

Belgium's Botanic Garden & Clarence Bicknell

Note by Graham Avery – April 2016

The Botanic Garden at Meise is an internationally important botanical institute, situated north of Brussels in Belgium. The botanic garden of Brussels, founded in 1826, transferred its collections to Meise in the mid-twentieth century. In 1967 its official name became 'Nationale Plantentuin van België / Jardin Botanique National de Belgique' (National Botanic Garden of Belgium) and in 2014 it became 'Agentschap Plantentuin Meise (Botanic Garden Meise)'. It has a herbarium of almost 4 million specimens, with notable collections of Belgian, European, Central African and other plants.

Clarence Bicknell (1842-1918) studied at Cambridge University, became an Anglican priest, and in 1879 took up residence on the Italian Riviera as pastor of the church in Bordighera. He was active as a botanist, publishing two books on the local flora, and later as an archaeologist and author of the book 'Guide to the Prehistoric Rock Engravings of the Italian Maritime Alps' (1913). His collections can be seen in the Museo-Biblioteca Bicknell in Bordighera and in museums and botanical gardens elsewhere.

The online catalogue of the Meise Herbarium lists two specimens collected by Clarence Bicknell:

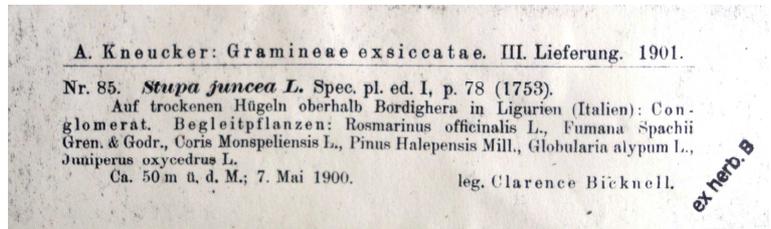


Species	Find-place & date	Barcode
<i>Stipa juncea</i>	Italy (sine loco) 07/05/1901	BR0000009670495
<i>Potentilla valderia</i>	Val Valmasca de Tenda, Italy 31/08/1901 (Image of <i>Potentilla valderia</i> above)	BR0000009360495

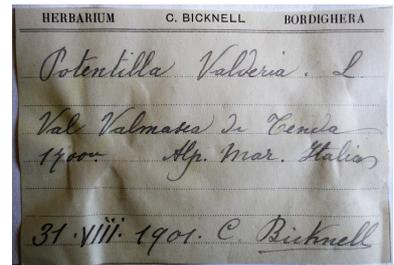
I am grateful to Quentin Groom of the Botanic Garden at Meise for bringing them to my notice, and for kindly arranging for me to inspect these and other specimens at the Herbarium in October 2014.

The sources of the specimens collected by Clarence Bicknell are indicated more precisely by their labels:

- *Stipa juncea* has a printed label 'A. Kneucker, Gramineae Exsiccatae III Lieferung 1902' with the explanation (in German) that the plant grows on dry hills above Bordighera, and that the specimen was collected by Clarence Bicknell on 7 May 1901. The sheet also has several subsequent labels. Johann Andreas Kneucker (1862-1946) was a German botanical collector: after working as a schoolteacher in Karlsruhe, he was curator of the natural history collection in Baden. He created several collections of exsiccatae, of which some are in the herbarium at Karlsruhe.



- *Potentilla valderia* has a printed label (image right) 'Herbarium C. Bicknell Bordighera' on which the species-name, find-place and date are written in manuscript and signed 'C. Bicknell'. The sheet has a subsequent stamp and label indicating that it was originally in the herbarium of Paul Errard of Montmedy, before being given to Meise in 2008.



The herbarium at Meise also holds several specimens of the plant *Pimpinella bicknellii* (image right), first found by Clarence Bicknell in Mallorca in 1898, and named after him by John Briquet. The specimens at Meise were collected in Mallorca in 1968, 1978, 1979 and 1990.



The herbarium has numerous specimens of the plant *Saxifraga florulenta* which grows in remote localities of the Maritime Alps; it was much sought by nineteenth-century botanists, and was found in several places by Clarence Bicknell. The specimens at Meise include one collected by Thomas Howes (Fellow of the Linnaean Society and contributor to the *Alpine Journal*) in 1876, and another collected by Hervé de Maupassant (brother of the novelist Guy de Maupassant) in 1884.



Illustrations

1. *Stipa juncea* collected by Clarence Bicknell in 1900
2. *Stipa juncea* label
3. *Potentilla valderia* label
4. *Pimpinella bicknellii*
5. *Potentilla valderia* collected by Clarence Bicknell in 1901

