

# SOUTHAMPTON PUBLIC LIBRARIES

CLASSIFICATION	SUBJECT	SOURCE	DATE
Biog.	CLARKE, Col. A.R.		30.12.64

## Plaque mystery solved at last

"Echo" Staff Reporter

**O**VER the entrance to No. 21 Carlton-crescent, Southampton—now occupied by a firm of architects and surveyors—is a plaque. It reads simply.

"In this house from 1861-1881 lived Col. A. R. Clarke, CB, FRS, who determined the figure of the earth."

When I wrote a recent review of Southampton's monuments and plaques this one was inadvertently omitted.

My attention, inevitably, was drawn to this and on making some inquiries I thought I had found a rather unusual situation—that the plaque was on the wrong house.

### Quite clearly

The Southampton directories between 1861 and 1880 (the 1881 directory seems to be missing) state quite clearly that A. R. Clarke lived at No. 20, Carlton-crescent — now the home of the Southampton Constitutional and Conservative Club.

There are some anomalies in the entries, but No. 20 is quite unmistakable.

This matter was the subject of a letter to the "Echo" in 1945, but as people had other things on their minds then, apparently there was no repercussion.

Explanation is simple — in 1882 Carlton-crescent was re-numbered.

The City Engineer's Department delved in the records and found that in that year No. 20 Carlton-crescent became No. 21.

### In 1881

The entry for 1861 gives the name of Captain Clarke; two years later the designation is Lieutenant!

The initial "H" is substituted for "A" in 1869, but later the title Colonel appears, although in 1880 the final "e" is missing from the surname.

Col. Clarke's name appears in the details of the Ordnance Survey—where he worked for 31 years, with a short break—in the 1880 directory for example, it gives the name of Col. A. C. Cooke, RE, CB "assisted by Col. A. R. Clarke RE, CB FRS."

### "Outstanding"

Alexander Ross Clarke is mentioned in Britannica and is called the outstanding geodesist of the 19th Century.

Born at Reading in 1828, he was

appointed to the Royal Engineers after passing out of the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, in 1847.

His mastery of mathematics led him to the Ordnance Survey at Southampton in 1850 and he remained there until his retirement in 1881.

He then lived at Reigate, Surrey, where he died in 1914 in his 86th year.

### Gold medal

He was notable for his work on the principal triangulation of the British Isles, for his book "Geodesy" (1880) and his determinations of the earth's dimensions in 1858, 1866 and 1880.

He became a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1862 and received their gold medal in 1887. He was created CB in 1870.

Oddly enough there seems some doubt about his actual birth-place, for whereas Britannica says Reading, Chambers Dictionary of Scientists speaks of "the Scottish geodesist" and says he was born in Sutherland.

There is good reason for putting up the plaque; no doubt one or two more could be placed on old houses still remaining to commemorate other famous people, and it is pleasing to know that this particular plaque is on the right house, after all.

