

## FAQs – Frequently Asked Questions - and their answers

# The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell

Le Meraviglie di Clarence Bicknell - Les Merveilles de Clarence Bicknell

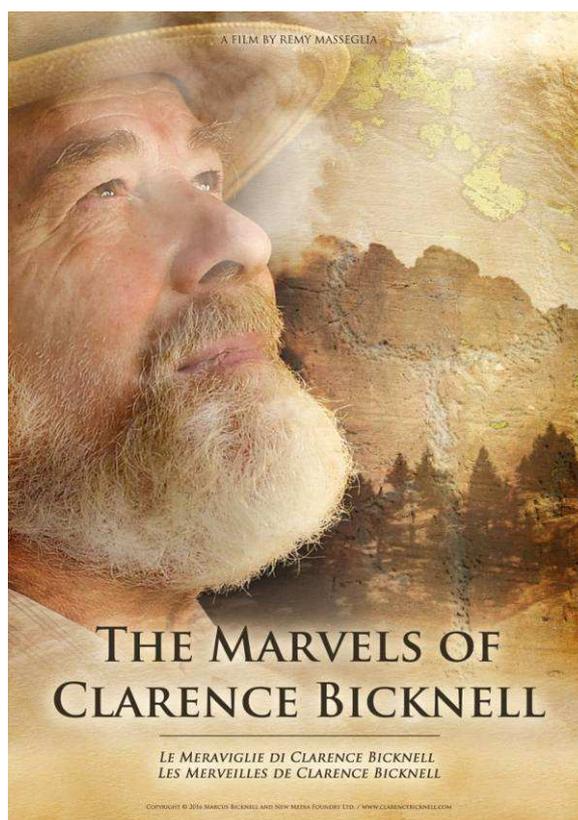
A film by Rémy Masségla

Note from the film's producer, Marcus Bicknell,  
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### What is the film about?

The Marvels of **Clarence Bicknell** is a short documentary, or biopic, the true story of Clarence Bicknell. He was born in 1842 in Herne Hill near London and died in 1918 in his summer house in Casterino, in the mountains near Tende. He left the church when he was 35 years old to become an out-of-the-ordinary botanist, artist, archaeologist and idealist in Bordighera on the Italian Riviera.

The 16 minute film shows Bicknell and his work in spectacular images of the landscape, the flora and his paintings. It could be a pilot for a full-length documentary by an established TV broadcaster or production company.



### Where can I view it?

The trailer is at <https://vimeo.com/182358729> and on the [www.clarencebicknell.com](http://www.clarencebicknell.com) home page. The 16 minute short documentary, released end September 2016, will be at similar locations.

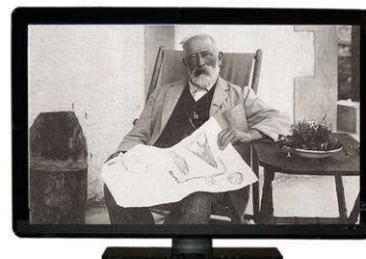
### Why is Bicknell relevant today?

Bicknell's path is intertwined with artists like Turner, his cousin Phiz, intellectual sects of the Anglican Church, wanderlust of the Grand Tour, the scientific Renaissance of the end of the 19th century, the British on the Riviera, a network of researchers across Europe, and with charity and with idealism. In a remarkable parallel with the explosion of free-spirited learning in that period, Bicknell threw off the dog collar and devoted himself to nature. He became an expert on flowers of the Riviera, painted accurate water-colours of them and published a highly-respected book on them. He then turned his skills to archaeology, discovering, copying and classifying thousands of rock engravings on the high rock slabs of

the Vallée des Merveilles and the Val Fontanalba. He was one of the first scientists to devote his energies to providing a record from which future researchers could benefit. His self-taught techniques of recording and classifying finds, rather than jumping to conclusions, predated the best modern techniques by 100 years. University researchers today use his material to put modern day earth sciences, geography, botany, culture and communication of scientific knowledge into focus.

### Are we celebrating anything?

Yes. Clarence Bicknell died in 1918 so the centenary of his death will be in 2018. The Clarence Bicknell Association, the Bicknell family, researchers, university and museum are cooperating on making 2018 a year in which Bicknell's memory can be brought alive and further extended into the future...



- A) The international Clarence Bicknell Association was itself set up in 2013 as a means to harnessing the energies of those that appreciate the man and what he did in his life.
- B) Members of the Association have been working on new original research which is published on [www.clarencebicknell.com](http://www.clarencebicknell.com) at the downloads page.
- C) This research has been intensified by Valerie Browne Lester, Bicknell's great grand niece, who is writing the first full biography of Clarence Bicknell, due for publication before 2018. More about Valerie and her books at <http://www.valerielester.com/>
- D) The Bicknell family, in the persons of Susie and Marcus Bicknell, have been the driving force behind the new short documentary film on Clarence Bicknell, released at the end of September 2016 in four languages. The trailer is at [www.vimeo.com/marcusbicknell/clarencebicknell](http://www.vimeo.com/marcusbicknell/clarencebicknell). The film is not only a tool for museums, tourist organizations and websites for the promotion of Bicknell's life but is also a pilot for broadcasters to consider producing a full length documentary on Bicknell for television in various European countries.
- E) Academic research into Bicknell and his place in modern studies is planned by groups of researchers, even though the large-scale multi-national research projects planned by the University of Nottingham and the University of Genoa have not yet proceeded to the funding stage.
- F) The film, the biography, items of Clarence's in the Bicknell family collection and new research can form the basis of exhibitions during 2016 in relevant museums and sites in Bordighera, Tende, Cambridge, Genoa and elsewhere.



### **Who originated the film?**

Marcus Bicknell, a great grand-nephew of Clarence Bicknell, is the producer of the film and has commissioned the director and managed the concept, script, casting and finance. Susie his wife is assistant producer, costumes, continuity, note-taker and eye-on-the-ball expert. The company they own, New Media Foundry Ltd has financed this low-budget 10-minute pilot.

Marcus and his wife Susie have been students of Clarence Bicknell since the 1980s and look after much of the family collection of botanical water-colours, letters, books and illustrated albums. They also help run the international Clarence Bicknell Association and its team of researchers.

### **Who directed the film?**

Marcus and Susie Bicknell met Rémy Masségla in 2012 with the Countess Roberta d'Alberti who had engaged him on her putative "Wild Flowers" art-classes-to-perfume-company initiative. Rémy in the meantime has been forging a reputation for visually-exciting short videos on high mountain biking, dance, comic theatre and education. Rémy is based in Breil-sur-Roya, a village in the steep valley of the Roya river which runs from our French sites (Casterino and Val Fontanalba) to our Italian one (Bordighera). He knows well the Val Fontanalba, the adjoining Vallée des Merveilles where Bicknell also discovered thousands of pre-historic Rock engravings, the flora and fauna of the area, the park authorities and most of the locals. Rémy is director of the film but acts also as creative director, screen play editor and camera man.



The producer and others in the Bicknell family, in the Clarence Bicknell Association and in the institutions which hold his work in such respect were keen to let Rémy express the story of Bicknell in his own visual way. Although we started the shoot with a complete text for the narration, the visuals are so informative that the number of words has been halved.

### **Who else was on the production team?**

Rémy's wife of three months, Gwenn, is a Breton folk and folk-rock singer and flute-player with a growing interest in cinematography and historical documentaries. In the team she compliments Susie Bicknell perfectly by keeping Rémy disciplined to the tasks he's undertaking, and by staying close to his side to ensure his part in continuity, time-keeping and creative opportunities. The energy of her love for her husband and her infectious laugh keep us all in a positive frame of mind.

## Who plays the role of Clarence Bicknell in the film?

Marcus's cousin Renchi Bicknell plays the role of Clarence Bicknell. Renchi is a creative, spiritual and mild-spoken soul who not only looks like Clarence but has similar interests and instincts. Renchi painted a series of 365 pictures of flocking starlings on the marches of Glastonbury, one a day every day for a year, and a cycle of text and drawings of his circumnavigation of London's rural ring road, the M25. He has limited experience of acting but assimilates with Clarence so much that by taking on the role of Clarence in his mind he finds he can act the part convincingly. Six weeks earlier, he worked with Marcus on a day's filming in the Shropshire village of Stoke-upon-Tern where he was a priest in a high-Anglican-church sect the *Societa Sancti Spiritus* before coming to Italy; the experience guides Renchi in the Clarence role and highlights how effective the portrayal is even if Renchi is not speaking to camera.

All those who know the images of Clarence find the portrayal by Renchi to be unnervingly accurate; his body language, the angle of his stoop, the fullness of his beard, the colour of his cheeks and the twinkle in his sun-soaked eyes all project, in moving images, a Clarence we have only known in stills.



## Who else appears in the film and where did the props come from?

Renchi's wife Vanessa Bicknell plays the cameo role of Alice Campbell, a mystery woman who according to local folklore was Clarence's faithful companion in the latter years of his life and who is seen fleetingly and distantly with Clarence in three period photos. Vanessa and Susie found the black dress, white blouse, and white hat from the photos and brought the costumes from England.

Renchi, or should we call him Clarence, brought at least two different costumes. His white linen jacket and baggy slacks are what Clarence wore in the heat of Bordighera, while Marcus's heavy tweed Norfolk coat, knickerbockers, long woolly socks and hob-nailed boots are ready for the mountain scenes. We had a variety of props to complete each costume; the correct hat in each case, cravat or scarf with pin or toggle, green and gilt Esperanto badge, pocket watch, Clarence's treasured watch strap with green jade amulets and the metal badge of the *Societa Sancti Spiritus* and a six foot long walking pole cut for the occasion by Andre Boulanger at the Hotel Les Mèlèzes at Casterino.

All the water-colour paintings, albums, pressed flowers, butterflies, rubbings of rock engravings, letters, books and Esperanto artefacts are originals created by Clarence Bicknell, either from the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera or from the Bicknell Family Collection.

## Where was the film made?

Stoke-on-Tern (UK), Bordighera (Italy), Val Fontanalba and Casterino (France).

Some five years after the idea of a film about Clarence Bicknell was first mentioned, a small team came together in late June 2016 for a three day shoot in Bordighera, in the Val Fontanalba and in Casterino.

Bordighera is the town on the Italian Riviera where Bicknell lived and worked from 1878 till his death in 1918 and where he created the Museo Bicknell which still today houses much of his work and is the backdrop to concerts, seminars and exhibitions.

The Val Fontanalba, in the high mountains of the Mercantour round the Mont Bego, is the site of the prehistoric rock engravings which are most associated with Bicknell. The high valley is accessible from the hamlet of Casterino at 2000 metres altitude where Bicknell spent his summers, from 1906 in the Casa Fontanalba, the house which he built. These mountains were in Italy in Bicknell's time but have been part of France since 1946.



Bicknell lived in England until he was about 35. His family home at Herne Hill no longer exists - it's covered by a housing estate - and his first church at Walworth in south London no longer exists either. Some of the scenes at the beginning of the film there were therefore shot at his second church, in Stoke-on-Tern, a hamlet in Shropshire north of Shrewsbury in May 2016, by Marcus and Renchi alone.

## Does Bicknell's Casa Fontanalba feature in the film?

No. The d'Alberti family, owners of the Casa Fontanalba which remains in good condition but closed to the public and the elements, did not accept our request to feature Bicknell's house in the film. He built it in 1905-1906 on their land under a lease which terminated officially at his death. The owners are concerned that publicity for the house would attract vandals and potential damage.

So, up at Casterino, Rémy and the team located a house which has an uncanny resemblance to the Casa Fontanalba and where we got the okay to film, the Casa Barbara. The location, colouring and the terrace are all very similar to the Casa Fontanalba although we miss the arts-and-crafts decorations, painted shutters and fresco designs inside. Clarence is therefore filmed on the terrace of the Casa Barbara finishing a botanical painting (which Renchi had prepared in advance) and a scene with a coloured flower drawing lying on the table. The camera rises inexorably away into the sky to communicate the end of Clarence's life.



## **What equipment was used in the making of the film?**

Rémy Masségli shot the film in HD1080 with a Nikon D810 digital SLR, a camera ideally-suited to shooting video, and a 3-axis gimbal-and-GPS-stabilised DGI Phantom 4 drone with high definition camera. All scenes were shot on location i.e. no studio was used. Rémy edited the film with Adobe Premiere Pro.

Sequences taken in the Parc National du Mercantour with the drone were deemed to be against the authorisations given and the producers were forced to withdraw them from the trailer and from the final version. Alternative drone and ground shots replace the deleted sequences perfectly.

## **How was the soundtrack made?**

No sound was recorded for the action sequences although incidental sound, such as the cry of the marmots or the roll of thunder, was recorded during the shoot days.

Classical music pieces, led off by Mozart's Requiem for the "revelation" scene, and listed below, were added as part of the image editing process. Then the voices of the narrator, Clarence Bicknell and his niece Margaret were recorded and added afterwards. The words spoken by Clarence are taken from letters he himself wrote, and Margaret's from her 1906 diary, all from the Bicknell Family Collection. The English version narration and voices were recorded at the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield, UK, under the direction of Thomas Blazukas, a 2nd year student there. The French and Italian versions were recorded in Breil-sur-Roya under Rémy Masségli's direction.

<b>Frédéric Chopin:</b>	Nocturne No.2 Op.9
<b>Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:</b>	Requiem K.626, Introitus "Dies Irae Rex Tremendae Majestatis Confutatis Lacrymosa"
<b>Franz Schubert:</b>	"Leise flehen meine Lieder" from Schwanengesang ("Swan song"), D.957
<b>Frédéric Chopin:</b>	Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor Op.11: II Romance: Larghetto
<b>Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky:</b>	Valse Sentimentale op 51 No.6

## **Who researched and wrote the film?**

Since 2013 the Clarence Bicknell Association and some of its key members have been researching aspects of Bicknell's life and work. Some of the research is oriented towards the researcher's own interests such as Marcus Bicknell's transcriptions of diaries and other documents in the Bicknell Family Collection, Helen Blanc-Francard's insights into the world in which Bicknell lived and Valerie Lester's in-depth work on original documents in Bordighera and the UK. It also includes Graham Avery's discovery in Geneva and Florence of hundreds of Bicknell's letters that reveal his network of European contacts, and his finding that dozens of botanical institutes in Europe and the USA hold plants from Bicknell in their collections. This research is published on the downloads page of [www.clarencebicknell.com](http://www.clarencebicknell.com).



At the same time, all of the researchers fed information to Valerie Lester who is writing the first full-length biography of Bicknell for publication in time for the centenary of his death in 2018. Valerie is a descendant of Clarence's cousin Phiz, Dickens' illustrator, and she is therefore a cousin of Marcus and Renchi. Since completing her biography of the Italian printer and designer Bodoni she has been working at home near Boston USA and on the road with Susie and Marcus near London, in Cambridge, in Shropshire, in Walworth, in Tende and Casterino and in Bordighera on finding out the aspects of Bicknell's life which have not previously been documented.

All this research plus Valerie's own research and creative input have informed the production team about the key aspects of Clarence's life and work. Marcus and Susie wrote the screenplay. Other researchers including Valerie corrected and improved it.

### **Is everything in the film historically accurate?**

We have made an effort to ensure what is shown in the film would have been as it was in Bicknell's time. Here are some examples;

The narration is taken from sources written at the time of Bicknell, with a minimum of speculation or anecdotal stories handed down by those who did not actually know him.

One could pose the question why we show Alice Campbell, a friend of Bicknell late in his life, when there is no prior written evidence of this lady before Enzo Bernardini's 1977 article. But there are three photos showing the lady in question, up in the Val Fontanalba, with Bicknell. We permit ourselves therefore to show her in one scene, in image only, with no reference to her in the narration.

Bicknell walks from Val Fontanalba to Casterino down the main trail which is surfaced with large slabs of rock. Indeed, the Italian army was constructing defences around Mt Bego in

the late 19th century and made tracks strong enough to carry horses drawing carts and guns. Bicknell refers to them in his own diary.

From more than one scene in the Fontanalba, you can see well-established paths which you might associate with the foot-traffic of mountain walkers, archaeologists and tourists of the last twenty years. However, it is known that shepherds brought their flocks up here many centuries ago; wild and domestic animals would have worn down these paths well before Bicknell's time. Margaret Berry refers to the paths through the rock engravings in her diary.

Throughout the film we have been careful to exclude incidental parts of the image which would not have been there in Bicknell's time. In both church scenes we had to be careful to avoid or eliminate electric cables, telegraph posts and other urban clutter. Interior shots, such as in the Museo Bicknell, were set up to avoid anything modern in the background. The props used by Bicknell were ones which he used in reality (his watch chain for example) or which were the same as those he would have used (his clothing, his vasculum for carrying flower samples and his walking stick (shown in photos) and his bicycle (indistinguishable during the shoot from Bicknell's bicycle in period photos)).



### **How did the film get its name?**

The film is titled "The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell" and similarly in French and Italian.

The production team considered various generic phrases to go alongside the name Clarence Bicknell in the film title... "The Man of Marvels", "Renaissance Man", "A True Victorian", "Anglican Cleric who revealed an Ancient Culture" and similar phrases featured in the list.

"The Man of Marvels" or "L'Homme des Merveilles" is a well-used phrase, in fact, too well used. It also ties Bicknell to the geographical site of the Vallée des Merveilles, the principal site of the rock engravings he studied and published. However, Bicknell was the principal researcher of the neighbouring site, the Val Fontanalba, also part of the Massif du Mercantour around the Mont Bego, so "L'Homme des Merveilles" constricts the scope of his archaeological work. More importantly, the film is about all of Bicknell's "marvels", his belief, his botany, his art, his idealism etc. So, "The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell" uses the "marvels" word but distances it from a geographical connotation.

When the trailer for the film was first released in late July 2016, the title was "There is no God but Nature". One of the objectives of making the film is to attract the attention of a major company to make a full length documentary about Bicknell. Film and television professionals had advised us that the film title needs to make an impact with commissioning editors at big broadcasters or production companies. The moment when Clarence Bicknell turns his back on the church in about 1880, age 38, is considered by many to be the key

moment in his story, certainly stronger than the rather mundane "cleric-draws-plants-and-discover-rock-engravings" angle. There are many men of the church in the last few centuries who were able to indulge their creative hobbies as a sideline. But Bicknell tore off his dog collar, forsook the church, and became a dedicated and successful botanist and, later, archaeologist as full time occupations. "There Is No God But Nature" are words very close to a quotation of Bicknell's and they certainly encapsulate the main themes of the film... years in the church, the sun and exoticism of Bordighera, leaving the church, botany, painting, the mountains and archaeology. However, our academic and distribution partners on the Riviera raised with the production team in the last days of August the spectre of religious controversy, incitement to aggressive demonstrations, police presence at screenings etc. We were informed that The Shahada, the most common prayer in the Muslim religion, which is recited 5 times a day, begins with "There is no god, but God." Therefore, the title "There is no God but Nature" could be taken to be a direct confrontation to Islam. The producers had no choice but to change the name.



The definitive name, below, has been widely applauded among our partners:

## **The Marvels of Clarence Bicknell**

Le Meraviglie di Clarence Bicknell - Les Merveilles de Clarence Bicknell

All three languages are used on promotional materials and merchandising (which includes 10 postcard images, 4 mugs with two pictures each and a 2017 calendar with 13 images (12 months and a cover!) which will be available at projections and online. The three languages are displayed in this form, with all three languages, on each individual language version. The film screenplay has been translated into Esperanto but we hope to have the voices recorded for an Esperanto version of the film.

### **Which authorities helped make the film?**

The film was made with the assistance and authorisations of...

- St Peters Church, Stoke on Tern
- The Shropshire Archive, Shrewsbury
- Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge,
- University of Nottingham
- University of Oxford Herbaria
- Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, Museo Biblioteca Bicknell
- Ufficio Attività Culturali Bordighera
- Comune di Bordighera,  
La Chiesa Anglicana, Bordighera, Italy

- Musée des Merveilles, Tende, Conseil General des Alpes Maritimes, Parc National du Mercantour, France
- Clarence Bicknell Association
- The Bicknell family collection

### **Did the film have any public funding?**

No. The film was funded by Susie and Marcus Bicknell and by New Media Foundry Ltd, a company which they own.

### **What are the objectives of making the film?**

Firstly, museums which feature Bicknell and his works have no video material to inform their visitors, so the film will be made available to them for screening on demand by visitors. The most relevant museums are the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera and the Musée des Merveilles in Tende, to whom the use of the video, in the various language versions, will be offered free of charge. Those museums and academic institutions which hold events or exhibitions for the centenary will also be able to use this film. The film is part of a series of activities to celebrate the centenary 2018 of Bicknell's death; to maximize the impact of the events and to trigger interest in Bicknell at a wider public level, the film will be available on social media and web sites like [www.clarencebicknell.com](http://www.clarencebicknell.com) .

Secondly, the film is a pilot which Marcus Bicknell and the core team can use to attract the attention of a major broadcaster or TV production company and persuade them to commit to a full scale documentary for international broadcast.

### **How will the film be distributed?**

The key moments for the film, in each of the languages in which it is made, will be a) the premier screenings in relevant places in late September and October 2016, then b) at seminars, exhibitions and other events in 2018, the centenary of Bicknell's death.

If the subject is taken up by a major broadcaster then we will inform in due course the broadcast dates. Otherwise the film will be available on the internet (social media and web sites) and on DVD and USB memory sticks at low cost.

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