

# THE MARVELS OF CLARENCE BICKNELL

A film by Rémy Masségia

## Screenplay

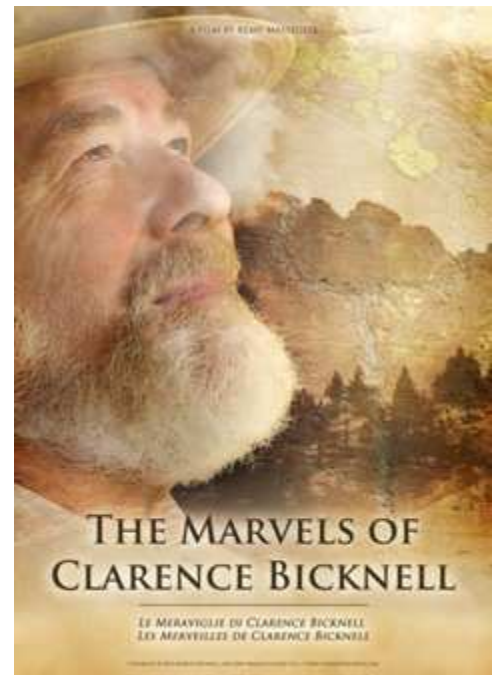
18m30

Black	Narrator	(Pauline Butcher)
Brown	Clarence Bicknell	(Nigel Norman)
Blue	Margaret Berry	(Evie Butcher)

1

How did the 13<sup>th</sup> child of a rich whale oil-trader in Victorian London become an internationally-respected botanist and archaeologist on the Italian Riviera?

Clarence Bicknell started his adult life in the Anglican church in London, then in a sect in rural England called the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit, and briefly as chaplain of the Anglican Church of Bordighera, in the sun and exoticism of the Mediterranean coast. But his doubts about his religious beliefs had already set in.



1875 - Stoke-upon-Tern, England

Voice of Clarence Bicknell<sup>1</sup>

“I fear I have become rather narrow about all church things, having become convinced that the churches do more harm than good and hinder human progress.

<sup>1</sup> Clarence Bicknell quote C. Chippindale Highway to Heaven p 21

## 2

1879 Bordighera, Italy

Entranced by the sun, the flowers, the colours of Bordighera, and disappointed by the divisive views of the Anglican congregation, Clarence Bicknell threw off his dog-collar and launched himself into the study of botany, soon becoming an authority on the wild flowers of Liguria and a prolific botanical artist.

Clarence, whose cousin was Phiz, Dickens's illustrator, grew up surrounded by paintings and in the company of great artists like Turner when they visited his wealthy father

Clarence's watercolours of flowers were beautiful, and accurate in botanical detail. He published in 1885 the first of his botanical works, the splendidly-illustrated book "Flowering Plants and Ferns of the Riviera and Neighbouring Mountains".

## 3

1882 Tende, Italy (now France)

Seeking ever more varieties while preparing his book, Bicknell ventured further up into the Alps, a long day's trip on mountainous roads by horse and mule to Tende and thence to a valley with a hamlet called Casterino at 5000 feet above the Mediterranean, 40 miles northwest of Bordighera.

From there, he made day trips even higher into the natural paradise which is now the Parc de Mercantour, where he was surrounded by the splendour of the alpine flowers and away from, as he put it...

"...the ordinary tea party church-going people who are so conventional and such gossips and have so little of an international spirit". (Voice of Clarence Bicknell)<sup>2</sup>

1885 - Val Fontanalba, Italy (Now in France)

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<sup>2</sup> Quotation from his letter to the Baroness von Taube (British Museum, Natural History, 1030, October 1912)

Bicknell had heard about prehistoric rock engravings on the smooth rock surfaces, exposed to the heavens and to the afternoon thunder storms, in the Vallée des Merveilles and the Val Fontanalba. 5000 years ago the shepherds who brought their flocks up to the pastures spent their time chipping away at the rocks. The recording of these images became from 1897 as much an obsession as the botany. He and his helper Pollini found about 11,000 images, mostly of horned figures, ox-drawn ploughs, farm enclosures, weapons, tools and gods. He wrote and illustrated "A Guide to the Prehistoric Rock Engravings in the Italian Maritime Alps".

Clarence Bicknell's experience as a botanist, recording and illustrating flowers in detail helped him in his scientific recording of the prehistoric rock engravings - he was the first to do so – and they have now been studied in great detail by many archaeologists.

Voice of Margaret Berry:

"It is wonderful to see the uncle's keen interest and marvellous energy about the rock drawings.

It is a walk of one and three quarter hours before he reaches these rocks and then he spends all day clambering and climbing about on them and lying on his face at full length for hours rubbing the design with a healball on large sheets of paper. He rubs till his nails are all worn down and his hands burned nearly black with the sun, and cracked and split by the incessant work.

When he comes home he goes through all the drawings he has done and dates them, locates them as best as he can. Then he writes an elaborate diary with full description of his day's work illustrated with small designs of the drawings he has found".

Diary of Margaret Berry, Bicknell's niece<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Berry, Bicknell's niece, is quoted verbatim from her diary written at the Casa Fontanalba 6-22 July 1906.

Despite his love of the mountains, Clarence Bicknell still had his home in Bordighera for the winter months. He built a museum which today bears his name. The ficus tree he planted has become the largest in Western Europe, symbolic in its present size of the great scope of Clarence's work.

He decorated features of the museum with proverbs in Esperanto, the universal language in which he so believed.

The museum houses his pressed flower samples, botanical water-colours, rubbings of engravings, butterfly collection and books.

The Museo Bicknell also serves as a cultural centre for concerts and plays, often to raise money from fellow expatriates for good causes. Bicknell worked throughout his life for the underprivileged and built a home for the poor in Bordighera.

[1888 - Museo Bicknell, Bordighera, Italy](#)

Bicknell shared his discoveries to enable researchers and writers to study and interpret them. He made efforts throughout his life to record, collect and preserve, for the benefit of others, 37,000 drawings, rock engraving copies, pressed flowers and more from his life's work. He corresponded all over the world, creating a network of like-minded archaeologists and botanists.

Because of the legacy he left behind, universities across Europe undertake, today, research based on the relevance of his work to present-day earth sciences, environmental changes and culture.

Clarence Bicknell was happiest in the mountains and received many visitors in the summer home he built there.

Voice of Margaret Berry:

“Now I must speak about Casa Fontanalba which is a most charming little cottage in Casterino built last summer by the Uncle in a secluded position behind larch trees, on the slope of the hills facing east with a view up and down the valley.

“The rooms of Casa Fontanalba have been decorated by the uncle in his own original and inimitable manner. The sitting room has a frieze of Mountain Ash berries and leaves.

“Over each door and window is a figure from the prehistoric rock drawings. The servant's sitting room has medallions at intervals all round the frieze, each one containing a different mountain plant with its name. These medallions are connected by intertwined ribbons or lines festooned from one to the other.

In this our simple mountain home,  
No riches will be found beside  
The welcome of our friends  
And nature's charms around.

Our dark rye-bread we can but eat  
With wild fruits of the mountain  
And purest water that foams out  
From Fontanalba's fountain<sup>4</sup>

17 July 1918 - Casterino, Italy

End

Clarence B intro video screenplay V10 formatted 10Aug2016 18Oct2016.doc

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<sup>4</sup> Poem by Clarence Bicknell painted on a wall at the Casa Fontanalba and quoted in C. Chippindale Highway to Heaven p 58.

## **Closing credits**

The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell  
1842-1918

A film by Rémy Masségia, Lez'art Creation, Breil-Sur-Roya, France

Renchi Bicknell played Clarence Bicknell  
Vanessa Bicknell played Alice Campbell

Direction, camera and edit by: Rémy Masségia  
Assistant Director, sound and continuity: Gwenn Masségia  
Continuity, research and costumes: Susie Bicknell, Vanessa Bicknell  
Research and screenplay: Susie Bicknell, Marcus Bicknell, Valerie Lester

Produced by: Marcus Bicknell

Voices in English  
Pauline Butcher  
Nigel Norman  
Evie Butcher

Voix en français  
Gwenn Masségia  
Raphaël Maulny  
Nathalie Masségia

Voci Italiane  
Marta Garulli  
Andrea Mazzarini  
Lynda Gastaldi

The words spoken by Clarence Bicknell were written by him.  
Margaret Berry, Bicknell's niece, is quoted verbatim from her diary  
written at the Casa Fontanalba 6-22 July 1906.

Filmed in Stoke-On-Tern (GB),  
Bordighera (Italy),  
Casterino and Val Fontanalba (France)

With the assistance and authorisations of

St Peters Church, Stoke-On-Tern  
The Shropshire Archive, Shrewsbury  
Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge  
University of Oxford Herbaria  
National Film and Television School, Beaconsfield  
Istituto Internazionale Di Studi Liguri, Bordighera  
Museo Biblioteca Bicknell, Bordighera  
Ufficio Attività Culturali Bordighera  
Comune Di Bordighera,  
Chiesa Anglicana, Bordighera  
University Of Genoa  
Collezione Museo Civico di Archaeologia, Genoa  
Musée Des Merveilles, Tende  
Conseil Départemental des Alpes Maritimes,  
Parc National du Mercantour, France  
Clarence Bicknell Association  
The Bicknell Family Collection

*Réalisé avec l'autorisation du directeur du Parc du Mercantour décision  
N°2016-342*

*For rights reasons, The Casterino house shown is not the Casa Fontanalba*

With thanks to

Gulshan Antivalle  
Graham Avery  
Alice Bicknell  
Titus Bicknell  
Helen Blanc-Francard  
Thomas Blazukas  
Janice Bradley  
Raffaella Bruzzone  
André & Natalie Boulanger  
Christopher Chippindale  
Sylvie de Galléani

Bruna de Paoli  
Dr. Daniela Gandolfi  
Marta Garulli  
Carolyn Hanbury  
Robert Hearn  
Wilfrid Houssin  
Maria Ingold,  
Alison Lester  
Valerie Lester  
Maria Pia Luly Jones  
Tris Miall  
Luca Moreno  
James Norman  
Franck Panza  
Jon Pettigrew  
Elena Riscosso  
Claudia Roggero  
Giovanni Russo  
Silvia Sandrone  
Colette Thomas  
Charles Turcat  
Francoise Riniéri Villian  
Shirley Whitton

The Biography Of Clarence Bicknell by Valerie Lester

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