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### **'NGAROMA'—A REMARKABLE MEMORIAL**

*R. O. Clark II built 'Ngaroma' as a spacious but practical home for his large family. It was built also, as a showplace for the new ceramic building blocks he had designed and which he hoped would catch on and replace some of the brick trade lost at the turn of the century. This did not happen and 'Ngaroma' is one of only a few surviving buildings built of the salt glazed ceramic blocks from R. O. Clark II's brick and pipe works.*

*No cost was spared in using the best quality materials available for the house. The final cost of 'Ngaroma' was £300,000. But despite this, and the rich embellishment of the house, the overriding impression of 'Ngaroma' is one of a practical, solid family home. His son, T. E. Clark I moved into 'Ngaroma' with his family in about 1903, before the house was finished.*

*In about 1920 'TE', his wife Margaret, and their six children, moved out of 'Ngaroma' for a year while extensive renovation and redecorating took place. It was at this time also that the gardens were extensively landscaped and additional tennis courts were laid.*

*The house became too impractical for 'TE's' children to occupy as they grew up and eventually it was sold to the R.N.Z.A.F. in 1925.*

*The New Zealand Historic Places Trust considers the house to be of national importance and worthy of preservation.*

*'Ngaroma' stands as a fitting memorial to the Clarks of Hobsonville and to their contribution to the development of New Zealand industry, and in particular the ceramics industry.*

*Right: Crafted from local Kauri timber, the staircase is set-off by a decorative, turned newell post and turned balustrade. The underside of the stairs has been turned into a feature with the unusual T&G, angled covering.*

*A feature on the first landing is the decorative stained glass window. The walls are covered with heavily embossed paper over hesian, laid on lath.*

*Below: The verandahs at 'Ngaroma' are framed with decorative iron lace imported from Sydney. It is considered to be one of the finest examples of ironwork surviving on a New Zealand house of the time. The verandah posts are also moulded iron work. As can be seen on the early photo of 'Ngaroma' on the previous page, the ironwork originally decorated the ridge line of the roof.*



blocks were made in two sizes 24" x 9" x 9" and 24" x 9" x 7" wide, salt glazed with a dividing wall up the middle of the block. He formed a company called "Clark Patent Blocks Ltd" and leased the works from Mr Holland for their manufacture. With the manufacture of these blocks he hoped to recoup some of the lost brick trade.

About 1890 he commenced to build a two-storied house for his large family at Hobsonville. Completed in 1902 at a cost of £30,000, it was built entirely in ceramic blockwork with all outside and internal walls built using these blocks. It is a magnificent building with well laid out grounds.

In the basement there was a laboratory with drying ovens, constructed for the purpose of testing the drying rates and total amount of shrinkage of clays and of his various products before burning. This was necessary in order to test the effect of the mixing



*Rice Owen Clark II and his family. (Left to right) Standing back row: Louisa, Rice Owen III, Mary Ellen (Dot), Thomas Edwin I. Front row: Olive Maude, Gwendoline, Rice Owen II, Alice Edna, Mary Clark (nee Cater), Gladys Irene and Clara Adeline (Addie).*

of various clays, to evaluate the total shrinkage in the drying process and also to determine design sizes for his extrusion dies. (A die is the final extrusion form through which the clay is forced to form green bricks or pipes.)

The oven and the underfloor of the house were heated by hot air piped from the kilns to the house by way of a large brickwork tunnel through which one could walk. There was also a well full of water under the house so that humidity of the basement air was maintained at a level to reduce the likelihood of the timber joists and floor being affected by dry rot. Thus he provided not only for the testing of his clay materials, but also for under floor heating of the lower storey of his house. Other features of the house are the richly



*The Miller and Clark children at Godleys, now named Pine Song – Louisa Felgate Gardner's country place. (Left to right in pairs): Athol Miller and Gwen Clark; Gladys Kydd and Eric Raymond Clark; Mary and Addie Clark; Gladys and Alice Clark; Nora Kydd and George Clark; Marjory Miller and Ellen Miller (daughters). Note:- The Kydd girls are not related.*

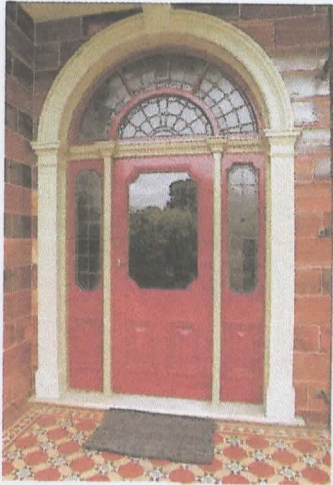
coloured floor tiles laid out on the ground floor verandahs, passages and porches. It is recorded that the tiles were imported from Italy and laid by Italian workmen. The ceilings were beautifully designed and finished in different materials. Fireplaces are of Italian marble while the ironwork around the verandahs was imported from Sydney. According to Gwen Clark, prior to the construction of "Clark House" the ROC II family lived in a house which was demolished to make way for the new home. She remembers living with Aunt Clara (Mrs Scott) during the early part of the construction, and that the family shifted into the new house long before it was completed.

The house in all its intricacies is a lasting tribute to its owner and builder R O Clark II and has been declared an historic building. It was sold by T E Clark I to the Royal New Zealand Air Force, who now occupy it and would no doubt be pleased to show any of the family over the house, as they did me. The visit is well worthwhile. My early memory of the house is of a visit with my parents, about 1904, and is of ROC II sitting on a Victorian chair in front of a fire and with a rug around his legs and his family about him. He left a life-long impression in my mind.

He was a very religious man and contributed generously to the Presbyterian Churches from Hobsonville to Avondale. I have a large family Bible with large metal clasps which he gave to my father in appreciation for the contribution my father had made to the education of his children when my father was headmaster of the Hobsonville school.

Whereas R O Clark I was the founder of R O Clark and Sons

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[2] Athol Miller, ed. Gail Lambert, 1989



Above: 'Ngaroma' was built on Clark Road, Hobsonville. The rear of the house overlooked the brick and pipe works owned by R. O. Clark II. The richly salt glazed building blocks, designed and produced by R. O. Clark at his Hobsonville factory were the precursor of today's concrete blocks and a design well before their time. Whilst many of the house's embellishments, such as the ironwork, were imported, other parts of the house, such as the timber, bricks and concrete blocks, were New Zealand products.

The green glazed decorative tiles that divide the ground and first floors, are not evident in the early photograph and were probably added at the time of the major refurbishment in 1924.

(For further information refer to pages 42-43.)

Top Left: The view of the main entrance to 'Ngaroma' shows the detail of the Italian, tessellated tiles that cover the floor of the verandah, entrance, hallways, kitchen and bathroom. The tile patterns on the interior floors are more intricate than those shown here. Although very decorative the tiles were also very practical and hardwearing for the home of a large family. Some ninety years on they show little sign of wear.

Family tradition has it that the tiles were laid by Italian craftsmen.

Left: The ceilings in 'Ngaroma' are a mixture of intricately patterned, pressed tin, iron work and New Zealand timbers. This example of a pressed tin ceiling is from another smaller cottage (see overleaf) but is similar to those in some of the rooms at 'Ngaroma'. This particular ceiling still retains its original paintwork.

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*'Love Cottage' as it is affectionately referred to by the family, was built by T. E. Clark for his new bride. As they were married in 1908 it is thought to date from about that time. Located on a farm he purchased (opposite Herald Island) at Hobsonville, it is constructed also of salt glazed ceramic blocks. Although the house is on a much smaller scale than 'Ngaroma' it also contains rich embellishment. (An example of the ceilings is pictured on the previous page.)*

*The ceiling in the master bedroom at 'Ngaroma' was elaborately crafted from various New Zealand timbers to create an unusual effect of colour, design and texture.*

