

Notes on exhibits of Walter Crane and Clarence Bicknell in *Floral Fantasies* in the Fitzwilliam Museum June-September 2018.

Walter Crane
1845-1915

Flora's Feast: a Masque of Flowers, 1889
Published by Cassell & Co Ltd, 1889
Lithographed illustrations, printed in colours

Crane was encouraged to draw by his father Thomas Crane (1808–59), a portrait painter and miniaturist. In 1859, at the age of thirteen, Crane was apprenticed to the engraver William James Linton (1812-97), with whom he learnt how to draw on woodblocks for illustration. He started his career successfully writing and designing children's books including nursery rhymes and fairy tales.

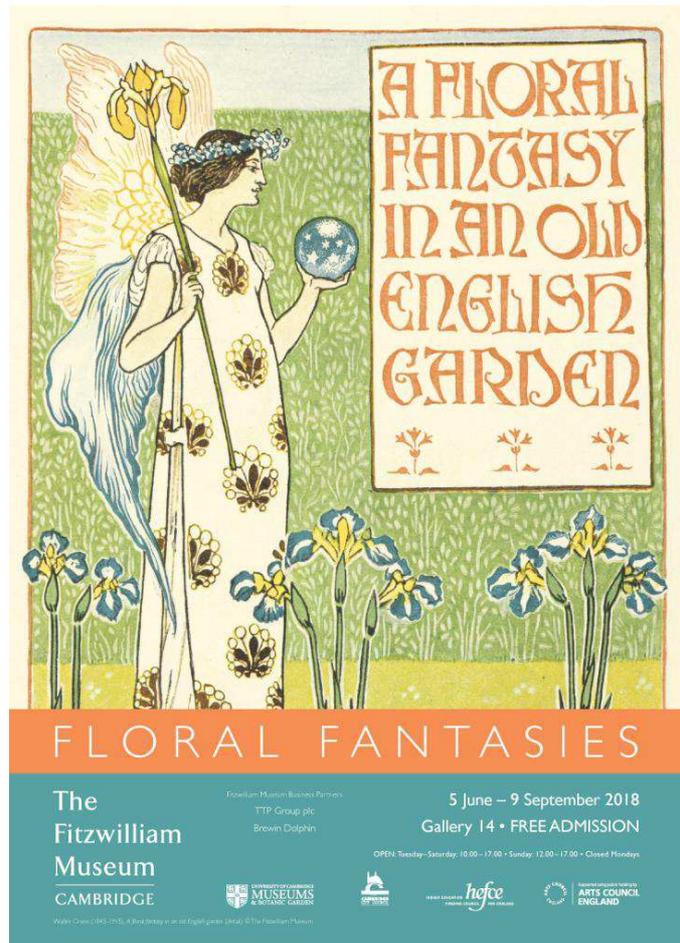
Flora's Feast is one of several books dedicated to flowers that Crane produced between 1889 and 1906. In this text, the goddess Flora (Spring) awakens flowers from their winter sleep; daffodils, buttercups, anemones, crown imperials, tulips, lilies of the valley, poppies and roses are personified and ordered according to the Season in which they bloomed. His lavish use of colour and skilled draughtsmanship made his books popular amongst the Victorian middle classes.

Walter Crane
1845-1915

A Floral Fantasy in an Old English Garden, 1898
Printed by Edmund Evans, published by Harper & Bros, 1899
Half tone process printed illustrations, in colours

Crane's text provides an imaginative narrative in which he leads the reader on a journey around the garden, where they encounter flowers in human form. In 1898 Crane said of his illustrations that the flowers 'are personified in a way that aims at expressing their different characters and constitution by emphasising certain structural features of each flower... as details or adjuncts to a fanciful costume.' Crane avoided the traditional symbolism associated with flowers, preferring to make up his own humorous puns and jokes based upon their forms.

The 1870s and 1880s saw a rise in appreciation of the decorative arts and Crane was a dedicated follower of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain and the work of its chief protagonist, William Morris (1834-1896). In addition to producing books, Crane set about designing wallpaper, tiles, printed textiles, posters and stained glass.



Clarence Bicknell (1842-1918)

Born in London, Bicknell grew up surrounded by art. His father Elhanan Bicknell was a whale oil magnate and a significant art patron, who commissioned works by JMW Turner (1775-1851). His mother, Lucinda Browne, was a talented artist, musician and singer, from whom Bicknell learnt to draw. After he studied at the University of Cambridge, Bicknell became an Anglican priest for fifteen years but in 1879, he moved to Bordighera on the Italian coast, where he dedicated himself to botany and the study of prehistoric rock engravings.

Partial to taking long hikes over the mountains and at times walking for twenty hours, he soon built up a reputation as a highly respected botanist. By 1884, he had painted over one thousand watercolours of wildflowers, eighty-two of which were used to illustrate his book *Flowering Plants and Ferns of the Riviera* published in 1885. In 1896, he published another book *Flora of Bordighera and San Remo* in which he acknowledges his debt to the Swiss botanist Émile Burnat (1828-1920), his lifelong friend. With a growing collection of thousands of plant specimens and paintings, Bicknell founded a museum in 1888 in a park off Via Romana, Bordighera.

Clarence Bicknell 1842-1918

The Triumph of the Dandelion *Parnessia palustris*, 1914

Watercolour on paper in vellum bound sketchbook

In addition to botanical illustration, Bicknell also created imaginative and sentimental poetic books and stories for his niece Margaret Berry. She gave him an album to fill every year from 1897 and of the dozen or so he produced, the Fitzwilliam Museum has seven. The last one in the series, this album tells the story of the triumphant dandelion, Bicknell's favourite wildflower. Every page is illustrated with different flowers alongside prose explaining why they should be regarded as the supreme flower. The dandelion ultimately wins the Order of the Golden Lion, and is here humorously painted in the shape of a lion.

Given by Peter Bicknell, 1980. PD.11-1980

Clarence Bicknell 1842-1918

Wild Flowers of Val Fontanalba, 1908

Watercolour on paper in vellum bound sketchbook

The albums requested by Margaret Berry encouraged Bicknell to be more creative. He moved away from botanical illustration to focus on decorative floral designs, simplifying plants like the *Plantago media*, known as the hoary plantain, on the left and the *Rosa pendulina* on the right into symmetrical floral patterns, perhaps with the use of a kaleidoscope.

Although he did not live in Britain, Bicknell was aware of the work of William Morris (1834-96), the leader of the Arts and Crafts movement, and Walter Crane (1845-1915). He owned a number of books including Crane's *Bases of Design* (1898) and *Line & Form* (1900). In the latter, Crane advised his readers how to turn natural forms into designs, saying that the plant must first be understood in detail, including how it grows, its character and form. Design 'must build upon some sort of a plan, or a geometric controlling network or scaffolding, so as to give it unity, rhythm, and coherence.'

Bicknell decorated his house, the Casa Fontanalba, with floor to ceiling wall designs incorporating floral motifs. Each room was decorated with flowers that were appropriate to its use. The cook's room, for instance, was embellished with a frieze of raspberries, gooseberries, strawberries, wild spinach and dandelions.

Given by Peter Bicknell, 1980 PD.9-1980



The Fitzwilliam Museum

CAMBRIDGE

Floral Fantasies, including Clarence Bicknell

5 June - 9 September 2018

The Fitzwilliam Museum's exceptional collection of botanical watercolours and drawings depict an array of posies, bouquets and elaborate floral arrangements. Magnificent roses, hyacinths, magnolias, peonies, fuchsias and irises jostle for attention in the works of Gerard van Spaendonck (1746-1822) and Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759-1840).

The floral motifs seen in the designs and illustrations of Walter Crane (1845-1915) and Clarence Bicknell (1842-1918) similarly draw their inspiration from garden flowers as well as those found in the wild. A selection of Bicknell's beautiful albums will be on display for the first time. Complemented by floral miniatures, jewellery, Sèvres porcelain and children's books from the wider collection, the watercolours in this exhibition reveal how artists' everlasting passion for flowers has manifested itself into a variety of creative forms.

On **Wednesday 20th June 2018** there will be a screening of Marcus Bicknell's short film about his great great uncle *The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell* followed by a joint talk with Graham Avery, *The Botanical Art of Clarence Bicknell*. 1.15-2pm. Admission is free-of-charge, by token, one per person,



available at the Courtyard Entrance desk on a first-come first-served basis from 12.45 on the day of the talk.

On **Wednesday 20th June 2018** at 11am Valerie Lester will present her **MARVELS – The Life of Clarence Bicknell** (Matador, 28th June 2018) in the Courtyard Café of the Fitzwilliam Museum. RSVP info@clarencebicknell.com to be certain of your place. Books on sale in the shop.

For all enquires please contact the Fitzwilliam Museum Press Office:

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www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Free admission

Open: Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00;

Closed: 24-26 & 31 December, 1 January, Good Friday