

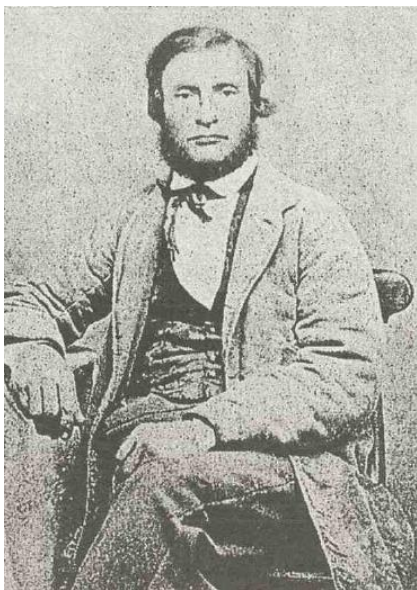
Humble Beginnings in Hobsonville

Crown Lynn Potteries Ltd. would become a staple of postwar Kiwiana in the 1960s and 70s, but many decades of pottery preceded this halcyon period. Before the Second World War thrust them into the spotlight and forced them to suddenly ramp up their experimental crockery production, their ambit had been mostly limited to pipes, bricks, and tiles. Their dynastic influence in Hobsonville and New Lynn is near-mythic in quality, peppered with family rifts, strategic marriage, and scandal. The relative mildness of some of New Zealand's most iconic pottery is belied by nearly a century of impropriety, ingenuity, and above all keen business nous. Tom Clark, the man who would come to be almost ubiquitously associated with Crown Lynn, was heir to a long, murkier line of Clarks in the same profession.

The fertile economic circumstances of the Second World War came about at the perfect time from the perspective of Ambrico, Crown Lynn's predecessor. They were met perfectly by Tom Clark's particular business sense and the diversification he had spurred on in the few years prior. He had not been at helm of operations long before this pivotal period came about, but before him came almost a century of often-scandalous Clark family history, first producing pipes out of need and later to compete in a dense Auckland clayworks scene.

Bigamy and beginnings

Rice Owen Clark arrived in Wellington from England on the *Gertrude* in 1841. He would beget a sprawling line of Clarks, many of them sharing first names. Countless records exist of one or other of the Rice Owens ending up in court for a myriad of different reasons.¹



Caption: Rice Owen Clark was the first in a long line of Clarks who preceded the rise of the Crown Lynn.

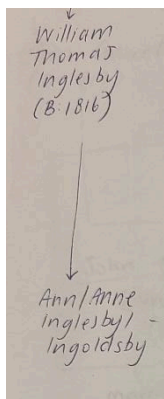
Reference: Gray, Matthew. "Not the 'woman' he thought he was." *Western Leader*, September 15, 2009, 9.

¹ "Law and Police," *New Zealand Herald*, February 19, 1904.

An alternative legacy for Rice Owen Clark is the first ever case of bigamy in the colony of New Zealand.² As was common at the time, he had been married to his first wife in England before emigrating.³ When Clark's wife had returned to England, the Methodist ministry in Wellington were persuaded to allow him to marry again after he claimed never to have consummated his prior marriage.⁴ Missionary James Watkin married him and Louisa Felgate in 1848.⁵

Many marriages were difficult to verify at the time, with so many couples making the trip from England after marrying. In this case, there was no evidence of the marriage except for one witness, William Norgrove, who had been on the boat with them. Norgrove claimed that by the end of the six-week-long journey, marriage was rumoured between Clark and the surgeon's servant, Ann, though not made explicit. To complicate matters further, Ann was not present in court but was established to be alive still.⁶

Clark pleaded not guilty and repeatedly made the claim that he had never consummated his marriage with "the person who calls herself Ann Ingoldsby". This description of her is telling, for in fact he claimed she was "not a woman", and that "no marriage could possibly be consummated with her by any one".⁷ This claim seems to be borne out by an extant family tree which shows that Ann's former name was William Thomas Inglesby,⁸ but the details here are murky. After this saga, Clark and his second wife, Louisa, had a long marriage with seven children.⁹ His great-great-grandson was Tom Clark, who was the face of Crown Lynn for decades during and after the Second World War.



Caption: Part of a family tree which seems to show William Thomas Inglesby becoming Ann(e) Inglesby/Ingoldsby, given the date of birth.

Reference: Family tree. Collection: Brick + Pipe History. Te Toi Uku Crown Lynn & Clayworks Museum.

² "Supreme Court," *Wellington Independent*, September 8, 1849.

³ New Zealand Lost Cases Project, *R v Rice Owen Clarke* (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Family history, Collection: Brick + Pipe History, Te Toi Uku Crown Lynn & Clayworks Museum.

⁶ *R v Rice Owen Clarke*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Family tree, Collection: Brick + Pipe History, Te Toi Uku Crown Lynn & Clayworks Museum.

⁹ Athol Miller, *The Clark Family History: the descendants of Josiah Clark & Ann (née Rose) Clark of Great Marlow, Buckinghamshire, England* (Wellington, 1989), 144.

Family business

It was in 1854 that Rice Owen Clark bought a plot of Crown Land in Hobsonville, he and his wife being the first Pākehā settlers in the area.¹⁰ The Hobsonville soil was waterlogged and difficult to work with, but he was a natural pioneer, having walked all the way from Wellington to Hobsonville, picking up Te Reo Māori as he went. He began to make pipes to drain his land, fashioning them from clay shaped around the circumference of a tree branch. He soon started selling them to neighbouring farmers for their fields as well.¹¹ The business continued to expand, and by 1890 his son, R. O. Clark junior, had taken the lead, producing the standard pipes, bricks, and tiles along with a host of other useful parts.¹² He had also begun shipping pipes and tiles on his scow, *Lady of the Lake*, down to Auckland.¹³ This was a apparently an unpredictable venture: on one particularly windy night, the pipes were all blown to one side of the boat, capsizing it in the Auckland Harbour.¹⁴



Caption: The Clark family's old house in Hobsonville.

Reference: Diamond, John Thomas. "Clark's Home at Hobsonville." March 1965. J.T. Diamond Collection. Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, JTD-16A-02522-2.

The older Rice Owen died in 1895, but not before an acrimonious rift between his children. R. O. Clark and Sons Ltd. dissolved, and soon after Edwin Clark sued the pair of Rice Owens for the division

¹⁰ Gail Henry, *New Zealand Pottery: Commercial & Collectable* (Auckland: Reed, 1999), 182.

¹¹ Dick Scott, *Fire on the Clay* (Auckland: Southern Cross Books, 1979), 98.

¹² "Gisborne Standard and Cook County Gazette," *Gisborne Standard and Cook County Gazette*, February 13, 1890.

¹³ "Weather at the Thames," *Auckland Star*, July 9, 1892.

¹⁴ Ibid.

of the accounts after the dissolution of the business, and the family began to split into two separate factions.¹⁵ Henry, the fourth son in the family, worked with R. O. Clark junior until 1903, before splitting off, contractually obliged to wait twenty years before establishing his company, Clarks Potteries Ltd., which, though enjoying far narrower success, outlasted Crown Lynn into the 90s.¹⁶

Adding to the dynastic atmosphere surrounding the Clarks' influence, apart from the warring factions and strategic marriages, was the sheer number of repeated names within the family. Rice Owen Clark and Louisa had, among other children, another Louisa and another Rice Owen. Rice Owen junior had Rice Owen III and Tom, better, among others, and then Tom Clark's son became the famous Tom Clark who would go on to be the figurehead of Crown Lynn for so many decades. This is without mentioning the multiple Latimers and Edwins on the other side of the family split, or the Gardners who started taking similar names as well.

New Lynn and the race to the bottom

Business really started moving along in the early 1900s. R.O. Clark Ltd. made impressive inroads in the market, despite a case at the Magistrate's Court over underpaying two carpenters.¹⁷ While they owed their origins to the drainpipes and the difficult soil in Hobsonville, by the time the 20th century rolled around they were capitalising on the huge expansion in housing at the time, selling their bricks in a range of different colours.¹⁸ For decades they had specialised in pipes, but by this time they were advertising the quality and range of their brick production.¹⁹

In 1903, Rice Owen Clark junior ran unsuccessfully for public office, but nonetheless the Clarks managed to stake out their place in the local community.²⁰ Business kept improving and they were even winning awards.²¹ In 1925 they moved to New Lynn, where the abundant claypits brought about many pottery factories in high concentration.²² With the advent of the automobile, their competitors were able to transport pipes across the city from New Lynn. R. O. Clark Ltd., by contrast, was still using a scow to move pipes from Hobsonville to Waitemata Harbour.²³ Though the family business had begun as a response to the need to drain Hobsonville soil, that location no longer served their interests: namely, to be competitive in a crowded market.

¹⁵ "Deaths," *New Zealand Herald*, July 10, 1896; "Supreme Court Civil Sitings," *New Zealand Herald*, April 14, 1885; Mary Medland, *Pipe Dreams: The Story of Clarks Potteries Ltd.*

¹⁶ Medland, *Pipe Dreams*.

¹⁷ "Magistrate Ponders," *Southland Times*, April 8, 1909.

¹⁸ "Clark's Patent Blocks Ltd," Eph-B-BUILDING-SUPPLIES-1911-02, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

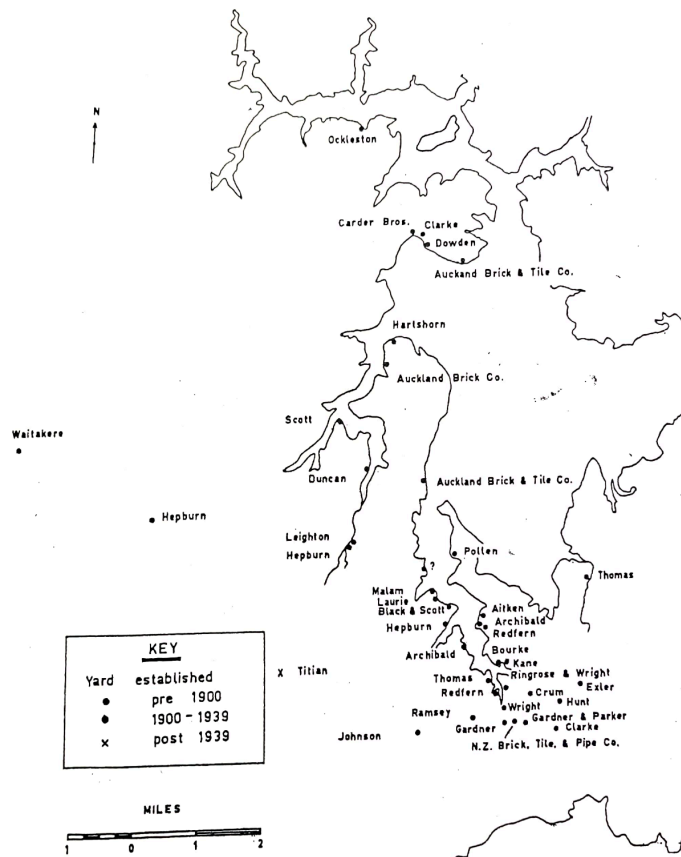
¹⁹ Scott, *Fire on the Clay*, 9; 115.

²⁰ "Advertisements," *Auckland Star*, March 23, 1903.

²¹ "R. O. Clark Limited," *Lyttelton Times*, May 26, 1909; "Exhibition Awards," *Auckland Star*, February 15, 1899.

²² Scott, *Fire on the Clay*.

²³ *Ibid*, 131.



Caption: A map of the many brick, pipe, and pottery yards which existed around the Whau River in West Auckland.

Reference: Goodall, Don. "Manufacturing in the Western Districts of Auckland." Thesis, University of Auckland, 1965.

In the early 1900s, attempts towards amalgamation between potteries had been made but had failed dismally. The dream was revived, in fact made necessary, in the 1920s: the various potteries in New Lynn had outcompeted each other so aggressively that their profit margins were close to nonexistent. The Clark family business quickly joined with others to become the Amalgamated Brick and Pipe Company Ltd so as to avoid the race to the bottom that had been taking place, and creating the subsidiary company Ambrico – derived from the name of the amalgamation – which would go on to become Crown Lynn.²⁴ An earlier marriage between the Clarks and the Gardner family helped, as the Gardners owned one of the other four businesses involved.²⁵ The Gardner factory was one of many to be shut down or experience layoffs during the Great Depression.²⁶ Ambrico's staff dwindled from 250 to 7 at one point during the 1930s.²⁷

²⁴ "Big Business Deal," *Otago Daily Times*, April 10, 1929.

²⁵ *Auckland-Waikato Historical Journal*, A.W.H.J., September 1988, no. 53, 30-35; "Auckland Brick Merger," *Evening Post*, Volume CVII, Issue 46, February 26, 1929, p. 12.

²⁶ Lisa J. Truttman, "New Lynn's brickmakers (1860s to 2015)" (2015).

²⁷ Scott, *Fire on the Clay*, 144.



Caption: The R. O. Clark Ltd. factory in Hobsonville, around 1906.

Reference: Department of Labour. "Factory of R O Clark's Brick and Pottery Works, Hobsonville." Photograph album for the International Exhibition, Christchurch, 1906-1907. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, PA1-o-370-20.

Tom Clark II was the heir to the family pottery, dropping out of school at age thirteen to work for the family business in the brick factory.²⁸ By 1937, he was made the assistant general manager at age 21.²⁹ He learned the tricks of the trade before he took over and began to innovate on them for himself. The company directors gave him money to establish a Porcelain Specialties Department dedicated to experimenting with new techniques and products in order to diversify the company's output.³⁰ Little did they know how aptly this programme would meet the upcoming economic conditions of the Second World War. The 1939 ban on nonessential imports meant no one was better placed than Ambrico to become the country's main crockery supplier, an opportunity they were able to capitalise on largely due to Tom Clark's vision for the company.³¹

After a long line of Clarks, each reacting differently to varying circumstances but none standing out particularly in the clayworks scene, Tom Clark rose to the occasion. His desire to diversify their production and his fiery work ethic came at the exact right moment, propelling Ambrico from one of many clay factories to what would become, albeit crudely at first, the producer of some of New Zealand's best-recognised crockery.

The legacy of the Clarks would change dramatically under his leadership. While his father continued to advise the government on promoting pottery and ceramics research, it felt like he uniquely embodied the ethos of Crown Lynn.³² A monumental shift occurred in the company's approach to business – the needs of the hour meant they were inward- rather than outward-focused, trying to perfect their product and, if needed, lobby the government, rather than form strategic alliances with other businesses. Their best efforts later on to let go of the cruder aspects of their production managed to shake the association with much of the company's past, and even now it is far too often overlooked as an essential part of Crown Lynn's history.

²⁸ "Ambrico", Collection: Brick + Pipe History, Te Toi Uku Crown Lynn & Clayworks Museum.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Import Certificates Emergency Regulations 1939

³² "PACRA reports," 1964-76, MS-Group-0578, New Zealand Pottery and Ceramics Research Association: Records, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.