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Ursula Clark:

Architectural photographer

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Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s, Ursula Clark (1940-2000) created around 20,000 black-and-white negatives featuring the built environment of Britain and continental Europe. They form the largest single collection of images by a woman photographer held by Historic England.¹ To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of her death, this article explores how and why these remarkable images were made and the unique legacy that she has left to the history of photography.

Oriel Press

In July 1962, a new publishing company emerged from Newcastle upon Tyne in North East England. *Oriel Press* was the brainchild of Professor Bruce Allsopp (1912-2000). His academic career in architecture flourished either side of the Second World War, first in Leeds and later in Newcastle. A Fellow of RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects), he was a founding member and later Chair of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain (1960-65), and a Master of the Art Workers Guild (1970). Something of a Renaissance man, he included novel writing and painting among his many interests.

In setting up *Oriel Press*, Allsopp wanted to create a regional imprint independent of London publishers. He hoped it would provide a platform for sharing ideas, particularly about the built environment (figure 1). The

Figure 1. View of the Castlerigg Stone Circle, looking north and showing two large stones either side of a passageway. © Historic England Archive/Ursula Clark Collection. UXC01/01/01/0151/28.



sub-title of the firm's first illustrated guide *Architecture of France* (1963) reflected that ambition: 'The Caves to Corbusier.' To help fulfil his publishing vision, 22-year-old Ursula Clark was hired as the firm's Photographic Editor (figure 2).

Born in the Newcastle suburb of Gosforth on 24 February 1940, Ursula was educated in local schools.² She took up photography during her teens. The medium it seems was in her blood. Since the mid-nineteenth century, her father's side of the family had run *Robert Clark*, a cutlery and optician business in the city centre. Its wares during one period either side of

Figure 2. A portrait of Ursula Clark with Durham Castle in the background. © Historic England Archive/Ursula Clark Collection. UXC01/01/01/0905/39.





Figure 3. The rear elevation of Bessie Surtees House seen from an elevated vantage point to the north, with views of the roof of the Guildhall and New Tyne Bridge in the background. © Historic England Archive/Ursula Clark Collection. UXC01/01/01/0431/04.

1900 included both cameras and optical lanterns and slides.

In 1958, Ursula joined the Photography Department of King's College in Newcastle (then part of Durham University) as a Photographic Assistant.³ It was this photographic training together with an interest in architecture that brought her to Bruce Allsopp's

to the flyleaf, its pocket-sized France guide was 'based on the latest research ... intended for tourists, they are also useful for students of architecture and specially valuable for school parties going abroad.'⁴ The text was decidedly non-academic with around 230 photographs reproduced as halftone illustrations across its ninety-six pages. Readers were led through a succinct

attention. Another family influence may have been partly responsible. Before her marriage, Ursula's mother had lived in historic old buildings around Newcastle. These included Leazes Terrace (now Grade 1 listed) in the shadow of Newcastle United's football ground, and Bessie Surtees House, a building dating back to Tudor times, which has a spectacular view of the Tyne Bridge that opened in 1928 (figure 3).

The title page of *Architecture of France* credited Allsopp, a skilled photographer in his own right, and Clark as co-authors (figure 4). The background to Oriel's launch and intended market was the arrival in Britain of continental package holidays and budget air travel. According

Figure 4. Front cover and title page of *Architecture of France* by Bruce Allsopp and Ursula Clark (Oriel Press, 1963). Author's collection.

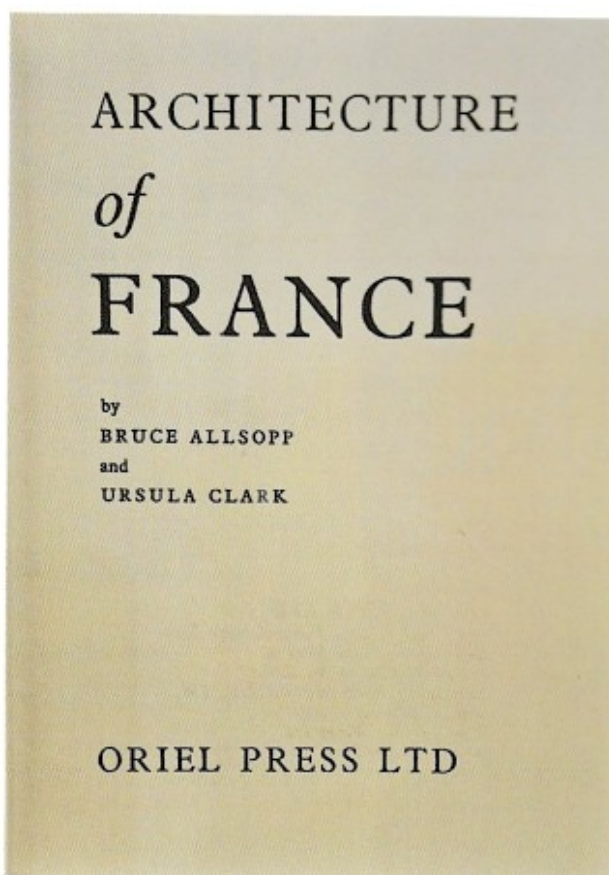
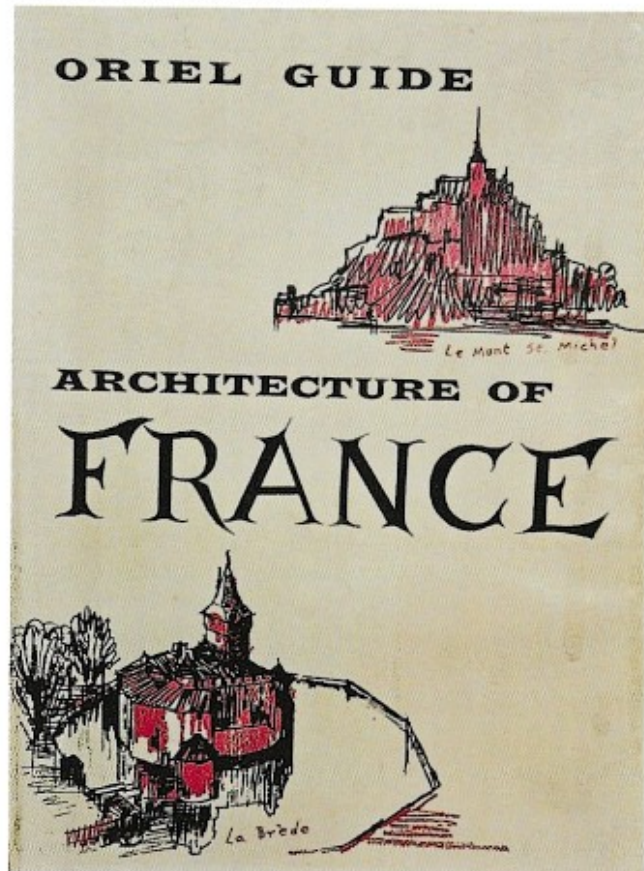


Figure 5. Double page spread from *Architecture of France* (Oriel Press, 1963) featuring Mont St. Michel, Caen Abbey and Coutances Cathedral, Normandy. Author's collection.

chronological history of architecture with accompanying maps and a section devoted to themed tours.

Though details of Ursula's photographic equipment are not known, her hand-written notes for *Architecture of France* reveal that she used 35mm black-and-white negative film. She was a frequent visitor to *Bacon's Cameras*, a Newcastle business like her own family's with its roots in the nineteenth century. Conveniently, *Bacon's* was in Ridley Place where *Oriel* had offices at number 27, a two-storey brick-built terraced house. As an insight into the publisher's modest beginnings, her France shot list was headed 'Ursula's holiday.'

One of the design challenges she faced was integrating multiple photographic images on to pocket-size pages. This informed her photographic approach, setting aside other aesthetic considerations in favour of how each image would look on the printed page. Despite space restrictions, the guide's effective lay-out confirmed that she had the necessary talent and flair for the task at hand (figure 5).

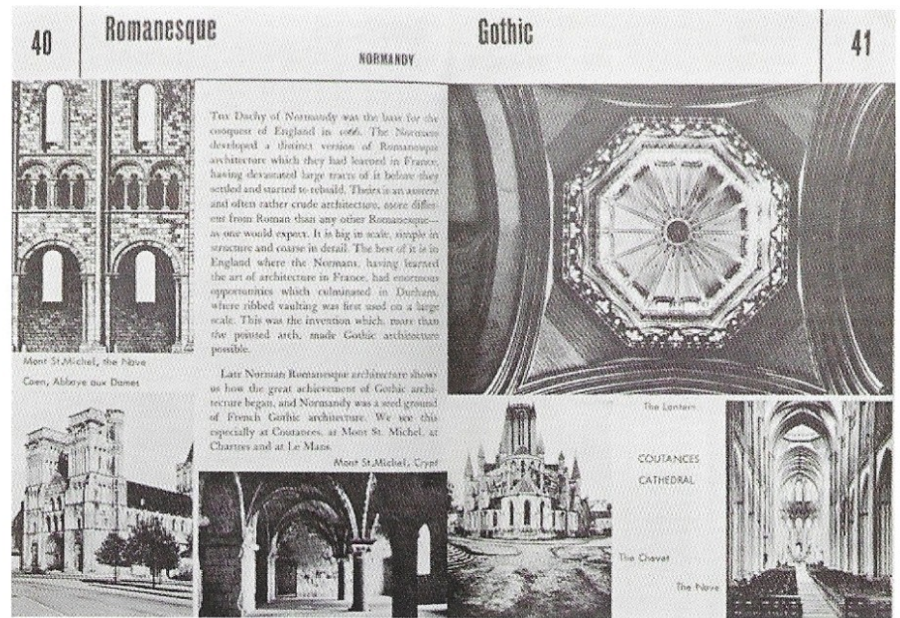
'An Admirable New Series'

The critics agreed. Press reaction to the France guide was positive with the *Times Literary Supplement* declaring: 'An admirable new series. An intelligent choice of illustrations, attractively laid out, is pointed by a terse and informative text.' Sales from an initial print run of 5,000 copies were sufficiently encouraging to result in two further *Oriel Guides* published the following year.

Architecture of Italy and *Architecture of England* (1964) again featured Allsopp & Clark as co-authors. These books were the first of many *Oriel* publications printed by Lund Humphries of Bradford, a company with a long-established reputation for high-quality offset-lithography.⁵ *Oriel* also branched out into producing books of humour, poetry and even academic conference papers.

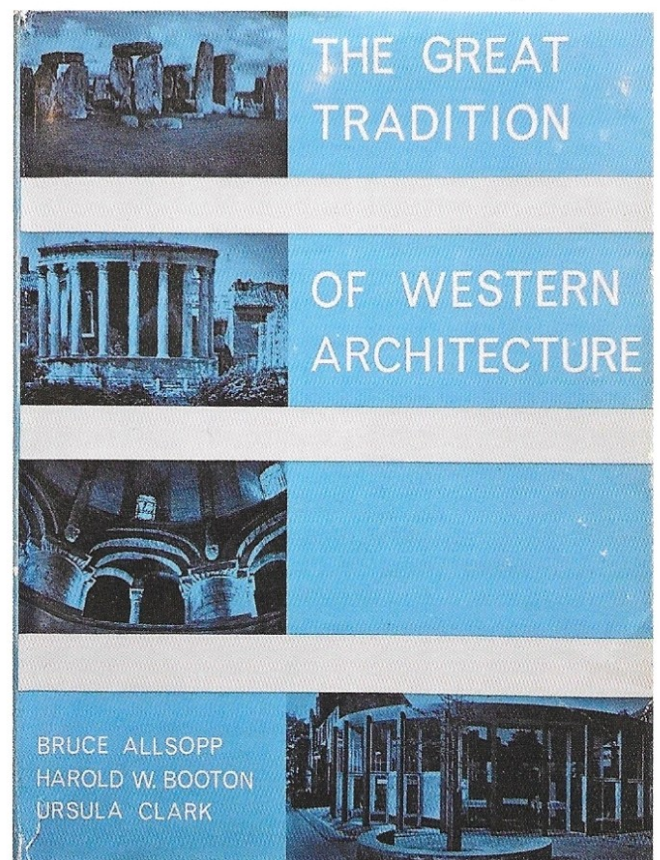
By this point, the company's activities were attracting wider interest from Bruce Allsopp's academic network. John Gloag (1896-1981), celebrated for his writing on architecture and design, was engaged to produce *Enjoying Architecture* (1965) with many of

Figure 6. Front cover of *The Great Tradition of Western Architecture* (A. & C. Black, 1966) featuring Jesmond Branch Library, Newcastle (bottom image). Author's collection.



Ursula's photographs illustrating the text. These included the new Coventry Cathedral completed in 1962 to designs by Sir Basil Spence. Its modernist appearance was in stark contrast to the neighbouring ruins of the Gothic cathedral that had been bombed during the Second World War.

Returning to continental Europe, *Architecture of Spain* (1966) by Harold W. Booton mirrored growing interest in a destination that British tourists were flocking to in increasing numbers. Later that year, the Spain volume was re-published together with material from the earlier *Oriel Guides* to France, Italy and England. *The Great Tradition of Western Architecture* (A. & C. Black, London) was credited to Allsopp, Booton and Clark. It featured around 700 photographs that



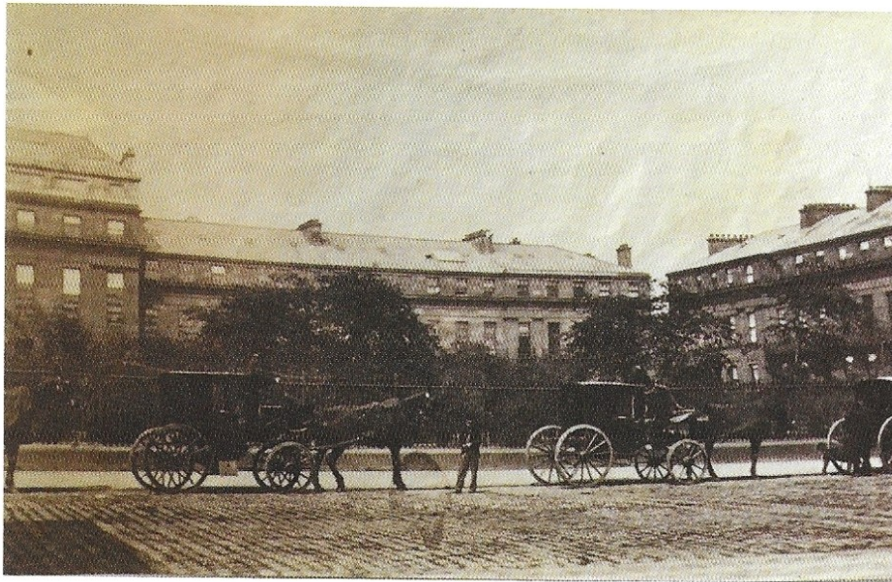


Figure 7. Eldon Square, Newcastle on Tyne c. 1860s. Unknown photographer. Private Collection, Zurich.

were shown off to far better effect by a larger page format.

One of Ursula's photographs chosen to grace the front cover (beneath those of Stonehenge, the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli, and St. Sepulchre, Cambridge) featured 1963's Jesmond Branch Library, Newcastle (figure 6). It was an innovative circular building designed by Harry Faulkner Brown, who had recently started an architecture practice in the city.⁶ Today, Jesmond Branch Library is a Grade II listed building.

An insight into *Oriel Press* as a fledgling publisher can be gained from 1966 press interviews promoting another of its books. *Photography for Tourists* was an unashamedly down-to-earth practical guide with tips including 'Buying a Camera' and 'Printing and Projection.' Whilst Bruce Allsopp fitted in publishing projects alongside his role as Senior Lecturer in Architecture at Newcastle University (later Director of Architectural Studies and then Reader), the company's working staff of five comprised a secretary/administrator, a secretary, one artist and two photographers including Ursula. They operated from 'three small rooms which contain files, a library, the studio, a dark room, developing facilities and typewriters.'⁷

Oriel Studios also offered 'to undertake photographic work where high quality and individual attention are called for'. This included 'printing from customers negatives and making fine prints in black-and-white from colour transparencies'. The service was offered at a minimum prepaid charge of 3 guineas (around £50 in today's money).⁸ Given the production quality of Ursula's own photographs, this service offered an attractive option for customers though it's not known how popular it was.

For another press article, Ursula was interviewed by *The Journal*, Newcastle and underlined the collaborative nature of *Oriel Guides*. For his *North Country Notes* column, Peter Anthony explained that 'some of the 200 photographs in the new handbook

were taken ... during trips to the Continent ... by Mr. Allsopp and herself in connection with the guides or on holiday. 'I have been to Italy, France, Spain and the Benelux countries,' she says, 'and Mr. Allsopp has been to many others.'⁹ Reviewers also commented that *Oriel Guides* with their extensive use of photographs perfectly complemented the in-depth textual analysis provided by the better-known *Pevsner Architectural Guides*.¹⁰

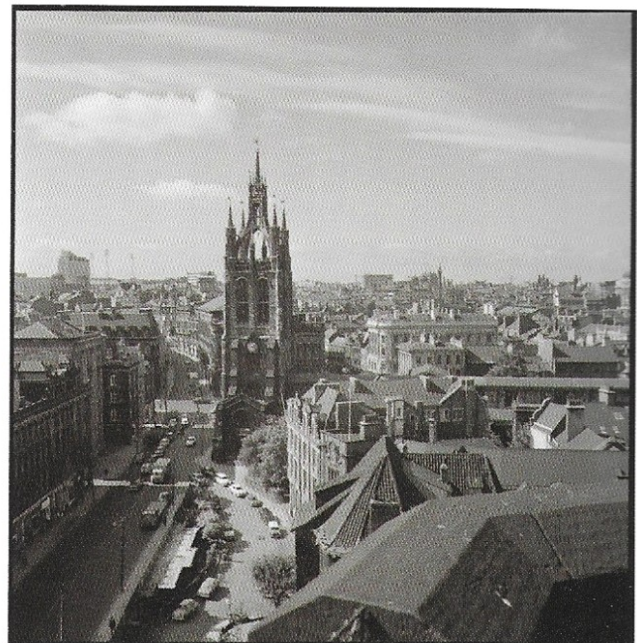
Now firmly established, Allsopp's ambition for *Oriel Press* was to make it world-famous. Publicity material stated that guides 'in preparation' included 'USA ... Greece, Scandinavia,

Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg ... Ireland, Wales, Austria and Switzerland.'¹¹ But a hoped-for American partner, who presumably would have injected the capital required to help realise these plans, failed to materialise. Instead, the company turned its attention to the buildings on its doorstep and went in search of financial support locally.

Historic Architecture series

Historic Architecture of Newcastle upon Tyne (1967) edited by Bruce Allsopp with 'all other photography by Ursula Clark' (apart from two credited photos) was a perfect showcase for their combined talents. For

Figure 8. Exterior view of St. Nicholas' Cathedral Church, Newcastle showing the west tower from a high elevation in the south, most likely the roof of Castle Garth's Keep. © Historic England Archive/Ursula Clark Collection. UXC01/01/02/045/04.



funding, *Oriel* turned to sponsors in the shape of the Northumberland and Newcastle Society, a conservation body founded in 1924, and Newcastle City Council.

Ironically, the local authority was caught up in ongoing battles with bodies such as its co-sponsors. These revolved around a controversial architectural vision for the city shaped by its council leader, the Labour politician T. Dan Smith (1915–1993). He and his supporters believed that Newcastle could become a ‘Brasilia of the North’ harnessing the best in modern design. Unsanitary housing and decaying old buildings would be demolished and replaced by the ‘concrete dreams’ of modernist architects from Britain, Europe and beyond.

Figure 9. St. Nicholas’ Church, Newcastle on Tyne c.1860s by W. & D. Downey of 9 Eldon Square, Newcastle on Tyne. Carte de visite. NB. The pencil notation ‘St. Peters’ in an unknown hand is incorrect. Author’s collection.



Figure 10. ‘A view of a range of Eldon Square being demolished, possibly the west range seen from the rear.’ © Historic England Archive/Ursula Clark Collection. UXC01/01/01/0975/06.

One of the key battlegrounds in the heart of Newcastle was Eldon Square, a three-sided terrace of Georgian houses (figure 7). It was designed by John Dobson whose architectural legacy to the city together with that of the builder Richard Grainger amongst others was (and still is) much in evidence. No doubt, Ursula knew that Eldon Square was once home to the studios of W. & D. Downey, later court photographers to Queen Victoria and the royal family. Her own photograph of Newcastle Cathedral for *Oriel* with its distinctive lantern tower (figure 8) echoes one taken by Downey a century earlier and published as a carte de visite (figure 9). When two sides of Eldon Square were demolished in the early 1970s to make way for a modern shopping precinct, Ursula and her camera captured its demolition (figure 10).

Research for this article has also revealed that Ursula had a unique perspective on what was happening architecturally in the city where she was born and raised. Electoral Registers confirm that during these tumultuous years of the 1960s, the Clarks lived next door to T. Dan Smith and his family. Belle Grove Terrace (built c.1868) with its three-storey houses had a superb view across the city to the River Tyne. As if to underline her own history, Ursula’s photograph of Belle Grove Terrace was featured in the ‘Nineteenth Century’ pages of *Historic Architecture of Newcastle*. As to being neighbours, the relationship between the Clark and Smith families may well have opened a door to a commercial opportunity for *Oriel* Press. The company later published *Dan Smith: An Autobiography* (1970).¹²

With the success of its Newcastle volume, the *Historic Architecture* ... format prompted an *Oriel* series featuring Northumberland (1969), Leeds (1969) and County Durham (1971). Again, sponsorship was obtained from a range of regional bodies including Northumberland County Council, Leeds Civic Society,



Figure 11. A general view of Durham overlooking the River Wear and Framwellgate Bridge, with Durham Castle to the left and the Cathedral Church in the background, seen from a high vantage in the north-west.
© Historic England Archive/Ursula Clark Collection. UXC01/01/01/0260/09.

the Civic Trust for the North East and Durham County Council. Ursula's camera regularly captured superb photographs, such as a view of Durham including its castle and Romanesque cathedral, that didn't make the published books (figure 11).

The Northumberland title soon required a reprint and featured among a display of *Oriel* titles in the British Pavilion at *Expo 70* in Tokyo, Japan.¹³ A member of *Oriel Press* staff told *The Journal*, Newcastle: 'It's been one of our best sellers. All sorts of people are going for it.'¹⁴ Its 'Acknowledgements' also thanked 'Mr. Peter Chatfield for his invaluable help in photography, transport and checking.'¹⁵ In June 1970, Ursula Mary Clark and Peter James Chatfield were married.¹⁶

As photographic editor, Ursula not only took many of the featured photographs in *Oriel's* books and other ad hoc projects for the company. She also worked closely with various outside authors on successfully combining their text with her illustrations. These included respected writers on architecture such as Derek Linstrum (Leeds) and Neville Whittaker (County Durham). The Leeds volume had the added attraction of a *Preface* written by John (later Sir John) Betjeman, who had spent the previous summer filming a programme about the Yorkshire city for the BBC.¹⁷

George Hay (1911-1986), another distinguished writer, authored *Architecture of Scotland* (1969). This included modern structures such as the Forth Road Bridge (1958-1964) and the Plant House at Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens (1967). It was hard to ignore the range of modernist and brutalist structures appearing in the urban landscape and the trend was recorded in another *Oriel* publication, *Modern Architecture of Northern England* (1969).

Edited by Bruce Allsopp, it was sponsored by the Northern Architectural Association, an organisation

founded in Newcastle in 1858 by a group of architects, who had shaped the look of the city at that time. Ursula's role photographically was to create 'a visual experience of the quality and variety of architecture, which is being produced in the north.'¹⁸ Civic buildings, tower blocks, residential developments, sports centres, schools and libraries brought the story of architecture in the region up to date.

Ursula Clark's Archive

During her work for *Oriel Press*, Ursula accumulated around 20,000 mostly black-and-white negatives. Many of the buildings she recorded have since been demolished or significantly changed. These not only provide an invaluable record of what's been lost or modified but also

allow architectural history to be viewed retrospectively and so more fully understood.

What becomes clear from viewing her archive is that during her travels across Britain and the Continent, Ursula engaged with inquisitive members of the public. She even included some of them in her photographs (figure 12). Images such as this echo the later documentary/social history work of photographers operating in the region such as Peter Mitchell, Sirkka-Liisa Kontinen and Tish Murtha. Given this, the quality of Ursula's images beyond the field of architectural photography is deserving of greater study and appreciation.

In 1970, reflecting its increased commercial activity and a US distribution deal, *Oriel Press* moved across Ridley Place to larger premises at number 32. Plans were even put in place to expand the staff from eleven to forty. However, in August 1972, *The Journal*, Newcastle, reported: 'Publisher needs £40,000 to keep going.'¹⁹ In today's money, that's more than £450,000. These serious cash-flow problems prompted a series of creditors' meetings. One newspaper reported that a publishing firm in Aberdeen had agreed to take on *Oriel's* 100 or so titles. This buy-out, it was said, saved the jobs of five staff, presumably including Ursula Clark's.²⁰

However, by the following February, a new owner had appeared in the form of *Routledge Kegan Paul*. RKP was a long-established publishing house of the type that Bruce Allsopp had set up *Oriel Press* to rival. *Oriel* assets and sales were taken over with 25 tons of stock being transferred from Newcastle to RKP's Oxfordshire warehouse.²¹ Allsopp remained as Managing Director, *Oriel* retained its distinctive bay window logo on the firm's letterhead and its offices moved back to 27 Ridley Place where it had all started

in 1962.

In the years that followed, a small number of earlier *Oriel Press* titles were given a new lease of life. The silver jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II and a renewed interest in British history encouraged *RKP* to reissue *Architecture of Scotland* by George Hay in a revised edition (1977), and Allsopp & Clark's best work was repackaged in two new volumes, *Historic Architecture of Northumberland and Newcastle upon Tyne* (1977) and *English Architecture* (1979). The latter's cover featured colour photographs for the first time and one of the images used was credited to Ursula's husband Peter Chatfield. Ursula herself was credited as 'an architectural historian in her own right' though that had been her status for many years. By the end of the decade following the *RKP* take-over, Ursula's role with *Oriel Press* came to an end. Thereafter, she provided occasional assistance to other organisations and authors. She died following a short illness on 28 February 2000.²²

Following her death, Ursula's husband donated her photographic archive to the National Monuments Record (NMR), now in the care of Historic England. Around 2,000 images have been digitised, mostly of North East England, a region which was previously under-represented. The Ursula Clark Collection is searchable via Ursula Clark (1940-2000) | Historic England

Acknowledgements

My thanks to staff at the Historic England Archive, Swindon, Wiltshire for their help in sourcing material and images for this article. I would be interested to hear from anyone who has memories of *Oriel Press* and in particular any family or friends of Ursula Clark and Bruce Allsopp via email at davidbarber@btinternet.com

The Author

Dr David Barber is a photohistorian with a research interest in the photographers and photography of North East England. His weekly Pressphotoman blog - <https://pressphotoman.com> - has a growing audience of photohistory enthusiasts around the world. Follow Pressphotoman on Bluesky and Instagram.

Notes and References

¹ Ursula Clark Collection, Historic England Archive, Swindon, Wiltshire.

² 'Ursula Mary Clark,' *Historic England* biography/list of books.

³ 'Ursula Mary Clark,' *Historic England* biography/list of books.

⁴ Bruce Allsopp and Ursula Clark, *Architecture of France* (Oriel Press, Newcastle, 1963), flyleaf.

⁵ Percy Lund (1863-1943), elected to membership of the Royal Photographic Society in 1898, founded Percy Lund & Co (later Percy Lund, Humphries & Co, and Lund Humphries) in the early 1880s as a publishing platform for his wide range of interests.

⁶ FaulknerBrowns continues today as an architectural practice in Newcastle upon Tyne with offices in Dublin and Vancouver.

⁷ *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 18 February 1966.

⁸ Bruce Allsopp and Ursula Clark, *Photography for Tourists* (Oriel Press, 1966), p. 96.

⁹ *The Journal*, Newcastle, 20 June 1966.

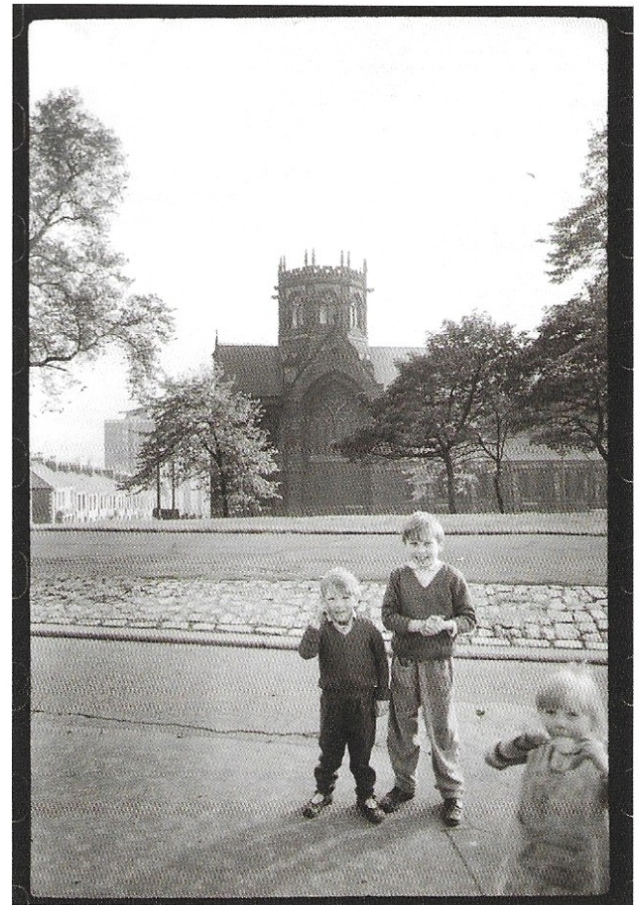


Figure 12. An exterior view of St Michael's Church showing the north elevation and crossing tower and three children posed in the foreground, seen from the south side of Elswick Park. © Historic England Archive/Ursula Clark Collection. UXC01/01/01/0521/09.

¹⁰ Sir Nikolaus Pevsner (1902-1983) produced a series of architectural guidebooks to the counties of England originally published between 1947 and 1972.

¹¹ Bruce Allsopp and Ursula Clark, *Architecture of England* (Oriel Press, 1964), rear cover.

¹² T. Dan Smith was caught up in a scandal involving corrupt architect John Poulson. In 1974, Smith pleaded guilty to corruption charges and was jailed for six years.

¹³ *The Journal*, Newcastle, 30 April 1970.

¹⁴ *The Journal*, Newcastle, 29 July 1970.

¹⁵ Bruce Allsopp and Ursula Clark, *Architecture of Northumberland* (Oriel Press, 1969), acknowledgements.

¹⁶ 'Ursula Mary Clark,' *Historic England* biography/list of books.

¹⁷ 'A Poet Goes North' (1968) presented by John Betjeman was made for the BBC, but for reasons unknown, it was not broadcast at the time. Twenty years later, Leeds Civic Trust presented a copy to the British Film Institute. Poet Goes North online - BFI Player

¹⁸ Bruce Allsopp (ed.), *Modern Architecture of Northern England*, (Oriel Press, 1969), p.5.

¹⁹ *The Journal*, Newcastle, 8 August 1972.

²⁰ *Evening Express*, Aberdeen, 29 September 1972.

²¹ *The Journal*, Newcastle, 1 February 1973.

²² 'Ursula Mary Clark,' *Historic England* biography/list of books.