

Renowned Yorkshire archaeologist and trailblazer Mary Kitson Clark has left her mark on York and the field of Archaeology in many ways. Her impact can be seen in the appointment of Elizabeth Grayson Hartley (1947 – 2018) as the Yorkshire Museum’s first keeper of Archaeology in 1971 and how archaeologists Mary Beard and Alice Roberts regularly grace our TV screens.¹ Clark’s impact can also be seen in the recent appointment of Deborah Smith as president of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society in February 2024, its first female president in its 202-year history.² In this short biography, I will explore Clark’s life and legacy and her links with the York Museum Gardens.

Anna Mary Hawthorn Kitson Clark was born on the 14th of May 1905 in Leeds, Yorkshire to Edwin Kitson Clark and Georgina Kitson Clark.³ She studied History at the University of Cambridge and then took a diploma in Archaeology.⁴ In 1929, she joined fellow archaeologist Dorothy Garrod on her palaeolithic excavation in the Judean Desert in Palestine with an all-female team of archaeologists.⁵ At this excavation, she met her future husband Derwas James Chitty who she married in 1943.⁶ Clark was also very involved in Yorkshire’s archaeology and was Secretary of the Roman Antiquities Committee for Yorkshire from 1929 to 1943.⁷ Her ‘Gazetteer of Roman Remains in East Yorkshire’ which was published in 1935 remains a starting point for any study of the Romans in the north of England to this day.⁸ In 1938, she was also appointed Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries which was considered a notable achievement for a woman at that time.⁹ Additionally, Mary Kitson Clark is important to the history of the Yorkshire Museum. In 1941, she was elected the Honorary Curator of Roman Antiquities at the Museum and served until 1943.¹⁰ She was the first woman to be elected a curator at the Museum.¹¹ In the same year during the Second World War, Clark assembled a group of women to catalogue the Museum’s Roman artefacts and prepare them for evacuation to stately homes in the Yorkshire countryside.¹² Her actions ensured these artefacts can still be enjoyed in the Yorkshire Museum today. We can also see Clark’s legacy in the establishment of the University of York. During the Second World War, Clark ran summer schools in Archaeology which contributed to the eventual acceptance of York’s bid for a University in 1963.¹³ After publishing her last book on *The Monks of Ynys Enlli* in 2000, Clark died in 2005 at the age of 99.¹⁴

¹ ‘Elizabeth Hartley, Archaeologist’, *HerStoryYork*, accessed 20 November 2024, <https://www.herstoryyork.org.uk/elizabeth-hartley/>.

² ‘Deborah Smith President of Yorkshire Philosophical Society’, *York Press*, accessed 12 October 2024, <https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/24104596.yorkshire-philosophical-society-elect-first-female-president/>.

³ ‘Mary Kitson Clark’, in *Wikipedia*, 19 September 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mary_Kitson_Clark&oldid=1246459167.

⁴ Roger Pinder, ‘Trailblazer: Yorkshire Female Archaeologist – Mary Kitson Clark’, *Yorkshire Philosophical Society*, accessed 12 October 2024, <https://www.ypsyork.org/events/trailblazer-yorkshire-female-archaeologist-mary-kitson-clark/>.

⁵ ‘A Pioneer of Prehistory: Dorothy Garrod and the Caves of Mount Carmel’, *Pitt Rivers Museum*, accessed 29 October 2024, <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/pioneer-of-prehistory>; Sarah Sheils, ‘Trailblazer: Mary Kitson Clark Part 2.’, *Yorkshire Philosophical Society*, accessed 12 October 2024, <https://www.ypsyork.org/blog/trailblazer-mary-kitson-clark-part-2/>.

⁶ Pinder, ‘Trailblazer: Yorkshire Female Archaeologist’.

⁷ C. Stephen Briggs, ‘Mary Kitson Clark’, *The Independent*, accessed 12 October 2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/mary-kitson-clark-6757.html>.

⁸ Briggs, ‘Mary Kitson Clark.’

⁹ Sheils, ‘Trailblazer: Mary Kitson Clark Part 2.’

¹⁰ Briggs, ‘Mary Kitson Clark.’; ‘List of Keepers and Curators of the Yorkshire Museum’, in *Wikipedia*, 2 January 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_keepers_and_curators_of_the_Yorkshire_Museum&oldid=1193201792.

¹¹ *Wikipedia*, ‘List of Keepers and Curators of the Yorkshire Museum’.

¹² Sheils, ‘Trailblazer: Mary Kitson Clark Part 2.’

¹³ Sheils, ‘Trailblazer: Mary Kitson Clark Part 2.’

¹⁴ *Wikipedia*, ‘Mary Kitson Clark’; Briggs, ‘Mary Kitson Clark.’

Mary Kitson Clark is also an important figure in the history of the York Museum Gardens through her connection with the York Philosophical Society. The YPS is a charity founded in 1822 that works to promote the study of the natural sciences, archaeology, history and the antiquities in Yorkshire and beyond.¹⁵ In 1928 Clark was elected to full membership by the YPS as only the second woman to receive this title.¹⁶ She also served as a vice president of the society from 1950 to her death in 2005, becoming its longest serving vice president.¹⁷ During Clark's early vice presidency at YPS, the running of the York Museum Gardens underwent a lot of important change. In 1829, YPS created the Yorkshire Museum and a botanical garden that would form part of York Museum Gardens and the society alone was responsible for their maintenance and development.¹⁸ However, by early 1956, the annual costs of maintaining the gardens alone were higher than the Society's entire income from member's subscriptions.¹⁹ Subsequently, negotiations with York City Corporation for the transfer of the Gardens and Museum began and by late 1960 an agreement had been reached.²⁰ After 132 years York Museum Gardens was to be shared with the people of York under public ownership.²¹ Therefore, through Clark's role as vice president of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society during this period of transition, we can see her links to the changing place the York Museum Gardens has had within the city of York.

Therefore, there is no doubt that Mary Kitson Clark was a trailblazer for women in archaeology and in the Yorkshire philosophical society. Through exploring her life, we can see the resilience that was required of women when trying to be included in patriarchal academic spheres. For example, her role as Curator at the Yorkshire Museum was full time but was not paid and she was not chosen for the role of Museum Keeper despite her overqualification for the role.²² Similarly, Violet Rodgers Wloch (1914-1978) was never paid the same as a male equivalent in her role as the Deputy Curator of the Yorkshire Museum during the Second World War to the late 1940s.²³ However, thankfully Mary Kitson Clark's contribution to the field of Archaeology would not always go unnoticed. In 1985, British Roman scholars held a conference in Leeds in her honour.²⁴ The proceedings of this conference were later published in 1988 as *Recent Research in Roman Yorkshire: studies in honour of Mary Kitson Clark (Mrs Derwas Chitty)* with acknowledgment of her skills and 'the debt owed to Mary Kitson Clark's work by current research.'²⁵ Additionally, Clark's legacy was highlighted in York Museum Gardens by the 'York Trailblazers Project' from August to September 2024.²⁶ A Tansy beetle sculpture featuring painted Roman Mosaic patterns and flowers created by artist Sian Ellis was placed in the gardens.²⁷ This design tied together Clark's lasting impact on the study of Roman Yorkshire and her work in the Yorkshire Museum and Museum Gardens. Additionally, information

¹⁵ 'YPS History', *Yorkshire Philosophical Society*, accessed 29 October 2024, <https://www.ypsyork.org/about-yyps/yyps-history/>.

¹⁶ Sheils, 'Trailblazer: Mary Kitson Clark Part 2.'; Yorkshire Philosophical Society, 'Annual Report of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society' Yr.1928(1929) (1929), <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/263856#page/24/mode/1up>, 10.

¹⁷ Briggs, 'Mary Kitson Clark.'

¹⁸ 'YPS History.'

¹⁹ Hogarth, Peter J. and Anderson, Ewan W, *'The Most Fortunate Situation': The Story of York's Museum Gardens*. (York: Yorkshire Philosophical Society, 2018).167

²⁰ Hogarth and Anderson, *'The Most Fortunate Situation'*, 167.

²¹ Hogarth and Anderson, *'The Most Fortunate Situation'*, 168.

²² Pinder, 'Trailblazer: Yorkshire Female Archaeologist'; Sheils, 'Trailblazer: Mary Kitson Clark Part 2.'

²³ 'Violet Rodgers Wloch, Curator, York Castle Museum', *HerStoryYork*, accessed 20 November 2024, <https://www.herstoryyork.org.uk/violet-rodgers-curator-york-castle-museum/>.

²⁴ Briggs, 'Mary Kitson Clark.'

²⁵ J. Price et al., *Ebook of Recent Research in Roman Yorkshire: Studies in Honour of Mary Kitson Clark (Mrs Derwas Chitty)* (BAR Publishing, 1988), ix.

²⁶ 'York Trailblazers Sculpture List', *Visit York*, accessed 12 October 2024, <https://visityork.org/trails/york-trailblazers>.

²⁷ 'York Trailblazers Sculpture List'

below the statue summarised her achievements and legacy, introducing her to a new generation for those who came across her story while enjoying the gardens.²⁸ Through commemorative projects like this, York's pioneer women like Mary Kitson Clark continue to shape and inspire the city.

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²⁸ 'York Trailblazers Sculpture List'

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