

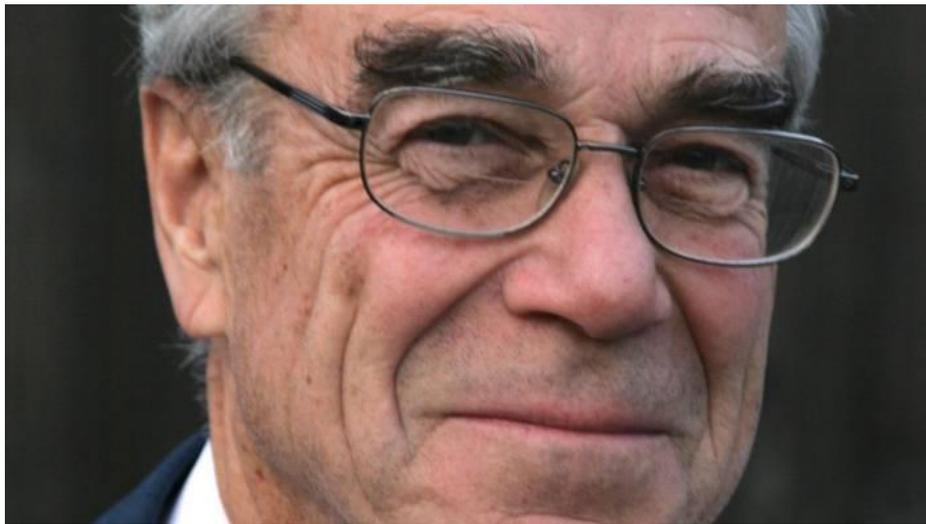
AUTHENTICATION IN ART

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Life Story: Art authenticator and colourful chemist Robin Clark

Maddison Northcott05:00, Dec 29 2018



CLARK FAMILY

Professor Robin Clark died on December 6, aged 83.

OBITUARY: Professor Robin Clark's office was crammed full of chemicals in bottles, matrix structures of compounds, samples of metals and reams of paperwork.

Through his study of pigments, he accessed ancient manuscripts and iconic works of art including the Lindisfarne Gospels, Egyptian papyrus, ancient maps and Renaissance art. He delved into royal collections and separated priceless works from counterfeits, insuring art sold at auction

was genuine by determining the chemical nature of old paint, all in the name of science.

The Christchurch-born chemist lectured in 36 countries, worked as a visiting professor at 14 universities, has published more than 525 papers and written or edited 36 books. He died after a fall in London, on December 6, aged 83.

Robin Jon Hawes Clark was born on February 16, 1935, in Rangiora, just north of Christchurch, to Reg and Marjorie Clark. He attended Marlborough and Christ's colleges, and, during that time, played piano, tennis, cricket and rugby, won mathematics and science scholarships and loved the outdoors.

Clark won a scholarship to the University of Canterbury in 1953, graduated with a bachelor of science in 1955, then gained his master of science with first-class honours. He briefly studied at the University of Otago before accepting a scholarship to the University College London to study for a PhD in transition-metal chemistry. He was later awarded a DSc – a doctorate in science – in 1969.

After three years, he graduated and joined the staff. He took leave to attend Columbia University, in New York, for four months and started lecturing at several American universities. He times spoke at Gordon Research Conferences, a prestigious international scientific convention, three times. His work took him to 36 countries, including a university for black people in South Africa before apartheid ended, something he was strongly advised against.

"If you had something interesting to say, he was interested to hear it and would no doubt probe you with some testing questions," his son, Matthew Clark, said.

Matthew said despite living most of his life in England, there was never any doubt that his father was a "New Zealander at heart" and he remained fiercely loyal to his home country. He was a gentle man and a gentleman and didn't cheat, lie or raise his voice.

"That doesn't mean he wouldn't bend rules that he didn't agree with, such as smuggling banned publications of *Time* magazine into Eastern Europe, whilst the iron curtain was still in place."

Robin Clark proposed to Beatrice after watching the All Blacks beat the Barbarians at Cardiff Arms Park in 1964. The pair married two months later in Derby, England, and their children, Vicky and Matthew, were born in 1967 and 1971 respectively.

After returning to London, Clark became a professor in 1982 and was appointed as dean of science and head of chemistry.

In 1992, he was asked to develop a non-destructive technique to analyse the chemical composition of a painting to be able to spot forgeries. He developed the use of Raman spectroscopy to test the authentication of antique artworks.

He lectured several times at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, an organisation devoted to scientific education and research, becoming its secretary in 1998 and an honorary fellow in 2004. Clark's involvement in various committees extended to chairing the advisory council of the Ramsay Memorial Trust and the NZ Universities Graduates' Association in the UK, and he and took considerable interest in NZ High Commission matters.

He twice gave the address at the annual Anzac Day service in Guildhall, London, and was elected an honorary fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand in 1989. He was a fellow of the Royal Society of London in 1990, a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for contributions to science and to New Zealand's interests in the UK, a foreign fellow of the National Academy of Sciences, India, and an international member of the American Philosophical Society.

Clark is survived by his wife, two children and four grandchildren.

