

Nobby Clark

Keith S. Clark (1921–2008)

Graphic designer, illustrator, writer and artist

A Profile Commentary by
Philip Heath

Gerry Barton and I encountered Nobby Clark during our research for *Coral Route; Tasman Empire Airways Ltd, Flying Boats and the South Pacific* which was published in 2015 – Air New Zealand’s 75th anniversary year.¹ The book provided a wonderful opportunity to explore Nobby’s works and showcase surviving examples of his contributions to the development of TEAL visual identity. This paper expands on that account.



Born in Hull, Yorkshire, in 1921, Keith S. Clark showed an interest in drawing from an early age. Educated at Hull Technical College,² and keen on pursuing the creative path, he joined a small advertising firm in Hull as a copywriter and assistant, driving his railway signalman father to worry over his only child's future prosperity. Advancing to a London advertising firm, Clark attended evening drawing classes and was gradually assigned illustration and design work. World War II thrust him into service as a radio operator with the Royal Signals, and a unique tour through North Africa, Italy and France. Stationed in Paris and looking to make military service tolerable, he visited galleries and churches, and took art training at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. On return to civil life, and marriage to his sweetheart

Margaret Hussey in June 1945, the lure of adventure took the couple to Bombay in March 1947, with Clark to work for *The Times of India* as a writer and illustrator. One of his children's stories, 'The Little Sailor Boy', published in India in 1948, was broadcast by the BBC in Children's Hour. During a four-month holiday back in Hull in mid-1950 with their young son Timothy, Margaret reported to the Hull *Daily Mail* that she loved living in India.³ Nevertheless the economic and political turbulence that followed Indian partition and independence led to their leaving India in early April 1951. Having had a taste of lively ex-patriot life, and with the old country now distinctly unappealing, the family emigrated from England to New Zealand the following year.

When Clark arrived in Auckland in July 1952, the place seemed like a boom town, and a new life there quickly blossomed. As he recalled:

*'all those steak and eggs and fizzy beers!! It was so cosy and intimate and soon I knew all the local artists who taught exciting new skills such as concreting, drain-digging and homebrewing.'*⁴

Starting out at Ryder Advertising, Clark soon moved across to W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, which had held the Tasman Empire Airways Limited (TEAL) advertising account since Bill Haythornthwaite and George Moore established the firm in 1946. TEAL was extending its international capability beyond the trans-Tasman routes with the Auckland-Pacific Islands-Tahiti Coral Route flying boat service. Clark recalled TEAL to be the 'arty account', the 'cream of the accounts',⁵ allowing creative freedom and quality printing. Haythornthwaite, Moore, Arthur Thompson and Linwood Lipanovic had been garnering international recognition for TEAL's visual identity and destination posters particularly, with examples selected for *Modern Publicity* from 1952,⁶ and TEAL's playful graphic style became an ideal launching ground for Clark, whose work began appearing recognisably from 1953. The New Zealand-Fiji Douglas DC-6 Hibiscus Service from 1954, expanded TEAL's leisure market, providing a great opportunity for Clark to apply his extraordinary skills of caricature and setting, while his Pacific island themes were further lent an air of authenticity by an August 1955 familiarisation trip to Fiji. Vignettes for the *TEAL Flight Companion* magazine, provided to Hibiscus Service and Coral Route passengers, mimicked linocut / woodblock prints, as well as Fijian tapa cloth patterns. Also, his pineapples and coconut palms became persistent reminders of an exotic tropical paradise only hours from the nation's doorstep.

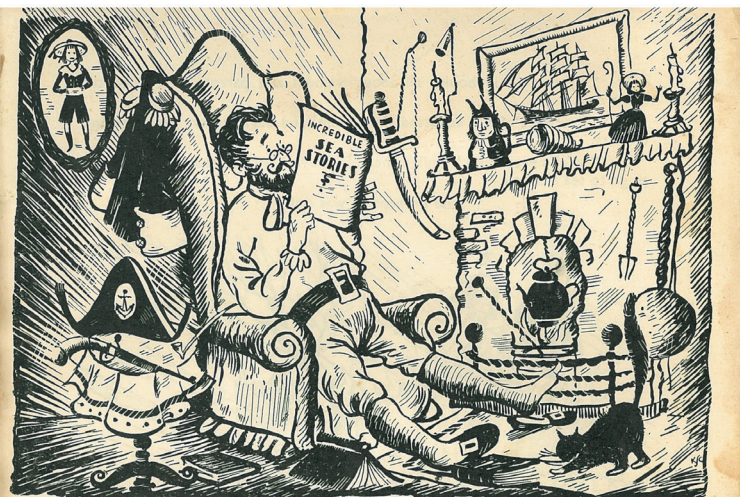


Illustration for Keith S. Clark's children's story, *The Little Sailor Boy* published in India, 1948.

"Well," snapped the sailor boy, and flicked a speck of dust off his coat—just to show how particular he was about appearances.
 "Don't you remember me?" said the piece of splintered wood very dolefully.
 "No, I don't," replied the sailor boy, and turned his back on it.
 "Look a little closer." The newcomer made a pathetic effort at puffing out his chest as the sailor boy turned on him a disdainful glance.
 "You don't mean to say—you can't really be—" gasped the sailor boy.
 "Yes, I'm the admiral," the pathetic creature said, and began to cry, which didn't sound very nice because he had a cold in his nose.
 "But where are your lovely medals and your big cutlass?" asked the sailor boy.
 "Gone—all gone in the storm," and the admiral began to cry much louder.
 "Never mind," said the sailor boy, who felt really sorry now for the poor admiral. "This is a very nice garden, and I feel sure that we will be quite happy. Personally, I am rather pleased, because it has been most lonely and I should love to hear some more about China, and South America and all the other wonderful places to which you have been."
 The admiral flushed a deep red beneath his splinters and sobbed;
 "I've never been to sea really—never at all."
 "But surely," cried the sailor boy (now he thought the admiral must certainly be ill or have lost his memory) "surely you must have been to sea, or how else would you know all those wonderful things about China and South America?"
 "I read it all in books," blurted out the admiral. A big tear rolled right down his cheek, fell with a wet splash on the garden path, and rolled away over the cliff and into the sea.

August, 1954. Page 5

Tahiti via la route du corail

Tahiti - la Perle du Pacifique

Par avion par **TEAL**

TASMAN EMPIRE AIRWAYS LIMITED
in association with QANTAS and B.O.A.C.
Reservations: Agence de voyages et TEAL

Page 6 WHITES AVIATION

This winter take a South Pacific Holiday

SMARH
FIJI
TONGA
AUCKLAND

THERE'S A WARM WELCOME FOR YOU at any of these places along the TEAL Coral Route to the Islands of the South Seas where happy, friendly Polynesian will help to make your every evening enchanted, your days a time to remember always. Comfortable TEAL air services link New Zealand with its nearby northern neighbours—Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, the Cook Islands, Tahiti. Your travel agent will give you full particulars and free brochures describing the attractions of the Islands, details of time-tables, fares, hours. Escape from the New Zealand winter this year to the sunny islands of the TEAL Coral Route

TEAL

TASMAN EMPIRE AIRWAYS LIMITED
In association with QANTAS and B.O.A.C.
Inquiries and Reservations: Leading Travel Agents throughout New Zealand or TEAL, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

Coral Route

TEAL
TASMAN EMPIRE AIRWAYS LIMITED
in association with QANTAS and B.O.A.C.

Islands shown: FIJI ISLANDS (VITI LEVU, VANUA LEVU IS., HAAPAI GROUP, TONGATAPU GROUP, THREE KINGS, AUCKLAND), SAMOA ISLANDS (UPONU IS., AVAFAI IS., NUKUNONO IS.), TONGA ISLANDS (NUIE IS., PALMERSON IS.), COOK ISLANDS (FENIA URA IS., KAIATEA IS., AITUTAKI IS., MITERO IS., HERVEY IS.), SOCIETY ISLANDS (BELLINGHAUSEN IS., SAROTONGA IS.), TAHITI, Kermadec Is., Beveridge Reef, Buffon Reef.

Page 2 WHITES AVIATION

Fly to the sun

fly to Fiji

Discover sunny leisure this winter in Fiji — only hours away by TEAL. Palm-shaded beachside hotels sensibly priced for family holidays. (You can rent your own bungalows.) Safe swimming. And there's bowling, boating, fishing, sight-seeing where scenery's tropically different. With TEAL you enjoy impeccable service backed by 14 years' British flying experience.

fly TEAL

TASMAN EMPIRE AIRWAYS LTD.
In association with QANTAS & B.O.A.C.

INFORMATION: For fares, general information and a free copy of TEAL'S Guide to Fiji consult Leading Travel Agents throughout New Zealand or TEAL Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch.

Page 12 WHITES AVIATION

Tahiti fly Teal

TAHITI MON AMOUR
PIPEETE FOREVER

No place in the world has captivated poet, painter and traveller as has the beautiful romantic island of Tahiti—once remote, now so near by TEAL. Here Polynesian charm and French sophistication combine to give you the holiday of your lifetime.

This winter fly the TEAL Coral Route to Tahiti.

TEAL

Come to Tahiti for the July 14 celebrations. Ask your travel agent about Bouffie Day TEAL air cruises. See Fiji and Samoa — and Tahiti "en face".

TASMAN EMPIRE AIRWAYS LTD., in association with Qantas and B.O.A.C.
Inquiries: Leading travel agents throughout New Zealand, or TEAL, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

fly TEAL

Hibiscus Service

TASMAN EMPIRE AIRWAYS LIMITED in association with QANTAS and B.O.A.C.

TEAL Coral Route map designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, published in TEAL's Your TEAL Flight Companion magazine, 1950s.

TEAL Hibiscus Service and Coral Route destination posters designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, and silkscreen printed by Matt Chote & Co. 39 x 25 inches. 1955
Fiji—Fly TEAL was selected for Modern Publicity No. 26, 1956.

TEAL Coral Route advertisements designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, published in White's Aviation, 1954-55.



TEAL Samoa Coral Route destination poster designed by Keith S 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd. Silkscreen printed by Matt Chote & Co. 39 x 25 inches. 1955.



Illustrations for a magazine article on Samoa, with Samoan caricatures, motifs and settings.

Clark's TEAL posters for the Hibiscus Service for Fiji and the Coral Route for Samoa and Tahiti appeared about 1955, and it is no surprise that Clark would catch the eye of *Modern Publicity* with 'Fiji—fly TEAL', a cheerful Fijian boy riding a turtle in the sea, which appeared in that annual's 1956 edition.⁷ Though the image was used on brochures, the extent of the poster's distribution in New Zealand is unclear, and in later years it was reworked to promote Tahiti. 'French Tahiti—fly TEAL', showing a French rooster, was also particularly striking, and a distinct contrast in style to the Samoa and Fiji posters. Clark's known Australia posters present an idea of the lively cosmopolitan social life of Australian cities as a natural extension of good old New Zealand. TEAL ephemera such as these posters, once common and of the moment but now scarce, are considered classics of New Zealand travel advertising.



TEAL Tahiti Coral Route destination poster designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd. Silkscreen printed by Matt Chote & Co. 39 x 25 inches. 1955.



TEAL Australia destination poster designed by Keith S. 'Nobby' Clark, W Haythorn-Thwaite Ltd, 1950s. Clark Family Collection.

By 1958, Clark had moved to the advertising agency Carlton Carruthers du Chateau & King, working again with Lipanovic and Thompson on TEAL work. A special bond had formed between the 'Three Musketeers,' as they came to be known. Examples of their works were exhibited in the 1958 Auckland Society of Arts exhibition *Art in Advertising: An Exhibition for those who have an Interest in the Useful Arts....* with Clark presenting four works.⁸ And success brought opportunity.

*'I found working in New Zealand immeasurably nicer than working in England, there was tremendous full employment and you could change jobs like that; you could pick and choose where you wanted to work....everybody was enormously helpful and I made many enduring friendships.'*⁹

Generally, stints at the agencies—Haines, Goldbergs and Dormer-Beck—lasted two to three years into the 1960s, supplemented with freelance work for agencies, the *Auckland Star* and the *New Zealand Herald*. Taking charge of the creative process, Clark worked on such accounts as Malthoid, Formica, Topper Brew, Weetbix, Formica, Duroid roofing, Durock sidings, Durolac paint, Chesdale cheese, Gray Bros and Dominion Breweries. His work in promoting DB Brown beer, whilst at Dormer-Beck, sought to break free of overseas influences by portraying the actual market, the drinking New Zealanders, as they were—an innovation it seems, as little has changed since.¹⁰ As Clark put it:

*'At that time New Zealand advertising for beer struck me as being terribly amusing because there were rather bad drawings of people, usually gathered around a grand piano or in evening clothes, drinking beer. When you consider what drinking in New Zealand was like then with six o'clock closing, it was really hilarious. So I doodled around and produced an idea where I simply did drawings of people in what I considered normal situations, drinking beer, with about three lines of copy which I wrote. They accepted it and the campaign ran for five or six years.'*¹¹

Regular television broadcasts from 1960 onwards, with images fundamental to the advertising medium, radically increased Clark's scope, and his Betty Crocker cake mix television commercial was one of the first three made in New Zealand:



Beers by the barbeque.

Illustration for an article about what happens when one tries to discuss linguistics instead of cars and real estate. 230 x 270mm *New Zealand Herald*. 26 January 1985. Clark Family Collection



Aotea Square
270 x 320mm N.Z Herald. 22 March 1986.
Clark Family Collection



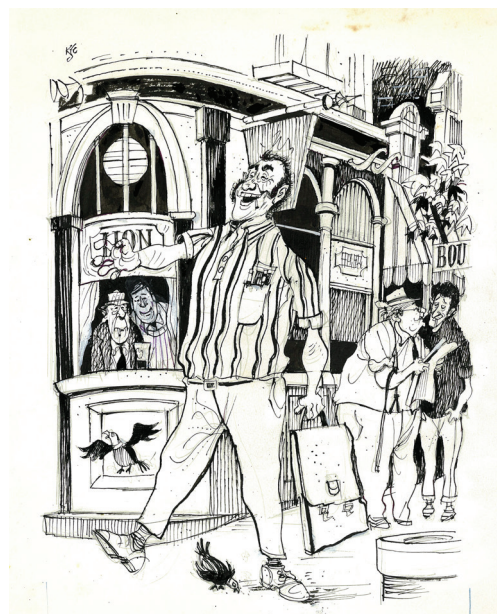
Kiwi Tourists in Japan
230 x 260mm N.Z Herald. 21 December 1985.
Clark Family Collection



On Grafton Bridge
Nobby meets a stripper on Grafton Bridge, on her way back from buying blood capsules for a vampire act. She's visiting a friend in hospital.
238 x 230mm. 8 August 1985.
S Clark collection



Reading the South China Morning Post
Illustration for an article about a lady reading a paper in the local library—wanting news of Hong Kong (or Honkers, as she called it).
250 x 280mm N.Z Herald. 9 March 1985.
Clark Family Collection



Vulcan Lane
Nobby bumps into a former colleague who is now 'riding the crest of the video wave'.
230 x 310mm N.Z Herald. 13 April 1985.
Clark Family Collection



Music Hall Jingo
175 x 215mm N.Z Herald. 26 July 1986.
Clark Family Collection



Kiwi Jigsaw
270 x 180mm. 28 September 1985.
S Clark collection

*'As far as I knew there was only one animator around at that time and I decided that I would do the drawings and we would cheat by doing a close up and then drawing back. I did about sixty drawings and took them to the TV producer, then we rearranged how we would shoot them. It was really quite successful. I found the doing of the TV quite intriguing.'*¹²

In subsequent years Kolynos toothpaste and Chesdale cheese commercials also benefited from Clark's contributions.

Back with newspapers in the 1970s, Clark's work as an illustrator for the *Auckland Star* became somewhat permanent, rolling on to a regular *New Zealand Herald* column called 'Encounters' in the 1980s, of which, he recalled:

*'Whenever I was out drawing in Auckland, invariably someone would come up to talk to me. Very often what they told me, what they said, was very amusing. So I recorded it and did an illustration to go with it.'*¹³

He'd illustrated books for authors for years, including Stewart Kinross's *Please to Remember* (1963), Pat Booth's *Dear Chevvy* (1965), Mary McKay's children's readers (1974–75) and Bill Hohepa's *Fishing Book* (1976). Then his own *Auckland, their Auckland*, published in 1983 and *Nobby Clark's Auckland* in 1985, a remarkable and amusing body of tales, sketches and paintings recording the way it was then within that ever-changing city.¹⁴ Subsequently he illustrated E.V. Sale's *Country Diary* (1987), Eirlys Hunter's *The Robber and the Millionaire* (1996), Richard Hadlee's *Hard Knocks and Caught Out* (1997), and Lew Goodman's *Jerry Attrick's Dictionary: Modern Words for Old-fashioned New Zealanders* (1999). Naturally there were also his paintings and exhibitions of his work.

Nobby Clark made a distinct mark with his art. His lively style, prodigious output and influence have ensured a deserved place in New Zealand's design, illustration and advertising history. He lived to see his life's work celebrated through a retrospective exhibition *Nobby Clark's Auckland*, at Auckland Library's Special Collections, in February–April 2007, curated by his son Simon Clark.¹⁵

ENDNOTES

- 1 Barton, Gerry & Philip Heath. *Coral Route; Tasman Empire Airways Ltd, Flying Boats and the South Pacific*. Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2015.
- 2 Humber, John, 'Humber's Echoes: From India', *Daily Mail* (Hull, England), 14 July 1950, p. 4.
- 3 Humber, Miss, 'Women', *Daily Mail* (Hull, England), 15 July 1950, p. 4.
- 4 Clark, Keith S. *Auckland, their Auckland*. Auckland: Landsdowne Press, 1983.
- 5 BOAC, with post-war optimism and opportunity, had set an influential design policy in 1946.
- 6 *Modern Publicity*, International Advertising & Design DataBase, URL: <http://magazines.iadb.org/periodicals/MP>
- 7 *Modern Publicity 1956–1957*, no. 26. London: Studio Vista, p. 25.
- 8 Auckland Society of Arts, *Art in Advertising: An Exhibition for those who have an Interest in the Useful Arts...*, Auckland, 1958. Auckland Museum Library, MS 19/150.
- 9 'Nobby Clark', *New Zealand Graphic Design Archive*, URL: <http://www.nzda.aut.ac.nz/graphic/designers/nobby/index.html>
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 'Nobby Clark', *New Zealand Graphic Design Archive*, URL: <http://www.nzda.aut.ac.nz/graphic/designers/nobby/index.html>
- 14 Clark, Keith S. *Auckland, their Auckland*. Auckland: Landsdowne Press, 1983
- 15 Exhibitions 2006 – 2007', Auckland Libraries, URL: <http://www.aucklandlibraries.govt.nz/EN/heritage/sirgeorgegrey/exhibitionarchives/exhibitions2006-2007/Pages/exhibitions2006-2007.aspx>