

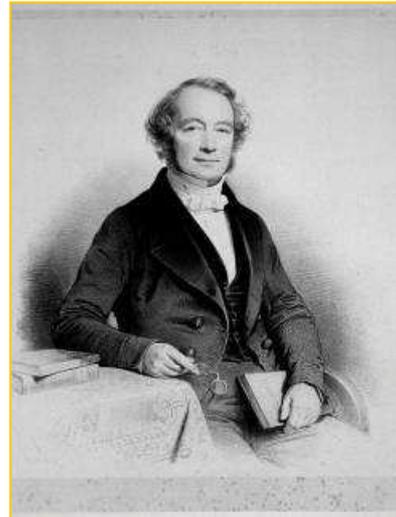
Elhanan Bicknell (1788-1861) of Herne Hill: Turner Collector

by Marcus Bicknell

This paper was developed from my talk for The Independent Turner Society evening “Two Turner Collectors who were Friends of Ruskin” on Wednesday, 20 November 2019 in London.

I have drawn from previously-untapped sources such as; notes by the late Valerie Lester for *MARVELS*, her biography of Clarence Bicknell; Sidney Bicknell’s handwritten memoirs in the East Sussex Record Office and in the Bicknell family collection; Brian Green’s 2014 paper for the Dulwich Society; Edgar Browne, *Phiz and Dickens*; Mark Howard’s unpublished, *Elhanan Bicknell - Oil Merchant and Shipowner* ; and previously unavailable 19th century maps of Herne Hill.

As my research into Elhanan’s collection continues, details will be available on our research page at www.clarencebicknell.com/downloads



J.M.W. Turner, *Wreckers - Coast of Northumberland, steamboat assisting ship off shore* (1843)

When Elhanan Bicknell's collection of works by Turner and other contemporary British art was sold at Christies in June 1863 the popular press described it as the Sale of the Century:



“The collection of paintings sold had been gathered together by a private Englishman, a man of comparatively obscure position, a man engaged at one time in mere trade - a man not even pretending to resemble a Genoese or Florentine merchant prince, but simply and absolutely a Londoner of the middle class actively occupied in business. This Englishman . . . had brought together a picture gallery which would have done no discredit to a LORENZO the MAGNIFICENT, although his name is probably still hardly known to the general public of the very city in which he lived”¹

Several noteworthy characteristics of my great-great-grandfather Elhanan are elicited in this single paragraph and they give me a good framework for this paper.

“A private Englishman, a man of comparatively obscure position”

Correct. Elhanan Bicknell, like some other art collectors in that period, was not of the landed gentry nor did he come into money other than by his own endeavours. Some writers² portray his father William as a rich serge merchant implying that Elhanan was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. No, contemporary accounts show that William had forsaken the business in 1789 and had become a London school master³.

Elhanan worked as an usher in his father's school⁴, then worked on a farm in Shropshire⁵, before being offered a partnership in 1808 by his uncle John Walter Langton (1746-1822) in his existing whale-oil business alongside his cousin John Bicknell Langton (1780-1858).

¹ *The Star* of 28 April 1863. Lorenzo de' Medici (1449 – 1492) sponsored Botticelli, Michelangelo. &c.

² “Elhanan Bicknell was given a start in his whale oil manufacturing business by his father, a successful serge manufacturer”. *Art and the Victorian Middle Class - Money and the making of cultural identity*. Dianne Sachko MacLoed, Cambridge University Press 1996

³ “William Bicknell (1749-1825), though he had been in the serge business all his life, was not by nature suited to conduct it efficiently, because his tastes were in an entirely different direction ; he was very musical, a mathematician, an author, and a great reader, far more fitted indeed to be a teacher than a merchant. At length, with something of that abrupt decision his relatives had evinced, he determined on being a schoolmaster, and in 1789 he sold his business, with his residence in Blackman Street and fields behind it, to a cousin, and bought the freehold of an "Academy," attended by some 100 scholars, in the old Palace of the Bishop of Lincoln at Ponder's End” *Five Pedigrees*, A. Sidney Bicknell, Sherwood, 1912

⁴ “He began life as an usher in his father's school” Edgar Browne, *Phiz and Dickens*

⁵ “In his 20th year E. “resolved to become a “gentleman farmer”. Went in March 1808 to a friend named Hawley who farmed several hundred acres at Cause, nr Westbury, in Shropshire, close to the Welsh border. There he remained till at least the middle of 1809 . . .” Then uncle's invitation to join his son John Bicknell Langton in the business. “. . . before long the partners were able to pay back the whole of the £5000 capital lent them at interest by Mr. Langton.” *Excerpta Biconyllea*, A.Sidney Bicknell.. Vol. II. Barcombe House, 1907 (The Keep, East Sussex).

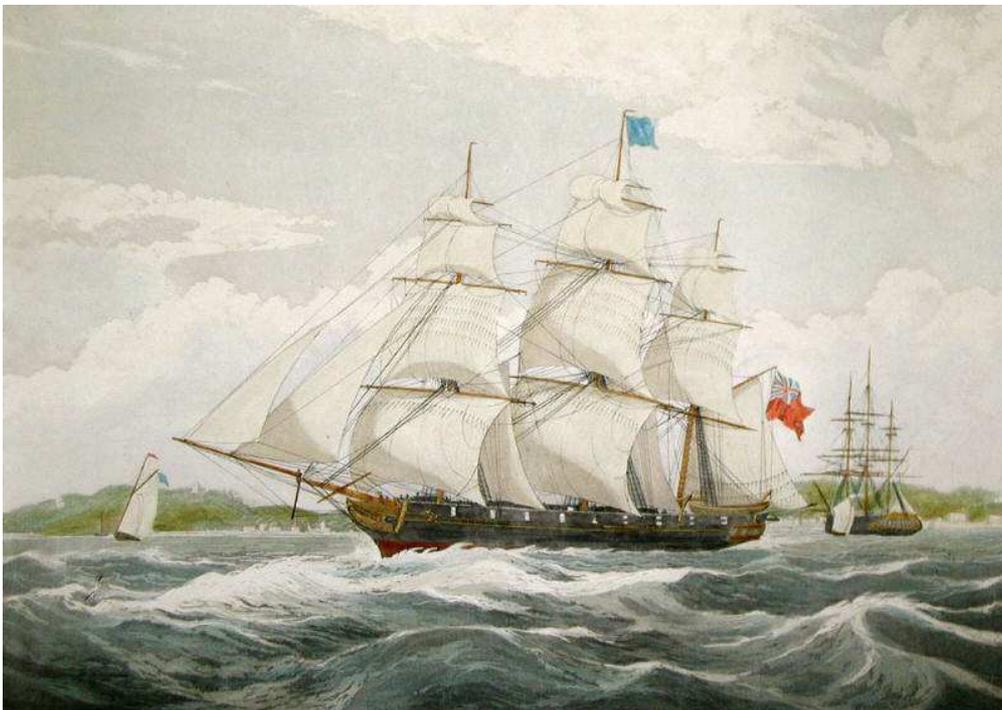
“A man engaged at one time in mere trade”

As Elhanan exercised his business skills, the oil business thrived, then Elhanan became a ship owner and or investor in whaling expeditions in his own name.

Image of a bill and receipt written in Elhanan's own hand on 20th November 1813 from Langton & Bicknell for 3 boxes of 20 sperm candles at 11 shillings and 6 pence. Monies were not received until 9th February. Pasted in the second version of Sidney Bicknell's Excerpta Biconyllea in the Bicknell Family Collection. Sidney has confirmed in pencil that the writing is Elhanan's.



Elhanan became an investor in whaling expeditions - South Seas Whale Fishery
Owned shares in the expeditions of at least six whalers, or in the ship itself, namely Foxhound, Hope, Elizabeth, Anne, Samuel Enderby, Favourite and others



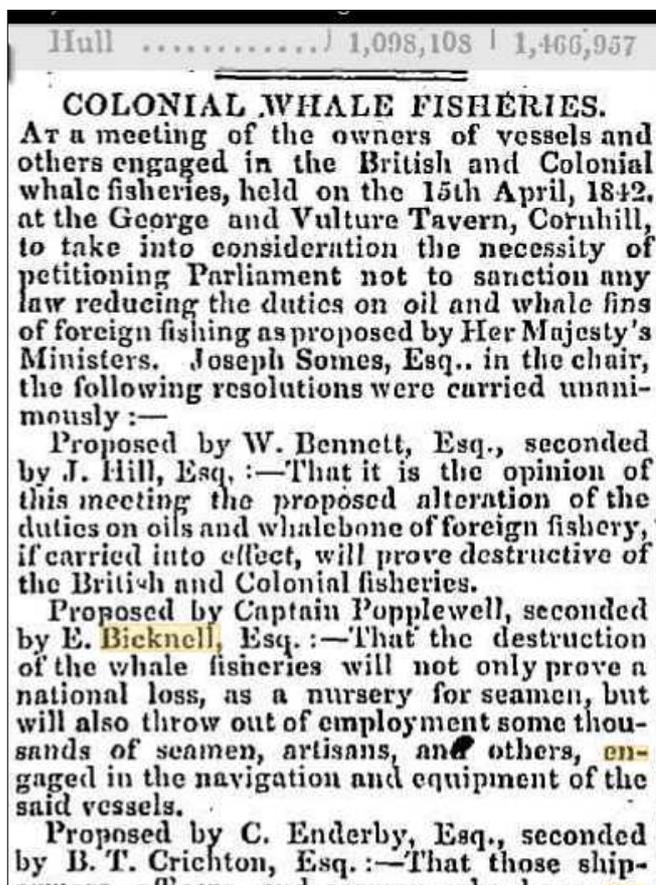
William John Huggins, *The Samuel Enderby* (1843-1848). Engraving not in Elhanan's collection.

“Simply and absolutely a Londoner of the middle class actively occupied in business”

“*Mere trade*”.

Yes. The industrial revolution, leading to the explosion of trade and wealth in the first half of the 19th century, created rich individuals who turned to art for reasons of altruism, culture, relief from the stress of their professional lives and for fun. Paul Oppé⁶ described the leading patrons as “newly-enriched members of the mercantile class”.

The notion of “trade”, “mere trade”, when taken to mean “other than the rich or the aristocracy” is an interesting one and has deep connotations of inferior class, including in the way my own family, as late as the 1960s, looked upon their origins and status.



Elhanan Bicknell became a key figure in the whaling industry in Britain as evidenced by the article reporting on a meeting of ship owners in 1842. (Sydney Herald, NSW, Australia, 18th July 1842)⁷

“*Actively occupied in business*”.

Yes. Collecting art occupied much less time than Elhanan’s business life, and end up making much less value. It was a leisure activity.

The amounts he invested in art were small compared to his earnings. By way of comparison, he left an estate valued at £350,000⁸, while the sale of his art works raised another £75,000, about four times what he paid for them.⁹

⁶ Paul Oppé, *Early Victorian England 1830-1865* ed.G.M.Young, London 1934, II, 15

⁷ sourced by whaling expert Mark Howard, <http://independent.academia.edu/MarkHoward>

⁸ As high as £500,000 in some sources. For details and present value see “Elhanan’s Will” on page 22 below.

⁹ Mark Howard, *Elhanan Bicknell, oil merchant and shipowner* (2016), on www.clarencebicknell.com and Bicknell family papers. Both figures in 1861 £ pounds.

“A man not even pretending to resemble a Genoese or Florentine merchant prince”

Elhanan did, however, have good taste. From this he developed a knowledge of contemporary art, strong relationships with the artists and a nose for the value of an original artwork or prints thereof. His wife Lucinda’s nephew, Edgar Browne, son of Dickens’ illustrator Phiz, wrote about Elhanan;

“There is nothing remarkable in a rich man making a collection of pictures, but it was not so common in the early Victorian days, and this was done entirely at first hand, on his own judgment, and without the aid or intervention of dealers. He had a most extensive knowledge of the works of contemporary English painters, and he must have had a shrewd idea of their pecuniary value and prospects.”¹⁰

There is something endearing in a successful business man who trusts his own judgement in a different sphere of activity. It is easy to imagine Elhanan disdainful of agents and the apparatus of the art world. Here is a whale-oil merchant self-opinionated enough to pick fights with Turner over the paintings of the whalers; Elhanan rubbed what he thought was watercolour off one of the paintings Turner had offered to him;¹¹ he returned from a tour of Italy embarked upon for the express purpose of seeing Old Masters, and announced that he had seen nothing he would 'give a damn for'.¹² Not a single work by a foreign painter was in Elhanan’s collection. I wonder whether patriotism born on the high seas of the whaling fisheries was the driving force behind this policy.

Dog-headedness and being bossy would certainly have been among Elhanan’s traits if I am correct in perceiving that this gene is in many other Bicknells since... I include myself. Elhanan’s argumentative nature is backed up in several places later in this piece.

Charles Martin Powell,
*Enchantress in the
River Dart*, 1804.
A typical painting by Powell,
not one in Elhanan’s collection



¹⁰ Edgar Browne, Lucinda’s nephew, son of Phiz, *Phiz and Dickens*, London: Nisbet 1913 p 57. Edgar continued this sentence “as the collection sold for about three times its original cost, fetching something about eight thousand pounds” but that figure is much lower than the sum of the individual pictures and either must refer to part of the collection or is a typo for eighty thousand.

¹¹ This incident is described in full on page 12 below

¹² Edgar Browne, *Phiz and Dickens*, London: Nisbet 1913

Elhanan began picture collecting¹³ on Dec. 13, 1828, by buying a marine view painted in oil by Charles Martin Powell (1775-1824) (an example above). Other early purchases¹⁴ were grandiose landscapes by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) and Richard Wilson (1714-1782). These three painters were English and had died relatively recently, i.e. could have been considered modern even if the style was classical.

Elhanan had been in business for twenty years, had bought Herne Hill 11 years before, was 40 years old and between wives. As mid-life crises go, this one turned out to be very productive. I also suggest that these purchases were high in kudos and certain to boost his status but low in risk and “safe” for a rich man new to art; Peter Bicknell and Helen Guiterman, in their excellent paper *The Turner Collector: Elhanan Bicknell*¹⁵ in *Turner Studies*, 7/1 (1987) pp 34-44 agree with the idea that Elhanan’s purchasing pattern was conservative:

“Although the Turner oils and watercolours were the pride of the collection, Elhanan did not buy anything more unconventional than *The Blue Rigi* and probably disliked Turner's 'nonsense colouring'... In general what he bought was what was acceptable at the time - the sort of picture which was being hung in the Academy.”



J.M.W. Turner 1775–1851 - *The Blue Rigi, Sunrise* - Watercolour 1842. Tate Gallery

¹³ Sidney Bicknell. This early purchase has been largely ignored by those writing about Elhanan and his art, unsurprisingly as Sidney’s memoirs were not discovered in the East Sussex records until 2015.

¹⁴ The names of the paintings are not given by Sidney.

¹⁵ As copies of this excellent article are difficult to find I have made available the text online at www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/turner_studies_peter_bicknell_1987.pdf

His son Sidney, a raconteur and a “lout”¹⁶ as much as a historian, goes on to write, straight after his remark about the art collection starting in 1828;

“As his collection of modern pictures increased, his acquaintance among artists extended widely, and for the next 25 years he frequently entertained Royal Academicians and men of note at dinner parties of 22 to about 26 guests. J.M.W. Turner R.A. constantly came with other celebrities, and he bought altogether 27 of his best works, chiefly from the artist, when they were quite unappreciated by the public.”

This sweeping statement masks the fact that Elhanan showed no interest in Turner until 1835 and did not buy any till 1838, ten years after buying the modern-classical landscapes. In the meantime, he had a life of stimulus and joy with his third wife, Lucinda¹⁷, the love of his life, artist and musician, whom he married in 1829.

Lifesize sculpture of Lucinda Bicknell née Browne (from her death mask, 1850) attributed to E.H.Baily



In the year of that marriage “Two wings were added to his house in which he at that time kept a footman and three maids besides a coachman and a gardener, his annual expenditures being about £2500.”¹⁸ Busy in business and busy at home.

There is no record of these extensions to the house being intended to show off his collection of art. There is no record of Lucinda influencing Elhanan’s buying pattern with her own taste in art; but she must have given Elhanan confidence about how the house was run. Edgar Browne confirms

“She was a notable woman, who managed her household affairs with a skill truly early Victorian. She had that art of organising which comes from natural capability, and which made the management of a big house and wealth no more difficult to her than a cottage home would have been, and she always seemed to have leisure for various pursuits.”¹⁹ Lucinda and Elhanan’s children are shown in the family tree, made for the 2018 biography of Clarence Bicknell, on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

¹⁶ “David Roberts visited his old friend Elhanan regularly, enjoying dinners at Herne Hill with Elhanan, especially if ‘that lout Sid’ was absent. Katherine Sim *David Roberts R.A., 1796–1864: a biography* (1984)

¹⁷ Lucinda was the aunt of Hablot Knight Browne, known as Phiz. She was considered his sister until Valerie Lester found out that her elder sister Kate had the child out of wedlock, with French Captain Nicolas Hablot. Their mother made out that the child was hers for the sake of propriety. Valerie Lester, *Phiz – The Man who Drew Dickens* Chatto & Windus 2004

¹⁸ From Sidney Bicknell’s Excerpta Biconyllea. A.S. Bicknell. Vol. II. Barcombe House, 1907 in the East Sussex Record Office at The Keep.

¹⁹ Edgar Browne *Phiz and Dickens* p 55

“He had brought together a picture gallery which would have done no discredit to a Lorenzo the Magnificent.”

When he did start buying seriously, the artists were of a different style...those alive, modern, vibrant, active on the London scene and willing to meet their patron and take direct commissions from him. The frequency of purchases was extreme and the increase in size of the collection remarkable.

“It was in the late thirties that Elhanan began devoting a substantial part of his wealth to the serious collection of works of art, and his little Roberts oil painting, *The Chapel of Ferdinand and Isabella at Granada*, which Roberts gave him in 1838, possibly as a fiftieth birthday present, could be looked on as the foundation stone of the collection”.²⁰

Now Elhanan sought out works by Thomas Webster, J.M.W. Turner, Clarkson Stanfield, David Roberts, Edwin Landseer, William Hilton, William Edward Frost, William Etty, Charles Eastlake, William Collins and Augustus Callcott in oils and Copley Fielding, Prout, de Wint, Gastineau and Muller in watercolours as his interest in modern British art evolved.

The detail of Elhanan’s acquisition of works by Turner is so excellently covered by my uncle Peter with Helen Guiterman (referenced above on page 6) that, until my own research²¹ into his collection of Turners is more advanced, I have relied on large chunks of their work, the paragraphs below, shown in quotes, and ending on page 13.

“The earliest record of Elhanan's interest in Turner seems to be an entry in the diary of E.W. Cooke²² for 16 January 1835: 'Bicknell called and brought an extraordinary dog. He came to see the Turner pictures . . .'. In 1838 Bicknell bought his first works by Turner at Christie's, two watercolours of Himalayan mountains which were designs for White's *Views in India*, published in 1836. Then on 24 April 1841 Cooke 'dined at Mr Bicknell's, met Messrs Turner RA, Stansfield, Roberts (& Christine), Collins, Phillips²³, Gastineau &c. It was in this year, 1841, that Elhanan bought his first oil painting by Turner [*Venice: the] Giudecca, la Donna della Salute and San Georgio*²⁴ for 250 guineas, followed in 1842 by a companion piece, *Campo Santo, Venice* for the same sum. Both these were catalogued in 1863 by Christie's (probably advised by Henry Bicknell) as 'painted for Mr Bicknell',²⁵ indicating, if correct, that by 1841 Elhanan was commissioning paintings from Turner.

²⁰ P Bicknell H Guiterman 1987

²¹ My detailed list of Elhanan’s collection of Turners is kept updated at www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/elhanan_bicknell_collection_details.pdf

²² Ms. Cooke Family Papers. E.W.Cooke, marine painter 1811-1880

²³ William Collins, R.A. 1788-1847 (87, 93 & dwg. 211) Father of Wilkie Collins, friend of Linnell; probably Thomas Phillips R.A. (1817-1867), who painted at least two portraits of Elhanan.

²⁴ This oil painting of Venice holds, at the time of writing, the record for the most expensive British painting sold when it went under the hammer to the owner of the Bellagio Hotel, Las Vegas for \$35.8m in 2014.

²⁵ Several of the pictures catalogued as 'painted for Mr Bicknell' were not in fact commissioned in this way. See note on Campo Santo, Venice (112) in Appendix.



J.M.W. Turner, *Giudecca, la Donna della Salute and San Giorgio*, 1840

“In 1843, the year of the publication of the first volume of [Ruskin’s book] *Modern Painters*, Ruskin²⁶ and Turner dined together [with Bicknell, on 16 December 1843] at Herne Hill, and were there again on 13 March 1844. It was in that month that Elhanan bought the great *Palestrina – Composition*, now in the Tate Gallery, which seems to have been in Turner’s studio since it was exhibited at the Academy in 1830, and for which Elhanan paid the large sum of £1,050. He is also reputed to have offered £1,600 for *Sun rising through Vapour*.²⁷ At the same time he bought five other paintings from Turner’s studio - *Calder Bridge*, *Ivy Bridge Mill*, *Port Ruysdael*, *Wreckers - Coast of Northumberland* and *Ehrenbreitstein*.

“Also in 1844 Elhanan bought two more paintings from Turner - *Helvoetsluys* and *Antwerp*. So eight of the ten Turner paintings which were the jewels in the crown of the Bicknell Collection were acquired in the same year. He did in fact buy two more in Christie’s sale of 13 and 14 June 1851, namely *Grand Junction Canal at Southall Mill* and *Saltash with the Water Ferry*, but sold both of them a few years later, so neither was in the 1863 sale.

²⁶ Turner and beautiful art on the walls were not the only attractions for Ruskin. Edgar Browne wrote that John Ruskin was very attached to Elhanan’s wife Lucinda. Ruskin is described as a ‘vehement young man’, who read long screeds of his writing to Lucinda, and who set the household running for colours when he saw a flower in the conservatory that he-wished to draw.

²⁷ David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton, 1978, p.206.



J.M.W. Turner, *Ehrenbreitstein: on the Rhine, and tomb of General Marceau*, 1835

“Just as the oil paintings were bought several at a time, so too the watercolours were bought in sets, but it is difficult to establish exactly when Elhanan bought them or where they are now. Two of his earliest purchases were the well known *The Blue Rigi* and *Brunnen, Lake Lucerne*, both acquired in 1842. These were subjects resulting from Turner's visit to Switzerland in 1841, and were commissioned by Elhanan from sketches introduced to him through the agency of Mr Griffiths²⁸ of Norwood. Two sets of three watercolours, one of vignettes connected with illustrations for *Wanderings by the Seine*, and another of miniature drawings of *Rouen*, *Chateau Gaillard* and the *Castle of Elz* were all catalogued in 1863 as 'painted for Mr Bicknell'. The first set appears to belong to about 1832, and the other to 1844 and 1832, so it is unlikely that they were commissioned. As Elhanan paid the same fee of 120 guineas for each set, they were probably bought at the same time from the studio in 1844 - perhaps with the redecoration of the drawing room at Herne Hill in mind.

“In all there were eighteen watercolours by Turner in the sale. Elhanan's most important purchase was that of the four *Yorkshire Drawings*', drawn for Sir William Pilkington in 1813-1815,²⁹ and now in the Wallace Collection, bought at the sale of Mr Hogarth of the Haymarket in 1854. It was at the same sale that he bought four early watercolours, including *Winchester Cross* in the Whitworth Art Gallery. He was buying the watercolours at the same time as the oils, so his famous Turner collection was put together between 1838 and 1854, about half of it being bought in 1844.”

²⁸ Sic. Normally spelt Griffith

²⁹ The four Yorkshire drawings were catalogued in 1863 as 'Painted for the late Sir Henry Pilkington', but were in fact painted for Sir William Pilkington, 8th Bart., 1775-1850, of Chevet Hall (see David Hill, *Turner in Yorkshire*, 1980, p.38). We are indebted to John Ingamells, Director of the Wallace Collection, for drawing our attention to this error.

Although Turner was for many years one of the most frequent visitors at Herne Hill, and Elhanan often went to his studio, their friendship never seems to have been intimate, and they had their quarrels. Bicknell had financed Hogarth's print of *The Fighting Temeraire* and quarrelled with Turner about his fee.³⁰ They quarrelled about the pictures of the whalers;



J.M.W. Turner, *Whalers* (now *The Whale Ship*) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, was never in Elhanan's collection

“It was just at this time, when Elhanan was seeing Turner regularly and was frequently in his studio, that Turner was working enthusiastically on whaling subjects. His four important pictures of whalers were painted in 1845 and 1846 (B.J. nos.414, 415, 423 and 426).³¹ Although they never ended up in the Bicknell collection, they may have been commissioned by Elhanan, and at any rate were probably painted in the hope that he would buy them.

“On 31 January 1845 Turner had written to Elhanan urging him to call in Queen Anne Street at his earliest convenience as he had 'a whale or two on the canvas'.³²

³⁰ H.I. Shapiro, *Ruskin in Italy* 1972 p248

³¹ B.J. refers to Butler & Joll's catalogue of Turner works (details on page 27). For a fuller discussion of Turner's whaling pictures see; Barry Venning, *'Turner's Whaling Subjects'*, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.172, Jan. 1985, pp.75-81; Peter Bicknell, *'Turner's The Whale Ship: A Missing Link?'*; *Turner Studies*, Vol.5, no.2, pp.20-23; *Turner and the Sea*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Maritime Museum, Greenwich, pp 23, 243,244,258,268.

³² John Gage (ed.) *Collected Correspondence of J.M.W. Turner*, Oxford, 1980, p.240 (V. & A. 86FF, 73, fo 8).

Turner's letter to Bicknell
inviting him to see the whalers

“Two of the four pictures were exhibited at the Royal Academy in the summer of that year, and one of them, *Whalers* (now *The Whale Ship*, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, image above), which certainly passed through Elhanan's hands, was the cause of a well recorded row between painter and patron. In September 1845, after the Academy Exhibition, Ruskin received a letter from his father saying “Bicknell is quarelling with Turner . . . he found Water Colour in *Whalers* and rubbed out some with Handky. He went to Turner who looked Daggers and refused to do anything, but at last he has taken it back to alter.” *Whalers* was never returned to

Elhanan; and the quarrel may well account for the absence of any of these pictures in his collection. Indeed, it included no whaling subjects of any kind - oils or drawings.

“Turner's enthusiasm for whaling subjects, which is closely related to his intense feeling for the drama of the sea, must have been stimulated and encouraged by his association with Elhanan who had such vital interests in the South Seas Whale Fishery. But Turner was also fascinated Turner was also fascinated by sea life (for example the curious unfinished paintings of sea monsters of 1840s)³³ and by Beale's book, *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale*,³⁴ an enlarged edition of which was published in 1839. Elhanan, from his business address, Newington Butts (not Herne Hill) had subscribed for four copies, one of which he may well have given to Turner. When the four pictures were exhibited at the Academy, the catalogue entries of three of them referred to Beale's book, relating them to dramatic accounts of whaling incidents.

“One of Beale's illustrations is from a print after the marine artist William Huggins (1781-1845), and the others are probably from his sketches. In an earlier essay in *Turner Studies* one of the present writers discussed how a painting of a whaler by Huggins which is still in the possession of the Bicknell family may have influenced Turner when he was painting the Metropolitan

47 2 A. July 31, 45

My dear Mr

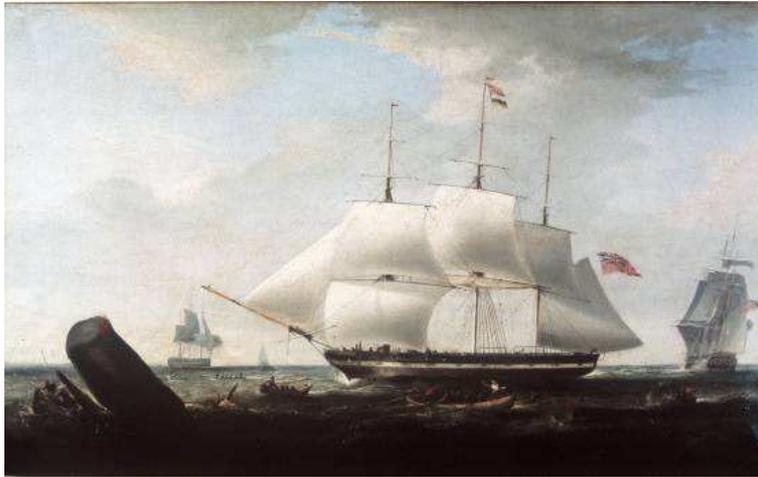
I will thank you
for a call in Decem-
ber 18. at your earliest
convenience. For I have
a Whale or two on the
Canvas

Yours truly
J.M.W. Turner
5 Becknells St
Herne Hill

³³ Selby Whittingham, email Nov 2019

³⁴ Thomas Beale, *A Few Observations on the Natural History of the Sperm Whale, with an account of the rise and progress of the fishery, and of the modes of pursuing, killing, and "cutting in" that animal, with a list of its favourite places of resort*, London, 1835; republished, revised and extended, with the addition of *A Sketch of a South-Sea Whaling Voyage* . . . London, 1839.

Museum *The Whale Ship*. The writer³⁵ considers it almost certain that Elhanan put Huggins' painting at Turner's disposal when he was working on his own picture.³⁶



William Huggins, *A Whaler*, private collection, courtesy Mark Bicknell

“Turner's 'stronger passion, love of money' is illustrated by another quarrel, referred to in the letter from Ruskin's father, already quoted, in which he says, ‘. . . he [Elhanan] gave him 120 Gs for the loan of *Temeraire* to engrave and

Turner besides demands 50 proofs. Bicknell resists and sends 8’.³⁷ As already stated, the financing of engravings in this way was one of the means by which Elhanan helped artists in whom he was interested.”

Turner frequently dined with Elhanan at Herne Hill. At one such dinner around Christmas 1845, because Turner objected to having his portrait taken, “Count D’Orsay and Sir Edwin Landseer, devised a little plot. While Turner unsuspectingly chatted with a guest over a cup of tea in the drawing-room, D’Orsay placed himself as a screen beside him to hide Landseer who sketched him at full length in pencil on the back of an envelope. Landseer gave what he had done to D’Orsay, who after re-drawing it at home and enlarged the figure to eight inches in height, sold it to J Hogarth, printseller in the Haymarket, for twenty guineas”. Sixteen copies of this print (including this copy, right, owned by Marcus Bicknell) were in the sale at Christie’s in 1863 after Elhanan’s death.³⁸



³⁵ Peter Bicknell

³⁶ See *Turner Studies*, Vol.5, no.2, pp.20.

³⁷ Shapiro, op. cit. p.248.

³⁸ Sidney Bicknell

“His name is probably still hardly known to the general public of the very city in which he lived”

There is nothing recorded of Elhanan Bicknell’s notoriety during his lifetime. There is nothing to suggest he “dined out” on his art collection i.e. he was not boastful, he did not join learned societies and he did not prop up the bar at the Garrick Club. Note that he had a speech defect, an extreme difficulty with the letter ‘r’ and had speech therapy³⁹.

When not working he had the pleasures of Herne Hill to occupy him, from the delights of Lucinda to the extensions to the house and the dinners when the famous artists came to visit him. Elhanan kept a good cellar - he was, after all, a warden and Master of the Worshipful Company of Vintners, where his grand-uncle Samuel Bicknell (1723-1811, master in 1793), his father William Bicknell (1749-1825), his brother William Isaac Bicknell (1783-1859), his nephew Thomas Honiborne Bicknell (1813-1887) and his son Sidney Bicknell were also members. I find no contemporary source confirming that he was an adviser to Gladstone and Disraeli.

Elhanan Bicknell, Master of the Vintners, oil painting by T Philips in 1853 (courtesy Vintners)



Obituaries and other writings after his death were largely complimentary, especially when the 1863 “sale of the century” at Christie’s generated such a huge sum.

A contemporary writing about the high prices paid for fine art in the 1860s said, “the fancy prices quoted are nearly all for pictures from famous collections; and some for the Bicknell pictures, for example, would almost suggest that as much was due to the name of the collector as the merit of the picture.”⁴⁰ Elhanan was hardly known to the public. But he had notoriety as a collector.

The Herne Hill house, into which he put so much effort, became well known in its own right for the way in which the art was displayed.

³⁹ Edgar Browne

⁴⁰ “Art in the auction room - Prices,” *London Society, An illustrated magazine of light and amusing literature for the hours of relaxation*, Vol IX, London, 1866, p.258.

Elhanan Bicknell's house in Herne Hill

As part of my research into the childhood of Clarence Bicknell, Elhanan's last child, in support of Valerie Lester's research for her *MARVELS: The Life of Clarence Bicknell*, and driven by curiosity, I visited the site of the mansion and researched its origins and history. I invite you to read my paper, especially if you are planning to pay a visit as the site is nowhere near Bicknell Road or Ruskin Park.⁴¹ The house was gigantic, covering a whole block of terrace houses built in 1907 in Casino Avenue and Danecroft Road.



The size of the Bicknell residence can be appreciated when an image of it, seen from the south, is superimposed on a Google Earth view of the area. The left-right length of the house is correctly in proportion to Danecroft Road and Casino Avenue in the image above, even if the height of the building seems to tower over the 1907 houses many of which are essentially two-up-two-down with add-ons.

Elhanan's house and its development is relevant here in the light of a question posed in an email from Selby Whittingham as I started to write this paper

“Your remark about the size of Elhanan's house prompts a thought. When was it enlarged? Was that before his bulk buy of Turners in 1844?”⁴²

“Collectors can be divided into those who (1) bought to fill up wall spaces, (2) had little wall space (like Windus and the Ruskins at Herne Hill) and so went for few pictures or small ones or watercolours, (3) made extensions to their homes to give space for purchases (Windus did that by a small addition of his library), (4) who had collecting mania and, like the 4th Marquess of

⁴¹ *Elhanan Bicknell's Mansion at Herne Hill*, Marcus Bicknell

⁴² My timeline of Elhanan's life on page 29 show extensions to the house and art acquisitions by year.

Hertford, used his houses, such as the present Wallace Collection house, as store rooms. If it could be established when Elhanan started buying in a big way and when he extended his house, one might assign him to one of these categories.”

Having bought Herne Hill⁴³ in 1819, Elhanan was pre-occupied with the whale-oil business, including the fire in the works in 1820, and with the business of making money. He had married his second wife Mary Jones in 1817 but she “had never been strong, and she died of heart failure, April 9, 1827”. One cannot imagine life at Herne Hill being vibrant during the ten years before he married the love of his life, Lucinda.

Elhanan started buying art (the Powell marine painting mentioned on page 5) in 1828, just a year before he married Lucinda. Had he met her before that date? One can imagine that his courtship with such an artistic and positive character and his introduction to her artistic and bohemian family (even though nephew Phiz, Hablot Knight Browne, was only 13 years old and did not meet Charles Dickens till the spring of 1836) could have inspired him to appreciate art and to start buying art. Certainly, the influence of a lovely new wife and the purchasing of paintings as an outlet for his wealth and his growing interest in art, would combine to encourage him to make improvements to the house. Indeed, in 1829, the year of his marriage to Lucinda “two wings were added to his house”⁴⁴ (image below).



Thereafter, there is no extension to the house, with a recorded date, until 1851, i.e. 22 years later. Either Elhanan and Lucinda considered the house with its two wings big enough for the art collection, or they did not have so much art that they needed more space, or they had no land on which to build. The latter is certainly possible because

⁴³ It was not called Carlton House until after Elhanan’s death (Marcus Bicknell)

⁴⁴ Sidney Bicknell

Sidney informs us:

“When his next door neighbor, a very cantankerous man named Prior died in 1851, he bought his property, adding the major portion of the grounds to his own, it enabled him to build another wing and a very large conservatory connect with it. The pictures had indeed long been so crowded that they could only be hung by their occupying frames of unsuitably narrow dimensions, so that the great extension of the drawing room, now permitted the works of art for the first time to be properly seen. In 1856 a billiard room was also joined to the conservatory.”⁴⁵

There are also contemporary references to redecoration of the house in 1854.

We can now answer Selby’s question from page 15. Elhanan Bicknell was both in category (3), *collectors who made extensions to their homes to give space for purchases*, and in category (4) *collectors who had collecting mania*.

More contemporary descriptions of Herne Hill

Our image of Herne Hill is incomplete without further contemporary descriptions. The house became the home for his art collection and the visible product of his wealth.

Jennett Humphreys wrote shortly after 1900 for the *Dictionary of National Biography* as follows:

“... in default of a gallery, these splendid works, with many pieces of sculpture, such as Baily's 'Eve,' enriched all the principal apartments of his house, and were always hospitably open to the inspection of art connoisseurs. Bicknell, moreover, became acquainted with artists themselves, as well as with their works; he was munificent in his payments, and generously entertained them.”

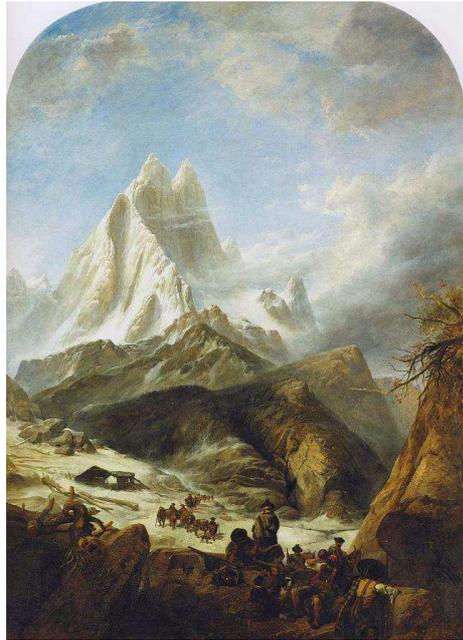
Peter Bicknell and Helen Guiterman say

“The enlarged house at Herne Hill made a splendid setting for Elhanan's collection of pictures and sculptures. Edgar Browne has described 'the three large rooms, entirely given up to the display of pictures . . . In the middle was the old drawing-room' which 'was covered over with a sort of Rococo panelling in white and gold' and Gustav Waagen tells us that 'the inside of the shutters [were] lined with mirrors.’⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Sidney Bicknell

⁴⁶ Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain*, 1845, P.351.

“The way Elhanan was buying pictures in 1854 with the redecoration of the house in view is nicely illustrated by his purchase of Stanfield's *'Pic du Midi d'Ossau' in the Pyrenees, with Brigands*. This was commissioned for 700 guineas (it sold in 1863 for 2550 guineas) and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1854. However, before it was delivered to Herne Hill on August 8th/9th, it was adjusted in its proportions and probably given its arched shape to fit over the chimney-piece of one of the new rooms.”



Clarkson Stanfield, 1854
'Pic du Midi d'Ossau'
in the Pyrenees, with Brigands
 (University of London - Royal Holloway)

This latter remark shows that Elhanan had no qualms about refashioning artworks for the space available in the house. Similarly “The pictures... were not hung in the usual manner, but inset, the gilded mouldings serving as frames, and the water-colours serving as decorative panels. Turner's *Rivers of France*, if I remember rightly, served as decoration of the doors.”⁴⁷ Our conclusion must be that Elhanan was buying art specifically for display in his home, not merely making extensions to their homes to give space for purchases; the house as an art gallery was an oeuvre in itself.

This is the moment to compliment Peter Bicknell and Helen Guiterman’s research and lucidity. In 1978, in the pre-internet era, the detail of their research into the Turner works bought by Elhanan is extraordinary. Peter is also unmoved by nepotism, and speaks against Sidney and Edgar in this respect...

“The Ruskins, until 1844 actually living on Herne Hill and then at Denmark Hill, were close neighbours of the Bicknells with whom John was able to study and discuss the Turners. It was asserted by Sidney Bicknell that ‘when Turner was wholly unappreciated and his works unsaleable, before Mr. Ruskin, a near neighbour had written a line, he [Elhanan] had bought a splendid assemblage of masterpieces from the artist's store of pictures . . .’⁴⁸; and Edgar Browne said, ‘Mr Bicknell had made up his mind about Turner before Ruskin was breeched’.⁴⁹ These claims, accepted by Katharine Sim in her biography of David Roberts,⁵⁰ are little more than manifestations of family loyalty, for the first volume of Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* was published in 1843, the year before Elhanan had his buying spree in Turner's studio. Indeed, Ruskin had defended Turner as early as 1836 in his unpublished *Reply to Blackwoods*

⁴⁷ Edgar Browne

⁴⁸ A.S. Bicknell, op. cit. p.6.

⁴⁹ Edgar Browne, op. cit. p.64.

⁵⁰ Katherine Sim, David Roberts R.A. 1796-1864 A Biography, London, 1984, p.209.

Edgar Browne was very friendly with Clarence Bicknell, both born in 1842, and they spent many happy days playing at Herne Hill. Like Sidney Bicknell's accounts, Edgar Browne's are written some fifty years later (1911 and 1913 respectively) but would appear to be accurate memories. Edgar's description of the house ("the splendour of the place") is worth relaying in full even if a couple of sentences are already quoted above:

"The house had originally been a medium-sized one. My uncle had built a wing at each end larger than the original structure, so that on the ground floor, among others, there were three large rooms, entirely given up to the display of pictures, which constituted the splendour of the place. In the middle was the old drawing-room. This was a low room, which, for the sake of protection against damp, had been entirely lined with mahogany. The wood was not apparent, as it was covered over with a sort of rococo panelling in white and gold, according to the prevailing taste of the time in drawing-room decorations. The pictures in this room were all watercolours, and were not hung in the usual manner, but inset, the gilded mouldings serving as frames, and the water-colours serving as decorative panels. Turner's *Rivers of France*, if I remember rightly, served as decoration of the doors. The effect was altogether admirable, and the individual pictures, when looked into, were found to be works of the most distinguished men of the time.



Stephen Poyntz Denning (1795-1864)
The six children of Elhanan Bicknell Esq., watercolour, 1841. Edgar Browne's playmate Clarence Bicknell, Elhanan and Lucinda's last child, was born in 1842 so is not in this painting. (V&A, P.18-1934)

"The dining-room and the big drawing-room were devoted to oils ; in the latter were a considerable number of Turners. Besides the pictures on the walls, Mr. Bicknell had stowed away others of equal importance. I shall never forget the thrill I experienced when he produced from a portfolio Turner's four Yorkshire drawings which had never been exposed."

The art critic and writer G. F. Waagen looked through the collection in the Herne Hill house and wrote it up in *Treasures of Art* (1854). Although he is very favourable to the collection he cannot resist, as a self-opinionated critic, pointing out any shortcoming, to his eyes, in the Turners...

"This gentleman, who has made a large fortune, chiefly in the whale fishery, is so zealous a lover of art as to have literally filled his house with pictures, including a series of masterworks by the most eminent English artists." He describes each room and its contents.

“Dining room... Turner - 1. “Port Ruysdael,” the name given by the master. The lighting and water masterly. The lover of truth, however, may object to the too firm appearance of the uppermost cloud in the otherwise wonderfully poetic sky. Painted in 1825. – 2. A view in Venice. The conception and transparent colouring are very attractive; the gaudiness and slight treatment very much the reverse. – 3. A large and justly celebrated landscape composition of great grandeur and spirit, known by the name of Palestrina; painted in 1830, of the earliest time of the master. A most poetical picture, and of wonderful effect both in the forms and in the management of the luminous and transparent light. In some portions only it is rather indistinct. The high value which Mr. Bicknell places on the work of art may be estimated by the fact that he has refused the offer of 2500l. for it. – 4. View of Venice. Companion to the one mentioned above, and of similar defects, but of magical effect of light.

“Drawing room... Turner – 5. Among the different watercolour drawings by this master I particularly remarked one, a view of the Lake of Lucerne, as highly poetical. Also another, the companion to it, with the reflection of the Righi in still water by evening light, is most exquisite. It is a pity, however, that the otherwise delicate harmony of this picture is disturbed by a too unbroken blue. In his other drawings the motives are always admirable; the execution, however, is too arbitrary, and in some instances even absurd.

“Entrance hall leading to the dining-room... Turner – 6. A landscape with rocks in the foreground, “Ivy Bridge, Devonshire”. As usual, spirited, but also warm and true to nature. ... Time did not permit of my taking notes of all the valuable works of art in this collection, among which I may mention ... several by Turner of very high class...

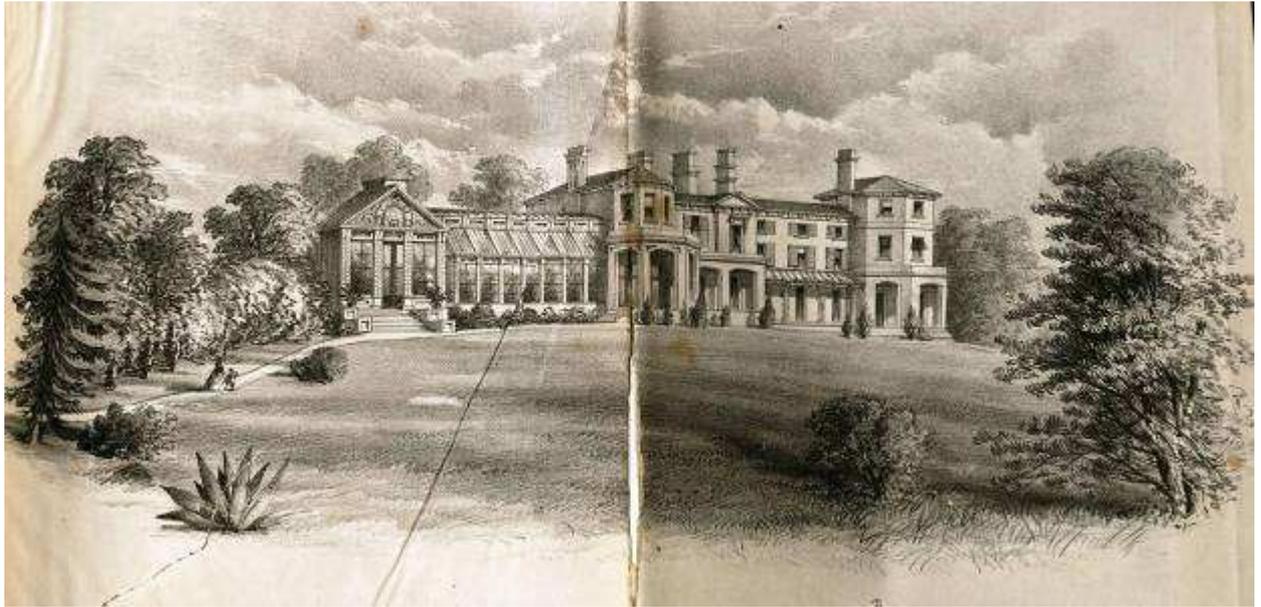
Edgar Browne’s great-grand-daughter Valerie Browne Lester⁵¹ writes:

The house “had the air of a prosperous Late Regency matron: imposing, bosomy, pale and stucco-fronted; but it lacked the elaborate trim so beloved of the Victorians. It made up for plainness with a columned portico, sash windows, octagonal gables, tall chimney stacks, many roof lines, a 120-foot long conservatory, and a labyrinth of rooms.

“The original building was fairly modest, but as Elhanan’s family and wealth increased and his pre-occupation with modern British painting grew, he extended the house and added two large wings, one at either end. The family lived upstairs and he turned the ground floor into an art gallery with reception rooms. He also created a library that contained not only books but musical instruments, telescopes and microscopes. He added a billiard room and a cellar, that absolute necessity for a Warden of the Worshipful Company of Vintners. Outdoors, he made sure his establishment was self-supporting by adding a dairy for his small herd of cows, a pig sty, a kitchen garden, greenhouses, stables, chicken coops and a carpenter’s shop.⁵²

⁵¹ Valerie Lester, *MARVELS: The Life of Clarence Bicknell – Botanist, Archaeologist, Artist, Matador* 2018. Valerie Lester née Browne is descended from Hablot Knight Browne, Phiz, related, therefore, to Elhanan.

⁵² Patricia M. Jenkyns, *The Bicknells of Herne Hill*, May 1986. Bicknell collection



Near the end of Elhanan's life, the house as an art gallery was probably complete. His art purchasing spree slowed down and an extension in 1856 was for a billiard room adjoining the conservatory, not just a space for art. The image above⁵³, showing the conservatory towards the left (west) end, was used by Sidney Bicknell to help sell the house after 1861.

Elhanan was also buying up houses and land round about ...

“In 1858, when his former partner, Mr Langton, died, Bicknell bought his meadows and part of his gardens, bringing his own grounds to around twelve acres. By then he had also bought most of the houses on Herne Hill, owning almost everything on both sides of the road from Red Post Hill to St Paul's church. Not that there were many houses at that time.”⁵⁴

Toward the end of his life, Bicknell supported a number of other small commercial ventures. He had a business partnership with Joseph Hogarth, printseller and publisher, at 5 Haymarket, Middlesex, which lasted till August 1854. Another partnership was with the jeweller, A. M. Futoye, from premises in Beak Street, an arrangement that ended in January 1856. It is tempting to see these ventures as an indirect way in which Bicknell used his money to help family or friends, with Hogarth to help Turner in particular.⁵⁵

In 1859 Elhanan's health began to fail, and he officially retired from Langton & Bicknell but he remained busy with various businesses in London till a few months⁵⁶ before his death. He passed most of his time at Herne Hill, where he died 27 Nov. 1861, aged 72. He was buried at Norwood.

⁵³ In the Bicknell Family Collection, c/o Marcus Bicknell

⁵⁴ Sidney Bicknell

⁵⁵ Source: Mark Howard, see sources on page 27

⁵⁶ Sidney Bicknell: “On June 30, 1861, after about 50 years in business, he retired from the firm of Langton & Bicknell at Newington Butts”

Elhanan's Will

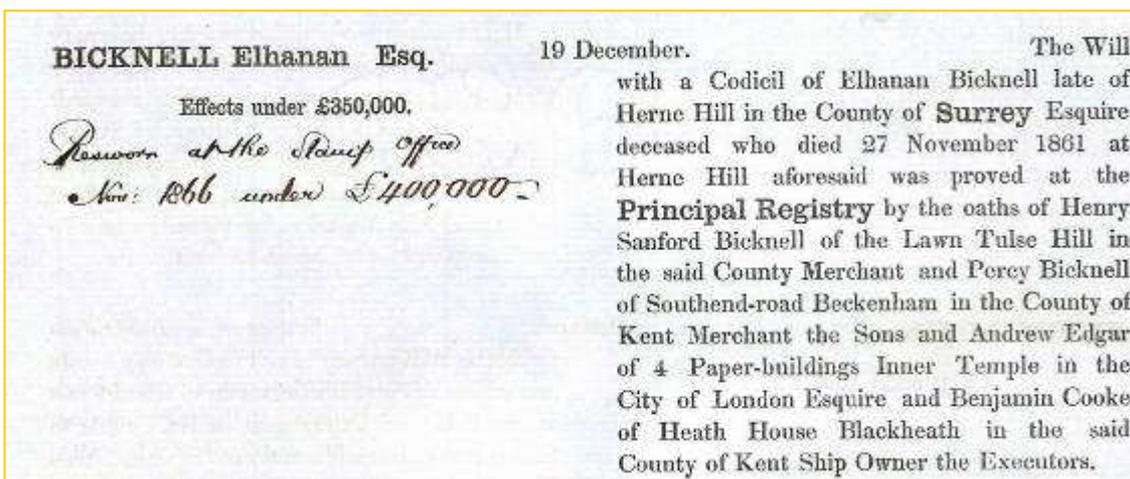
The proceeds of the Christie's sale (page 24 below), were only part of what Elhanan left behind:

“His will disposed of £350,000 [immediately] and ultimately his estate realized an amount close on half a million⁵⁷. The works of art Messrs. Christie, Manson, & Woods disposed of on April 25 and six following days, for £75,055.8s”⁵⁸

So only 15% of Elhanan's wealth was in the art collection. He could have bought more. Was there not enough art for him to buy? Had he fallen out of love with buying? Had his fights with Turner turned him off? More specifically, was he frustrated that his eminence in his shipping and whale-oil business was not reflected on the walls of his home? Elhanan did not write a memoir, so we shall remain wondering.

And what were Elhanan's intentions for the art collection?

Many writers offer the line “While Bicknell had wanted to leave his collection to the nation, the family decided otherwise”. I cannot find the source for this statement. It gets repeated by Jeanette Humphreys and later editors (including Selby Whittingham) of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, in serious works about Elhanan but without a source being quoted, on *Wikipedia* and widely on the internet.



The facts available to me say otherwise. Elhanan's will of 22 March 1861, proved in December 1861, is available in the form that was executed (by his sons Henry and Percy as executors). The will is a long and detailed document of 1218 lines on 22 pages.⁵⁹ The art collection is included in the will;

⁵⁷ £500,000 in 1861 are £60 million purchasing power in 2019 (Office for National Statistics)

⁵⁸ Sidney Bicknell

⁵⁹ Among the executors were two of his sons, Henry Sanford and Percy, along with his business colleagues Andrew Edgar and Benjamin Cooke. England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1995, download from www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/elhanan_bicknell_will.pdf

“...and I direct that my said Wife shall for the period of twelve calendar months next after my decease if she shall think fit have the use for... the accommodation of herself and also for the accommodation of my son *Clarence* and my daughter *Lucinda* of my Principal dwelling house and of the pleasure grounds and appurtenances... sculpture paintings drawings and prints...” included in a long list, then “... and that she my said Wife shall on the expiration of such period of twelve calendar months after my decease quit and give up possession of such dwelling house and other premises respectively including the said wines and liquors or so much thereof as shall not have been actually consumed it not being my intention that my said Wife should take the absolute interest therein.”

After cash, art and other considerations have been bequeathed to a long list of family, friends and servants, the meat of the will concludes

“...my said sons *Henry Sanford Bicknell* and *Percy Bicknell* equally between them as tenants in common⁶⁰ to all the residue and remainder of the aforesaid clear monies to arise by the sale getting in and conversion of my real and residuary personal estate and the income thereof.”

There is nothing in the will about leaving the art collection to the nation. Therefore, if that had been his wish prior, he must have changed his mind before 1861. Is it possible he lied to his fans, including Turner and Ruskin, that the art would be left to the nation? Would there have been embarrassment in leaving it to his family? Did he want to hide his shame till after he died? If there was a codicil which left the art to the nation, was it possible in law for the family to overturn it so discreetly that no copy remains in the public record? Was there pressure from the family not to give the art away?

In any case, the art was sold at auction.

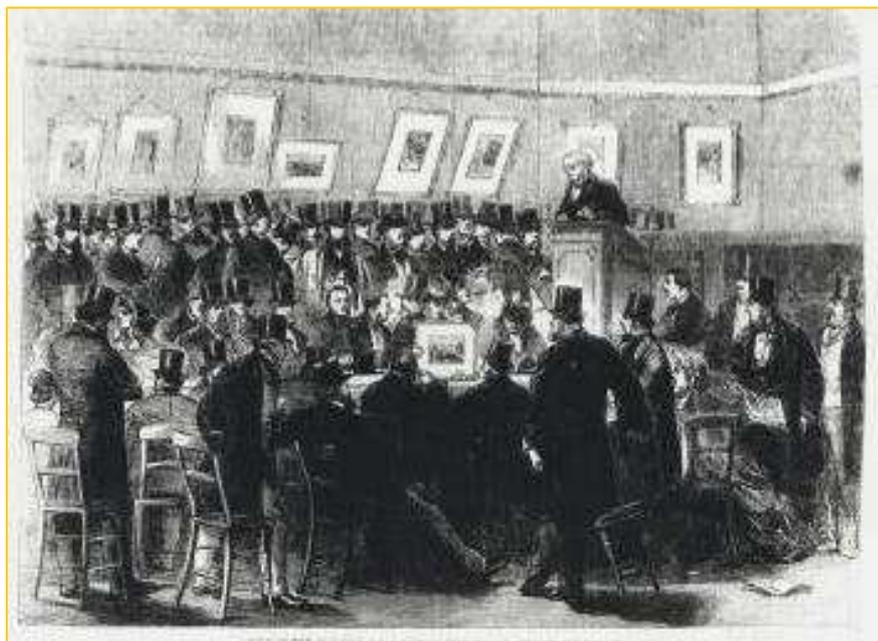
⁶⁰ Further conditions, if “my said son *Percy Bicknell* shall not at the time of my decease be a partner with me in the trade or business of an Oil Merchant and Spermacetti Refiner now carried on by me in partnership under the style or firm of *Langton Bicknell and Son*”

The Sale of the Century

Although Bicknell amassed important works by other artists including Roberts, Landseer, Clarkson Stanfield, Copley Fielding, Prout, de Wint and Muller, between 1838 and 1854 he acquired no fewer than twelve oil paintings and sixteen watercolours by Turner.

Thanks to a clause in the will which left the widow in possession of the house for a year, it was not until 25 April 1863 that the six-day sale was opened by Christie, Manson and Woods at their Great Rooms in King Street, St. James's Square. Before the collection went to King Street it was on view at Herne Hill, and so universal was the interest excited among artists, amateurs and connoisseurs that great numbers of visitors flocked to Mr. Bicknell's residence. On occasions there was a line of carriages stretching more than a mile from the house. Prior to the sale, Christie's two great rooms were opened for three days of Private Viewing. The ten Turner paintings, the sale of which was to form the finale of the first day, were massed on one wall, with the renowned *Palestrina* as the centre piece, *Ehrenbreitstein* beneath it, with, at each side, ranged out the four splendid sea pieces, flanked by the two early paintings, *Ivy Bridge* and *Calder Bridge*, with the two views of *Venice*, *Giudecca* and *Campo Santo* outside them. The Turners were rightly considered to be the jewels in the crown and whereas *The Blue Rigi* achieved £310.16 on the first day, the *Lake Lucerne from Brunnen* trumped this, when John Smith of Edinburgh paid £714 on day two.

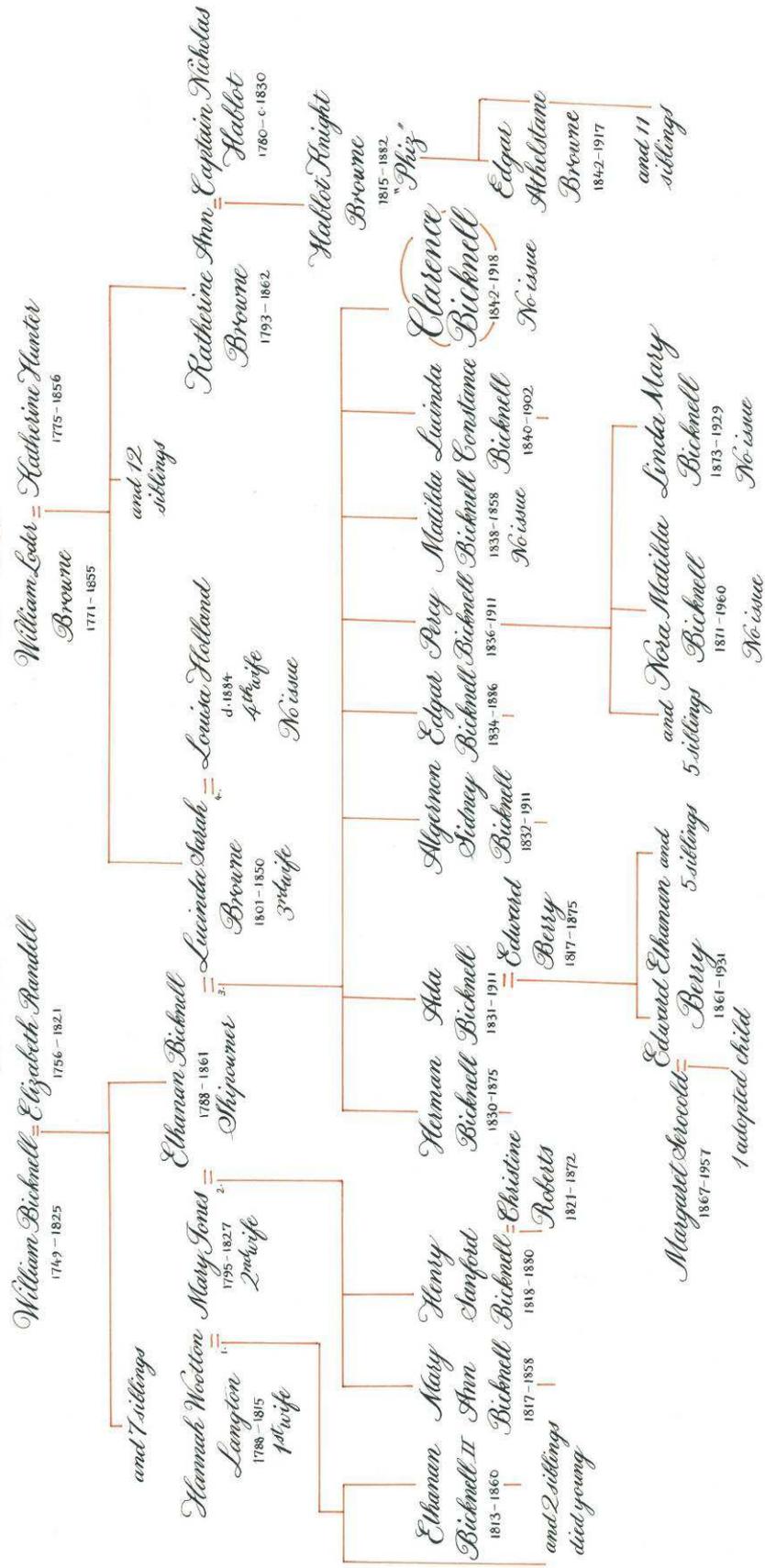
Sale of the Bicknell Collection of Drawings at Christie and Mansons, from the *Illustrated Times*, 2 November 1863



The auctioneers had taken £75,000.85. All records had been broken. As quickly and as emphatically as Elhanan had put his collection together, it was gone.



Clarence Bicknell and his Close Family



Credits

My new interest in Elhanan Bicknell and his house at Herne Hill was triggered by the discovery of the memoir of Sidney Algernon Bicknell in the East Sussex records office at The Keep near Brighton during the 5 years of research by volunteers, including me, helping Valerie Lester prepare her 2018 book *MARVELS: The Life of Clarence Bicknell – Botanist, Archaeologist, Artist*. For the first time we had a contemporary source of information about the house, its contents, enlargement, history and its ownership and naming after Elhanan died.

The writing of this paper was triggered by Selby Whittingham's inviting me to present a talk on Elhanan Bicknell as a Turner collector for Selby's Independent Turner Society evening "Two Turner Collectors who were Friends of Ruskin" on 20 November 2019 in London. My further research into Elhanan will include his collection of works other than by Turner.

I am grateful to ...

- The late Valerie Lester for the extraordinary research work and for letting us quote from *MARVELS*, her biography of Clarence Bicknell;
- My wife Susie for the encouragement in making this work something more significant than genealogical meanderings;
- The researchers of and contributors to the Clarence Bicknell Association (of which I am chairman) www.clarencebicknell.com ;
- Philip Bye of The Keep, East Sussex Record Office (www.thekeep.info);
- Brian Green of the Dulwich Society www.dulwichsociety.com for his support, intelligence and his paper of 2014 in appendix;
- the late Patricia May Jenkyns for her paper of 1986 (in appendix);
- Laurence Marsh of The Herne Hill Society www.hernehillsociety.org.uk ;
- National Library of Scotland for the 19th century maps of Herne Hill www.nls.uk;
- Vera Kas Noach, Clarence devotee of Herne Hill and Bordighera, who lives in Elfindale Road and who hosted, in December 2018, my most propitious visit to the site of Elhanan's house;
- Martyn Webster, a Sussex family historian, who alerted us to the Sidney Bicknell collection in The Keep;
- Selby Whittingham for his encouragement and a constant feed of intelligence.



Bibliography and sources

Peter Bicknell and Helen Guiterman, *The Turner Collector: Elhanan Bicknell*, Turner Studies, 7/1 (1987), pp 34–44 text available on our web site

[Bicknell, Elhanan - The Turner Collector \(in pdf\) \(in MS Word\)](#)

Peter Bicknell, *Turner's The Whale Ship: a missing link?*, Turner Studies, 5/2 (1985), 20–23

Sidney Bicknell (A.S. Bicknell), letter to the Athenaeum, 9 January 1909

Sidney Bicknell (A.S. Bicknell), *Five Pedigrees* (1912)

If Sidney Bicknell is credited above without further detail, the quote is from *Excerpta Biconyllea*, the memoirs of Elhanan's son A.S. Bicknell, Vol. II. Barcombe House, 1907 in the East Sussex Record Office at The Keep, Brighton. Marcus Bicknell has a second copy, also handwritten, with some differences. [Bicknell, Algernon Sidney - memoir at The Keep \(1910\)](#)

Edgar Browne, *Phiz and Dickens* (1913), chapter 4

Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner*, Catalogue Raisonné, The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art 1984 (Turner works referred to as B.J. and a reference number)

Samuel Carter, ⁶¹ *The collection of Elkanah [sic] Bicknell, esq., at Herne Hill*, The Art Journal, 19 (1857), 8–10.

John Gage, *Collected Correspondence of J.M.W. Turner*, Oxford, 1980, p.240 (V&A 86FF, 73, fo 8).

Brian Green, *Artist in Residence - Stephen Poyntz Denning and the Herne Hill Art Set*, www.dulwichsociety.com/2014-winter/1071-stephen-poyntz-denning and by Marcus Bicknell in <https://www.clarencebicknell.com/en/news-views/68-clarence-dorsay-1845>

J. J. Howard and F. A. Crisp, eds., *Visitation of England and Wales*, 21 vols. (privately printed, London, 1893–1921), vol. 17, pp. 33–46; vol. 21, p. 77

Mark Howard, *Elhanan Bicknell - Oil Merchant and Shipowner*
[Bicknell, Elhanan - Oil Merchant and Shipowner](#) in pdf

Jennett Humphreys (1829-1917), *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1900

Patricia M. Jenkins: The [Bicknells of Herne Hill](#) 1986

Emma Johnson: [Bicknell, Sidney Algernon - Science in the archive at The Keep](#) 2016

Valerie Lester, *MARVELS: The Life of Clarence Bicknell, Botanist, Archaeologist, Artist, Matador* 2018

Valerie Lester, *Phiz - The Man who Drew Dickens* Chatto & Windus 2004

Dianne Sachko MacLoed, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class - Money and the making of cultural identity*, Cambridge University Press (1996)

Krystyna Matyjaszkiewicz, Independent art historian & curator, tissotroberts@matyjk.me.uk, email exchanges (2019)

Sarah Monks, *Rendering*, University of East Anglia
<https://hoaportal.york.ac.uk/hoaportal/turnerwhaleEssay.jsp?id=307>

⁶¹ Although the article has no byline, it is probably by the editor, Samuel ("shirt-collar") Hall (1800-89), the model for Dickens' Pecksniff. "He knows nothing about art," Ruskin wrote in 1866.

Paul Oppé, *Early Victorian England 1830-1865* ed. G.M.Young, London 1934

W. Roberts: *Description & Full List Of Sale Of Elhanan Bicknell's Paintings In 1861*, "English Money Was Spent Upon English Art"; *Memorials Of Christie's, A Record Of Art Sales 1766 to 1896*, Vol I. London: George Bell And Sons, 1897, pp. 198-207.

Katherine Sim *David Roberts R.A., 1796–1864: a biography* (1984)

G. F. Waagen, Treasures of art in Great Britain, *Art Journal*, 2 (1854), 349–54 .

Selby Whittingham, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1988
[Bicknell, Elhanan - Dictionary of National Biography](#)

Related documents and further reading on our web site:

[Bicknell, Elhanan - Turner Collector](#) – This paper, 20th November 2019

[Bicknell, Elhanan - Turner Collector - slides for 20th Nov 2019](#)

Research - Marcus Bicknell, *Elhanan Bicknell's Mansion at Herne Hill*
[Bicknell, Elhanan - at Herne Hill](#) in pdf

[Bicknell, Elhanan - Will](#)

[Research - Elhanan Bicknell's art collection](#) Blog item from Marcus, September 2019

[Research - Lucinda Sarah Bicknell in the National Portrait Gallery - it's Sabrina Bicknell](#)

[Research - Clarence bought a picture from his father's collection](#)

Marcus Bicknell on the sketch of Turner by d'Orsay:
<https://www.clarencebicknell.com/en/news-views/68-clarence-dorsay-1845>

Other research papers, many on Elhanan Bicknell's 13th child Clarence, at
<https://www.clarencebicknell.com/downloads>



Appendix 1: Elhanan Bicknell - a timeline

- 1788 Elhanan born
- 1789 E's father William disposed of the serge business and started running a school in Enfield, London.
- 1807 E was a junior teacher in the school when his elder brother Isaac took it over. This encouraged Elhanan to abandon teaching and go to a friend at Cause, near Shrewsbury, to learn farming.
- 1808 E's uncle, John Walton Langton, offered him a partnership with his son, John Bicknell Langton, in an established business as oil merchants at Newington Butts.
- 1810 E married his partner's sister, Hannah Wootton Langton
- 1815 Hannah died
- 1817 E married Mary Jones, daughter of the Assistant Secretary to the India Board, and sometime Private Secretary to Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister
- 1819 E moved to Herne Hill
- 1820 Fire in E's *manufactory* for which he was not insured.⁶²
- 1822 E's uncle and father-in-law John Walter Langton died
- 1827 Mary Jones died of heart failure
- 1828 E bought his first picture Dec. 13, 1828, a marine view painted in oil by C.M.Powell (source: Sidney Bicknell).
- 1829 E married a third wife, Lucinda Sarah Browne, daughter of William Loder Browne, a merchant, and sister of Phiz.
- 1829 "Two wings were added to his house in which he at that time kept a footman and three maids besides a coachman and a gardener, his annual expenditures being about £2500" (source: Sidney Bicknell)
- 1835 Repeal of the navigation laws and the abolition of protection; the beginning of the end for the whaling business which had made E's fortune.
- 1835 The earliest record of Elhanan's interest in Turner⁶³
- 1836 Ruskin defended Turner in his unpublished *Reply to Blackwoods*
- 1838 Bicknell started his serious collection⁶⁴ and bought his first works by Turner⁶⁵
- 1841 E bought his first oil painting by Turner⁶⁶ and started commissioning from him. E's son Henry married David Roberts's only child Christine.
- 1842 E bought a companion piece by Turner⁶⁷
- 1843 Publication of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* Vol I. Ruskin and Turner dined together at Herne Hill, and were there again on 13 March 1844.
- 1844 E bought 8 paintings by Turner, the jewels in the crown.⁶⁸

⁶² "A fire was reported at the boiling-house of Messes Langton and Bicknell opposite Newington Church, Surrey. Part of the premises was destroyed, causing damage estimated at £2000". (Hampshire Telegraph Chronicle, 14/8/1820).

⁶³ diary of E.W. Cooke for 16 January 1835: 'Bicknell called and brought an extraordinary dog. He came to see the Turner pictures . . '

⁶⁴ "It was in the late thirties that Elhanan began devoting a substantial part of his wealth to the serious collection of works of art, and his little Roberts oil painting, *The Chapel of Ferdinand and Isabella at Granada* (82, now Wallace Collection), which Roberts gave him in 1838, possibly as a fiftieth birthday present, could be looked on as the foundation stone of the collection". (P Bicknell H Guiterman 1987)

⁶⁵ Bicknell bought his first works by Turner at Christie's, two watercolours of Himalayan mountains which were designs for White's *Views in India*, published in 1836.

⁶⁶ [*Venice: the*] *Giudecca, la Donna della Salute and San Giorgio*,

⁶⁷ *Campo Santo, Venice*

⁶⁸ E bought the great *Palestrina – Composition*, now in the Tate Gallery, which seems to have been in Turner's studio since it was exhibited at the Academy in 1830, and for which E paid the large sum of £1,050. He is also reputed to have offered £1,600 for *Sun rising through Vapour*. E bought five other paintings from Turner's studio -

- 1845 Turner wrote to Elhanan offering 'a whale or two on the canvas'. Hogarth bought at Christie's one of Turner's whaling pictures, seemingly for E. E argued with Turner about *Whalers*
- 1846 Painting by Bagniet shows Elhanan with three volumes lettered Priestly, Lardner and Channing, all three writers on Unitarianism.
- 1850 Lucinda died of enteric fever.
- 1851 E married Louisa Holland, his fourth wife.
- 1851 E built another wing and a very large conservatory connected to it.
- 1851 E bought two more Turners but sold them a few years later⁶⁹
- 1853 Painting of Elhanan as Master of the Vintners by T Philips
- 1854 Herne Hill redecorated. E buys Stanfield's '*Pic du Midi d'Ossau*' in the *Pyrenees, with Brigands* and it was exhibited at the Royal Academy.
- 1856 A billiard room was also joined to the conservatory.
- 1857 Severe attack of fever at Bologna when making a tour in Italy, and it left permanent ill effects (source, Sidney Bicknell).
- 1858 E's cousin and former ⁷⁰ business partner John Bicknell Langton died.
- 1861 Elhanan died, 27th November
- 1863 Elhanan Bicknell's collection sold at Christie's starting 25 April
- 1880 Henry Sanford Bicknell died
- 1881 Henry Sanford Bicknell's collection sold at Christie's



Calder Bridge (Ho, B.J.106) *Ivy Bridge Mill*, (104, B.J.122), *Port Ruysdael* (120, B.J.237), *Wreckers - Coast of Northumberland* (B.J.357) and *Ehrenbreitstein* (B.J.361). Also in 1844 E bought two more paintings from Turner - *Helvoetsluys* (102, B.J.345) and *Antwerp* (97, B.J. 350).

⁶⁹ E bought two more Turners in Christie's sale of 13 and 14 June 1851, namely *Grand Junction Canal at Southall Mill* (B.J. 101) and *Saltash with the Water Ferry* (B.J. 121), but sold both of them a few years later, so neither was in the 1863 sale.

⁷⁰ It is not known what date John Bicknell Langton had left Bicknell & Langton.

Appendix 2: Christine Roberts' journal

Christine Roberts, the only daughter of David Roberts, married Elhanan's son Henry Sanford Bicknell. The Roberts and the Bicknells became firm family friends, dined together and travelled together. Christine inherited 1,004 of David Roberts' works on his death, many of which feature in the sale of art when Henry died. The journal which Christine kept for about ten years after her wedding is full of notes on her visits to Herne Hill. The following extracts to do with Herne Hill record the names of many of Elhanan's guests, and refer frequently to Turner:

1844

- 15 February. Dined at Mrs Conduitts with Mr & Mrs B, Elhanan & Mary. [Elhanan's son and his wife], my Father, Stanfield, Mr & Mrs Barry, Turner & Tom Dermer.⁷¹ Pleasant party altogether. Turner was particularly talkative to me about Devonshire & an unfortunate trip he made to the Channel Islands.
- 18 February. Went with my Father, Henry & Mr Bicknell to Mr Griffiths⁷² at Norwood to see some of Turner's old pictures. They are exquisite, all full of beauties.
- 20 August. Henry dined at Fitzroy St. [Roberts' home] with Mr B, Brackenbury, F. Grant, G. Jones, Baring, Arden & Moon.⁷³ Ed Landseer had been thrown from his horse and cd. not join them.
- 22 August. Walked with Hy to H.H. to dinner. My Father, Moon, Stanfield, Brackenbury. Pleasant little party. Nice walk home.

1845

- 6 February. Mr & Mrs B called for me & took me to Mr Conduitts. Hy came with my Father . . . Turner was in vy good humour & returned thanks for the toast 'the single married & the married happy' with a great many ah-ah-ahs'. [It was the Conduitts' 50th wedding party]
- 25 February. Went to dinner at H.H. Very pleasant party . . . Turner, Leslie, The Stanfields, C. Landseer, Mulready. John Pye,⁷⁴ Mr Jones who is a very nice person and Mr Ruskin who improved very much on acquaintance. It is a pity his manners are so awkward. Turner was not in spirits.
- 24 June. Pleasant party [at Herne Hill]. My Father, Turner, Etty, Webster, Denning - grand discussion on duelling. My Father the only one that defended it' . . . Turner going to Venice.⁷⁵

1846

- 6 April. [at Roberts' studio] Mr B was so pleased with the smallest, a street in Cairo (75), that he bought it . . . [this refers to the preview for the Academy which artists held in their own studios. Christine went on with the Bicknells and Elhanan's partner Langton from Roberts to Stanfield and Landseer]

1847

- Christine recorded that at one of her father's parties with Mr Bicknell present she 'was surprized to hear that Turner had proposed [her] health in one of his funny speeches'.

1848

- 26 May. My Father went to Ramsgate to spend a few days with Mr & Mrs B.

⁷¹ Conduitts, relations of Mary Dermer, by whom she was connected with Sir Isaac Newton; Stanfield, see note 15; Sir Charles Barry, 1795-1860, R.A. F.R.S., Vice Pres. R.I.B.A., architect; Tom Dermer, brother of Elhanan junior's wife Mary.

⁷² Sic. Normally spelt Griffith

⁷³ Probably Sir John Brackenbury, d. 1847, former consul at Cadiz; Francis Grant, 1803-1878, portrait painter; George Jones, R.A., 1786-1866 (60), Librarian, Keeper and Vice Pres. R.A.; probably Sir Francis Thornhill Baring, 1798-1866, Baron Northbrook (1865), statesman; Joseph Arden of Rickmansworth, friend and patron of Roberts; Francis Graham Moon, 1796-1871, publisher of Robert's Holy Land etc., Lord Mayor of London.

⁷⁴ Charles Landseer, R.A., 1799-1879 (5), elder brother of Edwin; William Mulready, R.A., 1786-1863 (drawing 91); John Pye, 1782-1874, the favourite engraver of J.M.W. Turner' (D.N.B.)

⁷⁵ There is no record of Turner visiting Venice in or after 1845.

Appendix 3: Bicknell references in Ruskin's diary

The Diaries of John Ruskin, ed. Joan Evans

I, p 251 28 Nov 1843

Met Bicknell. Went to see his Flamborough⁷⁶; fear it is spoiled by cleaning. Has got his vignettes back – more than ever delighted with them.

p.254 15 Dec 1843

Called on Mrs Bicknell; saw the Calder Bridge⁷⁷; spoiled, I fear; ...

16 Dec 1843

At dinner at Bicknells. Turner, Stanfield, Harding and Roberts, in a line down the table, and Bayley⁷⁸ beside me. Yet I could not at all I expected, for they all talked together and Turner and Stanfield very low.

p.262 Feb 1st 1844

Yesterday late at Sir T. Inglis⁷⁹, ... Met Bicknell who very kind. Nasty crowded [?] party at Inglis's...

p.264 8 Feb 1844

Mrs. Bicknell also told me that I might have their Turner home to copy – they are most liberal people.

p.269 13 March 1844

Dined at Bicknells, with Turner, Landseer, Stanfield, Roberts, Uwins, Maclise, Collins and Brockedon. Too many to get much out of. I never knew on whom to fix.

p.270 25 March 1844

... Waiting for answer from Bicknell about Turner.

27 March 1844.

Mr Bicknell has bought it [Palestrina], and five others, which put me quite beside myself with joy yesterday, ...

II p.741 30 March 1873

Mr and Mrs Bicknell dine with me.

Notes by Selby Whitiingham

⁷⁶ Flamborough A lost work? Or Bamborough? Scarborough? 1837 (Sotheby 2007)

⁷⁷ Calder Bridge. How far did Ruskin exaggerate the deterioration of Turners? Still a nice picture.

⁷⁸ Bayley. Presumably the sculptor E H Bailly RA (Nelson; competitor for memorials to Turner ...)

⁷⁹ Sir T Inglis - perhaps Sir Robert, 2nd Bt, MP for Oxford University. In 1839 he supported the RA and in 1850 was elected Antiquary at the RA.

Appendix 4: Bicknell, Elhanan (1788–1861), art patron and businessman in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Bicknell, Elhanan (1788–1861), art patron and businessman, was born on 21 December 1788, at 8 Blackman Street, Southwark, London, the second son of William Bicknell (1749–1825) and his wife, Elizabeth, née Randall (1756–1821), of Sevenoaks, Kent. William was a friend of John Wesley and the Unitarian minister Elhanan Winchester, after whom he named his son. In 1789 William sold the serge manufacturing business which his grandfather had established at Taunton and Newington, and set up a school at Ponders End, moving it to Tooting Common in 1804; there Elhanan was educated, with Thomas Wilde, afterwards Lord Chancellor Truro. In 1808 he was sent to Caus, near Shrewsbury, to learn farming, but at the end of a year he abandoned that project; he returned to London and joined his uncle's firm at Newington Butts. John Walter Langton (1746–1822) had invented a process of using spermaceti, derived from whale oil, for the manufacture of candles; the company established to exploit his discovery—which became Langton and Bicknell—thived. About 1835 Bicknell foresaw how the repeal of the navigation laws, then in debate, would injure his trade, yet he disinterestedly supported the abolition of all protection.

From about 1838 Bicknell was a close friend of the painter David Roberts, and started to make a collection of modern British art. In 1845–6, probably inspired by Bicknell's business, J. M. W. Turner painted four whaling pictures. Paintings and sculptures, such as Edward Hodges Baily's *Eve*, adorned the principal rooms of Bicknell's house, which were always hospitably open to artists and art connoisseurs; visitors included John Ruskin, who from 1823 to 1842 lived opposite Carlton House, Herne Hill, to which Bicknell had moved about 1819. Apart from Thomas Gainsborough and Richard Wilson, the artists represented in his collection were those active in London about 1840, such as David Roberts, Clarkson Stanfield, William Collins, Augustus Callcott, William Hilton, Edwin Landseer, Charles Eastlake, and Turner, by whom Bicknell had choice works ranging from two small landscapes first exhibited in 1810–12 to some of his best paintings of Venice and watercolours of Switzerland of the early 1840s. Bicknell wanted to leave his collection to the nation, but for family reasons his pictures were sold after his death at Christies auction rooms in April 1863, realizing over £75,000.

In politics and in theology Bicknell was an enthusiastic and progressive liberal. He was a principal contributor to the building of the Unitarian chapel at Brixton, and gave £1000 to the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. He married four times: first, on 16 October 1810, to his first cousin and sister of his partner, Hannah Wootton Langton (1787/8–1815), with whom he had a son, Elhanan (1813–1860). He married second, on 13 February 1817, Mary Jones (d. 1827); their son, Henry Sanford Bicknell (1818–1880), married David Roberts's daughter and had his own art collection. His third marriage, to Lucinda Sarah (1801–1850), sister of the illustrator Hablot K. Browne, took place on 5 May 1829, and among their children were Herman Bicknell (1830–1875), the orientalist, Algernon Sidney Bicknell (1832–1911), author, and Clarence Bicknell (1842–1918), botanist. Finally, on 14 August 1851, Elhanan married Louisa Holland (1803/4–1884), widow of Henry Jones. Bicknell's health failed in 1861, and in the summer of that year he retired from business. He died at Carlton House on 27 November 1861, and was buried at Norwood cemetery on 3 December.

Selby Whittingham

Sources

P. Bicknell and H. Guiterman, 'The Turner collector: Elhanan Bicknell', *Turner Studies*, 7/1 (1987), 34–44 · A. S. Bicknell, *Five pedigrees* (1912) · J. J. Howard and F. A. Crisp, eds., *Visitation of England and Wales*, 21 vols. (privately printed, London, 1893–1921), vol. 17, pp. 33–46; vol. 21, p. 77 · D. S. Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class: money and the making of cultural identity* (1996), 393–5 · E. Browne, *Phiz and Dickens as they appeared to Edgar Browne* (1913), chap. 4 · G. F. Waagen, *Treasures of art in Great Britain*, 2 (1854), 349–54 · 'The collection of Elkanah [sic] Bicknell, esq., at Herne Hill', *Art Journal*, 19 (1857), 8–10 · *The Athenaeum* (7 Dec 1861), 769 · *Christian Reformer, or, Unitarian Magazine and Review*, new ser., 18 (1862), 55–9 · P. Bicknell, 'Turner's *The whale ship*: a missing link?', *Turner Studies*, 5/2 (1985), 20–23 · K. Sim, *David Roberts R.A., 1796–1864: a biography* (1984) · 'Clarence Bicknell', *On Beacon Hill*, 2 (1996–7), 1–4 [an occasional newsletter about the Bicknell family] · *The Times* (30 Nov 1861), 1a · cemetery records, West Norwood cemetery, London

Archives

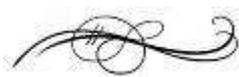
NL Scot. · NRA, priv. coll., Bicknell sales of 1863, Christies catalogues annotated and interleaved [microfilm copy at FM Cam.] | NL Scot., Roberts MSS

Likenesses

S. Drummond, oils, 1789, priv. coll. · S. Drummond, oils, c.1796, priv. coll. · T. Phillips, oils, c.1830, Vintners Hall, London · T. Phillips, oils, in or before 1842 · C. Baugniet, lithograph, 1864, priv. coll. · S. Drummond, group portrait, oils, priv. coll.

Wealth at death

£400,000 resworn probate, Nov 1866, CGPLA Eng. & Wales (1861)



End. Version of 1 December 2019

Filename elhanan_bicknell_turner_collector_mb_20nov2019.doc

marcus@bicknell.com

www.clarencebicknell.com