'A Survey of the River Ouse' was presented by the Archbishop of York, Dr Donald Coggan, to the Lord Mayor and Corporation of York at a Lord Mayor's Reception in the Guildhall. The plans included the re-design of an eighteenth century walk along the Ouse. This was carried out financed by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust. Other elements of the report, including a Folk Park, were not carried out.

Clark continued to work in York and the surrounding areas including Ledston Hall, near York, discussed in the case study. Clark and Sampson were the landscape architects for other work in York including the Retreat and nurses home at Garrow Hill. This was designed by Basil Spence, Glon,

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and Ferguson and was again financed by the Joseph Rowntree Trust.

More work followed with Robert Matthew Johnson Marshall & Partners on Stirling University. The Development plan report was published in 1968. Clark completed a landscape plan for Phase 1 of the master plan but unfortunately he died before the University was completed. The University was built in the grounds of Aithrey Castle. A large lake was part of the existing landscape.

In 1964, Clark contributed to the Shell Gardens Book edited by Peter Hunt and published by George Rainbird. The team of contributors included Peter Hunt, Miles Hadfield and Laurence Fricker. The book provided garden visitors with details of garden features, garden styles through the centuries and brief biographical notes on the gardens designers. Letters among correspondence in Clark's archive illustrate the hunt for good examples of various garden features.

Clark was one of the co-founders, with Peter Hunt and Miles Hadfield of the Garden History Society in 1965, described in Tim Richardson's history of the Garden History Society. Clark became the first Chairman and the first conference was held in Edinburgh. Clark continued his work in Edinburgh being invited to become expert witness for a number of amenity societies - including the Cockburn Association in 1964, the Cramond Association in 1967 and 1969 he became a member of the Amenity Committee for Hydro Electric Development. He had already been involved with the Council for the Protection

of Rural England (CPRE) when he lived in Oxfordshire.

Having been involved in Stevenage New Town some years before Clark was asked in 1964 to work as a consultant on Livingston New Town in West Lothian. The plans for Craigshill and Howden Development Project, among his papers, are dated 1964 but the development was built in the 1970s after his death.

Clark continued working, teaching and writing and spoke at the Garden History Society Seminar in 1968 at Stowe School on 'The Restoration and Reclamation of Gardens' and still found time to send a proposal for a book 'Garden Design and Landscape Architecture, A Short History' but this was not written as he had a series of heart attacks and died on 29 March 1971.

In 1974, a group of his friends and pupils brought out a book of essays to express their gratitude to him - *Furor Hortensis Essays* on the history of the Landscape Garden in memory of H.F. Clark.

### **CASE STUDY 1 - DESIGN INFLUENCES**

The first case study traces the influences on the development of Clark's designs from the 1940s. In 1947 he wrote the article 'The Landscape of Sweden's Parks - space between buildings'. In the later part of his article he showed the urban landscape design including cafes and their furniture including Helga Blom's famous portable gardens - 'those precast concrete

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circular plant containers arranged with well designed brightly painted park seats by tram and bus stops and casual corners of the city'. He said in the article that 'the most interesting examples of open space development are the children's playgrounds and the famous Nord Malärstrand on margin of Lake Mälaren.... The Mälärstrand was constructed for recreation, for the casual evening stroll, for mothers and their children and for picnic making. The margin is loosely defined with casually placed water-worn boulders or groups of reeds and water loving plants and the only floral decorations are naturalistic groups of indigenous Swedish wild flowers.'

Clark travelled to Stockholm in 1952 with his wife and young family for the International Federation of Landscape Architectures Conference. While Clark attended the conference sessions his wife and children visited the children's playgrounds.

The planning for the Festival of Britain had begun by this time and Clark was the landscape consultant for the whole site assisted by Maria Shephard. As he said in his paper to the Institute of Landscape Architects in April 1951 the landscape architects came in after the master plan was prepared: 'Our principal work has been to act as horticultural advisers and to take charge of the design and construction of what had become known in Festival circles as 'soft' landscaping. We were, in short, responsible for tree planting and the colour decoration of the exhibition, adding plant colour and life to buildings and vistas - not an unimportant job when it is remembered that without growing

plants they may have become intellectual abstractions.' He later said 'sixty nine semi-mature trees ranging from twenty to fifty feet high, (were transported) from Winchester and other places near London...The fact that they are at present all breaking into leaf is a source of great relief to Mrs Shephard and myself.' As well as supervising the overall landscape Clark and Shephard found time to design the Regatta Garden. This was illustrated in Clark's later article written with William McCance on The influence of Cubism on garden design. The plan shows the organic shape of the space the design was probably influenced like by Burle Marx as were many other landscape architects at the time.

By the early 1960s Clark had been appointed Consultant Landscape Architect for the University of York. He was very familiar with York having taught at summer schools at King's Manor in York for many years.

Again he was working with water on a site - in fact the site in the grounds of Heslington Hall had severe drainage problems. Clark thought that a lake would provide a superb setting for the Clasp built college buildings and as it was a low lying site would be the answer to the drainage problems. The lake was enlarged from the boating pond used by the Yarboroughs at Heslington Hall.

In 1984 Astragal in the Architectural Journal referred to the campus 'to be a place that has become an asset to the ancient and noble city of York, so much so that the burghers come to take their picnics in the grounds and generations of young Yorkists

are brought to play amid the groves of Academe. Clark's brilliant masterstroke was to solve the water problem of the whole site by creating a lake. The buildings reflected are, as the designers intended, a sort of neutral background containing England's last landscape garden.'

The Henry Moore statue overlooking the rectangular pond - part of the 'new' University landscape and facing Heslington Hall (The statue has since been moved from the site).

### **CASE STUDY 2 - LEDSTON HALL**

My second case study is of Ledston Hall - a private commission in the mid 1960s. The design for the landscape is attributed to Bridgman in Peter Willis's book. Clark was asked by the owner, Mr Wheler, to produce planting plans to interpret the Bridgeman design for the terrace opposite the Hall. He produced a series of plans. I was invited to see the Hall by Jane Furse who is researching the site. Ledston Hall is on the English Heritage Register.

Clark's design used beech hedging to outline the original Bridgman design of 1716 for Lady Elizabeth Hastings. From the east front of the Hall a central vista lined with tall beech hedges continuing to compartments to the left and right statues of 'King's beasts' amid regularly planted trees. Further compartments are joined by alleys and serpentine walks. Research is ongoing on this site. It is exciting to find an example of private commission by Clark.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper will have shown that although Clark's landscape career was relatively brief, his work is very representative of his time, starting with private design work before and after the war, continuing with public work after the war with schools and universities. His work for the Festival of Britain would have been a very busy, but a very exciting time.

His interest in landscape history is reflected in the book and articles he wrote as well as the fact that he was the Chairman of The Garden History Society. His interest in modern landscape practice and the education of the landscape architect is reflected by his work as a landscape architect and by his teaching over the last thirty years of his life. His physical legacy will be the campus at York and the York Ouse Walk as well as the public work that he designed both for schools, universities, and other public projects.

Research is still to be done on his landscape and planting plans. A book is planned which will bring together the many strands of his professional life.

## IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS:

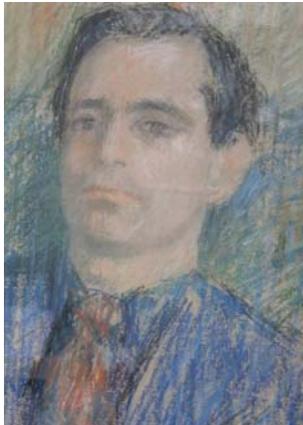


Fig. 1: Chalk drawing of Clark by Kenneth Martin c.1940s (Photo: private collection).



Fig. 4: Central Hall and Vanbrugh College, University of York (Photo: C. Newnham now Bennett).



Fig. 2: Clark and his students at the Grotto in 1959 (Photo: private collection).



Fig. 5: Henry Moore Statue at Heslington Hall (Photo: private collection).



Fig. 3: Seafield Law (Photo: C. Bennett).



Fig. 6: Ledston Hall - vista to Ledston Hall (Photo: C. Bennett).



Fig.7: Serpentine Walk (Photo: J. Furse).

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