

## Edward Clark and his legacy

The Collection has its genesis in the will of Edward Clark. Edward Clark was born in Edinburgh, to Robert and Emma Clark on 11 December 1864. His paternal grandmother Isabel was sister to Adam Black, Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh from 1843 to 1848, and a Member of Parliament from 1854 to 1865. More relevant to our interests however is that he began business as a publisher in Edinburgh in 1815, taking his nephew Charles into partnership and thus founding the firm of A. & C. Black. Black published the Edinburgh Review for many years, and also acquired the copyright in the Encyclopaedia Britannica when the business of Archibald Constable & Co. was dissolved in 1828.

Edward's father, Robert Clark, came to Edinburgh from Montrose and at the age of thirteen was apprenticed as a compositor to William Burness. After completing his apprenticeship he went to London to gain further experience working there for two years with Clowes & Vizetelly, before returning to Edinburgh where, with the modest sum of GBP 200 he set up as a small-scale law printer in George Street. With his own hands he set up the type and printed a circular which he sent to those connected with the Law in Edinburgh, "soliciting their attention" to his services. Slowly the business increased and in due course he moved to larger premises in nearby Hanover Street. However, Clark was not wholly satisfied with the progress of business and so travelled to London during the 1850s, seeking work from book publishers. He was particularly successful in establishing contact with the firm of Macmillan, who at that time were changing from book-selling to book publishing, and were moving from Cambridge to London.

This venture led to the close connection between Edinburgh printers and London publishers as Robert Clark's enterprise was copied by other Edinburgh printers. In 1861 the abolition of the duty on paper gave the opportunity for his London work to be increased: In December of that year, R. & R. Clark employed only 21 compositors, a number exceeded by eight other printing firms in Edinburgh, but the number of employees rapidly increased. This expansion was aided by Clark obtaining from his uncle, the aforementioned Adam Black, the contract for the printing of Scott's Waverley Novels.

It was during this period of expansion that Clark's claimed the distinction of having the first female compositor in Britain. Following a major strike of compositors in 1871, Clark engaged and trained women to do the job, the first being Fanny MacPherson who remained with the firm for over sixty years [\[1\]](#).

By 1882 further expansion was required and a move was made to a new site at Brandon Street. In 1880, James Kirkwood had been assumed as a partner and in 1887 Edward Clark, the only son of Robert Clark, also became a partner. The second R. Clark in the name of the firm was Richard Clark, who was a cousin of Robert, but he was never more than a sleeping partner, having provided finance for the founding of the firm. The driving force was always Robert, whose ambition and determination is aptly encapsulated by some words from his diary:

"to do work of the best possible quality, to give the most efficient service and to charge the highest possible prices." [\[2\]](#)

The printing of books for London publishers continued to expand after the opening of the Brandon Street works. It was said that on any day during the fortnight following Lord Tennyson's death in 1892 at least twenty-nine machines could be seen printing the works of the Poet Laureate. It is believed that such a concentration of the work of any author is unprecedented in the history of printing. By the time of Robert Clark's death in 1894, R. & R. Clark were employing between five and six hundred people.

Such, then, was the position when Edward Clark inherited responsibility for the firm. He was 29 years old and had been a partner for about 6 years. James Kirkwood was still alive when in 1895 the firm became a limited company with Edward Clark as Chairman and Managing Director. Though he had inherited a thriving business, Clark was not content to allow the company to rest on its laurels. From about the year 1910 several additions were made to the premises and many tens of thousands of pounds were spent in installing up-to-date machines. The company continued to flourish up to and beyond the Great War [3].

Outside his business interests Clark was apparently a jovial man and was popular in his social life, both in London and in Edinburgh, though, like his father he eschewed public affairs, preferring to delegate. He was also a keen sportsman, running a string of racehorses, and playing an enthusiastic round of golf, though less skilfully than his father. It is recorded that after one unsuccessful wager on the course he remarked that his loss would mean the printing of more Bibles. Whether for financial gain or moral penance is not recorded.

The Edward Clark Collection was born out of Edward Clark's will. The will is in fact a most remarkable document. Handwritten, it was begun on 17 October 1917 and with alterations, additions, deletions and codicils it was amended up to, and including, 5 August 1926. Clark left a considerable number of personal legacies; to staff employed at his house at North Berwick, to staff at R. & R. Clark, and to personal friends, including one recently married daughter of a golfing partner:

"as a token of my deep affection for her and for all her kindness to me free of tax."

One assumes it was the legacy, and not the affection which was free of tax!

In addition, there were some fifty thousand pounds [GBP] left to specific charities, including the following two significant legacies. Firstly:

"To endow a Printing School for Edinburgh I leave Ten Thousand Pounds. W. Maxwell R. & R. Clark to manage same and whom failing Robert Wilson Printer Edinburgh."

Secondly:

"I, Edward Clark, Printer, Edinburgh, Do Hereby Make this Codicil; I bequeath to the Managers for the time being of the Heriot-Watt College, Edinburgh to be held in trust by them or their successors in the management of that College such a sum, being not less than Five thousand pounds and not more than Ten thousand pounds as my Trustees may fix free of duty to be paid without interest as soon as convenient for the purpose of

furthering the teaching of typography under the auspices of that College. My wish is that it should be regarded as a capital sum so that if any expenditure be made on plant etcetera a depreciation and obsolescence fund should be provided out of future annual income so as to replace what is so spent and keep the fund intact."

The legacies are dated 5th August, six days before Clark's death on 11th August 1926.

As there was a certain amount of ambiguity about the objects to which these funds could be put, legal counsel's opinion was sought and the Clark Trustees were advised that the term "typography" could be interpreted in its widest form, namely printing from relief printing surfaces (as opposed to lithography and intaglio processes) and that this could include electrotyping and stereotyping as well as machine composition for relief printing processes. As a result of this ruling it was possible to meet from this legacy the main cost of the Monotype and Line-composing equipment as well as type-setting frames and letterpress machines which were installed in The Edward Clark Wing, a part of the extension of the Heriot-Watt College which was opened on 22 January 1935 by the then Secretary of State for Scotland, Sir Godfrey Collins, who was also a member of the well-known family of Glasgow printers and publishers.

This equipment accounted for much of the Capital Fund and, therefore, in accordance with the terms of the Bequest, the Governors of Heriot-Watt College allocated the income from the remaining funds to bring the total Capital back to GBP 10,000 as instructed by Edward Clark's Will.

In view of the fact that there was already a Printing School at the Heriot-Watt College, Counsel was asked whether the words "to endow a Printing School for Edinburgh" could be applied to any purpose connected with the existing printing school. Counsel was specifically asked to express a view as to whether the income from the Trust could be applied to the purchase of books illustrating the development of printing and of printing processes, as a means of demonstrating to students how printing had developed over the centuries. The opinion of Counsel was favourable to this idea and the Edward Clark Collection was conceived.

#### Notes

[1] See accounts in *A reputation for excellence: a history of the Edinburgh printing industry*. Edinburgh : The Scottish Printing Archival Trust [and] Merchiston Publishing, 1990; and in *Imprints in time: Scottish publishers past and present*. Edinburgh : Merchiston Publishing, 1991. Both are works compiled by students of the Department of Print Media, Publishing and Communication at Napier University.

[2] Reported in "Clark's of Edinburgh: centenary of famous printing house". *The Scotsman* (22 November 1946) p.5

[3] R. & R. Clark celebrated its centenary in 1946, and among many tributes received this one from George Bernard Shaw: "So the great printing firm of R. & R. Clark is 100 years old and I am only 90. They have been as natural a part of my workshop as the pen in my hand." Reported in "R. & R. Clark: the great printing house's centenary". *The Bookseller* (November 1946) p.3.