The Clarks' Century

Last updated: 20 December 2005

In 1905, Jack Clark opened a photography studio in Brecon. It was the beginning of a family business which in 2005 celebrated its centenary. To mark the anniversary, a special exhibition was set up at Brecknock Museum where family friend Tony Elston made the following speech.

Written by Tony Elston from Brecon:

"Vernon's father, Jack Clark, was born in Lyonshall Herefordshire in 1881, and arrived in Brecon when his father came to take up an appointment as a gardener at Penoyre House. After school he also went to work for Mrs. McClintock at Penoyre. Whilst there he met, and fell in love with an attractive young maid called Ethel, whom he was later to marry.

He had a natural love of photography and decided this was what he wanted to do for a living. In 1905 he rented a property in Castle Street, and opened a studio. Ethel joined him as receptionist and general factotum. Business was not too brisk in those early days so he had to find a way to supplement his income. If the commissions would not come to him he would go to them.

During the summer months he would travel to such places as Scotland, the Isle of Man, Birkenhead and Edinburgh and worked as a beach photographer. He was an accomplished ventriloquist and puppeteer and would often entertain the children with his two dolls Teddy and Cissy. As he became more well known the commissions increased.

He was the official photographer for Christ College and did a great deal of work for Llandovery and Lampeter colleges.

Postcards were extremely popular at the time and Judges bought a lot of his work, particularly landscapes and views in the mountains. He would set off in the early hours to walk up the Beacons to catch the sunrise. On one occasion at "stop tap" at the Siddons, almost every one in the bar asked if they could join him on his early morning walk. Off he went with his entourage like the "Pied Piper of Hamlyn". It is not known how many reached the top, but a considerable number started out.

He was an early pioneer in more ways than one. He and my father set about generating electricity, Jack using an engine and generator from the back of his shop, and Dad by harnessing the water in the Honddu. In addition to making electricity for their own use, Jack was supplying consumers in Lion St. and Dad in the Struet. Jack bought his first car from my father and they became very close friends.

Whilst all this was going on, Ethel was expanding the shop trade. She was taking on new lines and in particular Basildon..."
Bond, turning out to be a winner. With the increase in trade they moved to bigger premises, 13 High St. In 1915 Vera was born followed by Vernon in 1923.

The shop, in common with most other businesses ticked over during the war. Vernon was doing essential work with the War Agricultural Executive, and was also helping the war effort as a member of Dad's army.

After the war, in the early 1950s, Jack had reached the age of 70 and Vernon - who had been working for the Pearl Assurance Co, and then Elstons - joined the family business. At the same time, Jack decided to "hang up his cameras" and concentrate on picture framing, and so began a new phase in the development of the business.

The years of post war austerity were coming to an end and Vernon and Norma, who had given up her job at Goughs the grocer to join the family, could see an opening for a well stocked gift and Welsh souvenir shop.

The sixties was a decade of gradually increasing turnover. In 1968, Andrew left school and joined the business, which had for some time been selling toys and games in a limited capacity. He appreciated the huge potential that existed so when the adjacent property came on the market in 1979 they bought it.

The children in Brecon must have thought a Genie had been busy with its magic lamp. Never before had they seen so many toys and games displayed under one roof in a sleepy little market town. Suddenly a small family business was competing with the big players.

In 1982 they realised after the birth of Ben, that no one was catering for the needs of young families and anyone wanting to buy a pram or pushchair had to look outside Brecon, so they opened a showroom in High St, and since 2001 nursery products can be purchased from their shop in Lion St. In the meanwhile, a further property in Lion Yard was renovated in 1983, which now houses Welsh gifts, crafts and souvenirs.

The family was delighted when in 1998 Andrew's son Ben became the fourth generation of Clarks to be involved. He had always had an ambition to join the family firm, unlike his uncle Phil who had already made it clear that business was not his "cup of tea".

I wonder if Uncle Jack, as I affectionately knew him, could have foreseen the way his modest little photography studio would blossom into a thriving one hundred year old operation.

I have always believed that a business is only as successful as an industrious and hard working family who can be trusted and relied upon. The word retirement does not enter the vocabulary. Uncle Jack, was still framing pictures up until his death when he was in his nineties and Vernon is still going strong in his eighties.

It could be said they are small fish in a big pond. Is this perhaps the reason for their success? At a time when big is supposedly beautiful it is the smaller operator who offers the personal service, the attention to detail, the customer care, the ability to identify a need, loyalty and honesty.
Whilst working hard, they still had time for community involvement. Jack with his children's entertainment. Vernon with his Town Band and Brecon Corries Football club, and Andrew with Brecon Motor Club and Squash Club. These are all factors which spell success, and in the case of the Clarks, a hundred years of it.

And what of the next hundred years. Will Ben see the changes in his lifetime that his great-grandfather experienced, for he actually saw the first cars on the streets of Britain, when the legal road speed was four miles an hour, and saw the first man to walk on the moon? I wonder?"

Written by Tony Elston from Brecon.

• Jack Clark's old photos...

your comments

Huw Parsons, Brecon
Clarks Gifts and Toys is a Brecon institution! I'm told that it's now one of the few remaining family run shops in the town. It's been here for decades. I believe that the toy shop itself is probably unmatched by any other small town for its size and service.

Lucy Elston from Saundersfoot
Just wanted to know whether it was my grandfather that wrote these comments. My father is Nick Elston and his father was John Anthony Thomas Elston. Born in Brecon!
Mon May 14 09:50:11 2007

Hilary Williams, Brecon
Clarks Shop in Brecon continues to provide first class service. When my son, now in his teens, was a baby, I bought many articles of baby equipment from the shop at competitive prices and I must have spent hundreds of pounds on Lego over the years!! Shops like these are so important in retaining the individuality of country towns and provide a quality of service which you cannot find in multi national stores. My family continue to shop locally for over 90% of our needs. As the saying goes "Use it or lose it!"
Mon Nov 27 09:43:38 2006

Fran Palmer
When I lived in the wool shop in the struet with my mum I remember going past the toy shop and always looking in the window. When I used to visit my mum with the twins she would be forever treating them with a visit to Clarks and a toy or two purchased.
Mon Oct 2 14:45:00 2006

Richard Evans, Dodford
I was in Mount Street CP School in the late 50s/early 60s. Like many from that era I moved away to get an education, or job, and now live in the Midlands. The internet lets us get news from Brecon and Wales. Occasionally I return to wander around Brecon and Andrew's face can be seen through the shop window.
Fri Dec 23 18:02:57 2005

This site is now closed and cannot accept new comments.
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- **The Clarks Centenary...**

The Clark family business began in 1905 when Jack Clark opened a photographic studio in a rented shop in Castle Street, Brecon.

---

**your comments**

**Catherine Rose(Breakspear)**

I was born and raised in Brecon and remember how we used to line the streets whenever regimental bands would march through the town. It was always exciting and we all felt very patriotic and proud. bands still march but whenever I visit I always feel dissapointed that only a handful bother to turn out ......
Sun Mar 1 19:51:18 2009

**Dave Burgess**

As a friend of the Clark family, particularly with the youngest (ben) of which I know from school so have grown up with him, its so warming to know that local businesses can survive no doubt with a lot of hard work and time spent to achieve something so respected and admirable.I was lucky enough to have a personal invitation to the “100 years of clarks” exhibition and i must say what a very well presented and thought of display it was. It gave people of a younger generation to see the clarks of old and to only dream of what it was like yet at the same time for the elder members it was a time to step back in time and relive memories and share them through the clark family who have made it possible!
Thu Apr 12 16:47:27 2007

**Ceri Gerrish from Brecon**
I have lived in Brecon all my life and the best shop to call in when I was a child was Clarks "The Toy Shop" I am now a mother myself and find it still to be one of the best shops around. It is nice to have the personal service from the family. The photos on this web page are nice to see and it is good fun working out where they are. I do like the travelling fair photo which looks like it was taken from the flat above the original shop. I do hope this shop and family will be here for the next 100 years.


This site is now closed and cannot accept new comments.
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- The Clarks Centenary...

A display of Jack's photographic equipment

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Brecon Life
'That's how it was...'
A Brecon Revealed
Brecon Town Concert Band
Brecon and district disABLEd club
Brecon's Brigade
Brecon's Methodist Bishop
Burma Star's Last Post
Children's Contact Centre
Christmas Fayre 2008
Clive Nicholls
Cricket Reunion
Gurkha Exhibition
Gurkha Parade 2008
Johnny Nigma
Mountain Trail Challenge
My Town
Pen Portrait
Photo tour
Pioneering Physician
Regimental Museum
Reservoirs
Round the Lake
Roy Noble Show
Sarah Fleming
Swan of Usk Poetry Circle
Talybont-on-Usk
The Beacons Art Project
The Clarks' Century
The Speaker
Twin Towns
Useful Info
White Out
Wildlife Photos
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- **The Clarks Centenary...**

An advert for Jack's photographic business

"A few bold blots will suggest a portrait but for a lifelike photograph you must go to J Clark Artist - Photographer - High Street, Brecon"
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- **The Clarks Centenary...**

A family portrait taken in Jack's studio in 1906

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12  13  14  15  16
17  18  19  20
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- The Clarks Centenary...

Jack Clark was an accomplished ventriloquist

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

more from this section

Brecon Life
'That's how it was...' A Brecon Revealed Brecknock Museum Brecon Bellies Brecon Film Society Brecon Fringe Brecon Town Concert Band Brecon and district disabled club Brecon's Brigade Brecon's Methodist Bishop Burma Star's Last Post Children's Contact Centre Christmas Fayre 2008 Clive Nicholls Cricket Reunion Gurkha Exhibition Gurkha Parade 2008 Johnny Nigma Mountain Trail Challenge My Town Pen Portrait Photo tour Pioneering Physician Regimental Museum Reservoirs Round the Lake Roy Noble Show Sarah Fleming Swan of Usk Poetry Circle Talybont-on-Usk The Beacons Art Project The Clarks' Century The Speaker Twin Towns Useful Info White Out Wildlife Photos
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- The Clarks Centenary...
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

• The Clarks Centenary...

Another of Jack Clark's cars

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Brecon Life

'That's how it was...'
A Brecon Revealed
Brecon Bellies
Brecon Film Society
Brecon Fringe
Brecon Town Concert Band
Brecon and district disABLEd club
Brecon's Brigade
Brecon's Methodist Bishop
Burma Star's Last Post
Children's Contact Centre
Christmas Fayre 2008
Clive Nicholls
Cricket Reunion
Gurkha Exhibition
Gurkha Parade 2008
Johnny Nigma
Mountain Trail Challenge
My Town
Pen Portrait
Photo tour
Pioneering Physician
Regimental Museum
Reservoirs
Round the Lake
Roy Noble Show
Sarah Fleming
Swan of Usk Poetry Circle
Talybont-on-Usk
The Beacons Art Project
The Clarks' Century
The Speaker
Twin Towns
Useful Info
White Out
Wildlife Photos
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

• The Clarks Centenary...
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- **The Clarks Centenary...**

![The opening of the Electric Theatre in Brecon](image)

Jack's collection of old photographs have preserved a precious slice of Brecon life. As family friend Tony Elston remarked when he opened the Clarks exhibition at Brecknock Museum in September 2005:

"Without Jack and his camera and the far sightedness of the family in saving so much of his work, 100 years of important social history would not now be available as a legacy for all to enjoy".
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

• The Clarks Centenary...
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- The Clarks Centenary...

Brecon Street Party

more from this section

Brecon Life

'That's how it was...
A Brecon Revealed
Brecknock Museum
Brecon Bellies
Brecon Film Society
Brecon Fringe
Brecon Town Concert Band
Brecon and district disABLEd club
Brecon's Brigade
Brecon's Methodist Bishop
Burma Star's Last Post
Children's Contact Centre
Christmas Fayre 2008
Clive Nicholls
Cricket Reunion
Gurkha Exhibition
Gurkha Parade 2008
Johnny Nigma
Mountain Trail Challenge
My Town
Pen Portrait
Photo tour
Pioneering Physician
Regimental Museum
Reservoirs
Round the Lake
Roy Noble Show
Sarah Fleming
Swan of Usk Poetry Circle
Talybont-on-Usk
The Beacons Art Project
The Clarks' Century
The Speaker
Twin Towns
Useful Info
White Out
Wildlife Photos
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- The Clarks Centenary...

Brecon Street Scene

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10  11  12  13  14  15  16
  17  18  19  20

more from this section

Brecon Life

'That's how it was...'
A Brecon Revealed
Brecknock Museum
Brecon Bellies
Brecon Film Society
Brecon Fringe
Brecon Town Concert Band
Brecon and district disABLEd club
Brecon's Brigade
Brecon's Methodist Bishop
Burma Star's Last Post
Children's Contact Centre
Christmas Fayre 2008
Clive Nicholls
Cricket Reunion
Gurkha Exhibition
Gurkha Parade 2008
Johnny Nigma
Mountain Trail Challenge
My Town
Pen Portrait
Photo tour
Pioneering Physician
Regimental Museum
Reservoirs
Round the Lake
Roy Noble Show
Sarah Fleming
Swan of Usk Poetry Circle
Talybont-on-Usk
The Beacons Art Project
The Clarks’ Century
The Speaker
Twin Towns
Useful Info
White Out
Wildlife Photos
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- **The Clarks Centenary...**

---

Brecon Life

'That's how it was...'

A Brecon Revealed
Brecknock Museum
Brecon Bellies
Brecon Film Society
Brecon Fringe
Brecon Town Concert Band
Brecon and district disABLEd club
Brecon's Brigade
Brecon's Methodist Bishop
Burma Star's Last Post
Children's Contact Centre
Christmas Fayre 2008
Clive Nicholls
Cricket Reunion
Gurkha Exhibition
Gurkha Parade 2008
Johnny Nigma
Mountain Trail Challenge
My Town
Pen Portrait
Photo tour
Pioneering Physician
Regimental Museum
Reservoirs
Round the Lake
Roy Noble Show
Sarah Fleming
Swan of Usk Poetry Circle
Talybont-on-Usk
The Beacons Art Project
The Clarks’ Century
The Speaker
Twin Towns
Useful Info
White Out
Wildlife Photos
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- **The Clarks Centenary...**

> A touring company perform in the centre of Brecon

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- The Clarks Centenary...

Jack Clark took photographs of many of Brecon's sporting clubs.
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

• The Clarks Centenary...

Brecon Corinthians AFC 1947-48

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20

Brecon Life

'That's how it was...' A Brecon Revealed
Brecon Bellis
Brecon Film Society
Brecon Fringe
Brecon Town Concert Band
Brecon and district disABLEd club
Brecon's Brigade
Brecon's Methodist Bishop
Burma Star's Last Post
Children's Contact Centre
Christmas Fayre 2008
Clive Nicholls
Cricket Reunion
Gurkha Exhibition
Gurkha Parade 2008
Johnny Nigma
Mountain Trail Challenge
My Town
Pen Portrait
Photo tour
Pioneering Physician
Regimental Museum
Reservoirs
Round the Lake
Roy Noble Show
Sarah Fleming
Swan of Usk Poetry Circle
Talybont-on-Usk
The Beacons Art Project
The Clarks' Century
The Speaker
Twin Towns
Useful Info
White Out
Wildlife Photos
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

- **The Clarks Centenary...**

Jack Clark was the official photographer for Christ College, Brecon.
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

• The Clarks Centenary...

Christ College Junior XV 1932-33

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
17 18 19 20

Brecon Life
'That's how it was...'
A Brecon Revealed
Brecknock Museum
Brecon Bellies
Brecon Film Society
Brecon Fringe
Brecon Town Concert Band
Brecon and district disABLEd club
Brecon's Brigade
Brecon's Methodist Bishop
Burma Star's Last Post
Children's Contact Centre
Christmas Fayre 2008
Clive Nicholls
Cricket Reunion
Gurkha Exhibition
Gurkha Parade 2008
Johnny Nigma
Mountain Trail Challenge
My Town
Pen Portrait
Photo tour
Pioneering Physician
Regimental Museum
Reservoirs
Round the Lake
Roy Noble Show
Sarah Fleming
Swan of Usk Poetry Circle
Talybont-on-Usk
The Beacons Art Project
The Clarks' Century
The Speaker
Twin Towns
Useful Info
White Out
Wildlife Photos
Jack Clark's Old Photos

Last updated: 13 December 2005

Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

* The Clarks Centenary *

[Image of Vernon Clark as a young man]

Jack Clark's son Vernon, who was born in 1923, joined the family business in 1950s and opened a gift and toy shop in 13 High Street.
Photographer Jack Clark (1881-1975) opened his first studio in Brecon in 1905. Preserved by his family, the pictures he took provide a permanent reminder of Brecon in bygone days.

The Clarks Centenary...

Three generations of the Clark family - Ben, Vernon and Andrew

Jack Clark's great grandson Ben (born 1981) joined the business in 1997. He's pictured here with his grandfather Vernon and his father Andrew who joined the business in the late 1960s. A century after Jack opened his photography studio, the family now own four different shops in Brecon.