

Elhanan Bicknell's mansion at Herne Hill (1818-1905)

A meeting place for the London art set and Clarence Bicknell's birthplace

By Marcus Bicknell, great great grandson of Elhanan

“Herne Hill” takes on a mystical aura in the story of Clarence Bicknell whose centenary was celebrated in 2018. But Clarence was but the 13th of Elhanan's children; the house, its owner and the art collection are what really distinguish this place. This article is about what remains of the house and of its memories.

Clarence's birthplace

In her 2018 biography of Clarence Bicknell, *MARVELS*, Valerie Lester argues that his home (along with his mother Lucinda) was an influence on his life-long love of botany ...

The mansion in which he was born had the air of a prosperous Late Regency matron: imposing, bosomy, pale and stucco-fronted. 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.

He grew up surrounded by a beautiful garden, its long view reaching from the verandah to the distant Norwood hills. Even though London was only five miles away, no houses interrupted a vista that incorporated woods and meadows. Mature specimens of oak, ash, elm and a magnificent cedar of Lebanon cast their shade across closely clipped lawns. Young trees of exotic species and large shrubs were planted at intervals close to the sinuous paths that meandered around the large property and down the hill. As a budding botanist, Clarence could not have wished for a more entrancing environment. He was soon collecting wildflowers and making drawings of them, and he was devoted to drawing and painting from his earliest youth.



The Residence of the late E. Bicknell Esq., Herne Hill, Dulwich, May 1859

written on the back in the hand of by Sidney Bicknell, one of Elhanan's sons and the family historian. 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.



Above. *The Garden of Herne Hill* (above), photo by Sidney Bicknell. May 1859, looking south towards Dulwich.

Below left: This watercolour portrait by Stephen Poyntz Denning, depicting six of Clarence's siblings in 1841, left to right, Algernon Sidney, Percy, Herman, Ada, Matilda and Edgar. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Clarence was not born till a year after so he is not in the portrait.

Below right: Clarence with his pet donkey



Clarence spent time with his cousin Edgar Browne, Phiz's son, born like him in 1842, who lived in nearby Thornton Heath. Each boy had a pet donkey, and Edgar and his siblings even had a goat that pulled the younger Brownes around in a cart. Browne described his uncle Elhanan as a large, handsome, red-faced man, and his Bicknell cousins as all above average in personal appearance and intelligence. He adds an interesting note about the way they talked. '[Elhanan had] a rather thick utterance, which in his children became converted into an extreme difficulty with the letter 'r'.

Elhanan's Fortune and his Art Collection

Clarence's father, Elhanan Bicknell, made his fortune trading the whale oil used for street lighting. 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 1838, having occupied his residence at Herne Hill, Surrey, since 1819, Bicknell commenced there his magnificent collection of pictures, all of the modern British school. In the course of twelve years, 1838-50, he became the possessor of masterpieces of Gainsborough, Turner, Roberts, Landseer, Stanfield, Webster, Collins, Etty, Callcott, &c. (WAAGEN, *Treasures of Art*, ii. 359; *Art Journal*, 1862, p. 45); and, 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. Bicknell had bought many of Turner's best works before Mr. Ruskin's advocacy had made their beauties known.

Turner frequently dined at Elhanan Bicknell's Herne Hill house. He objected to having his portrait taken. At one such dinner around Christmas 1845, "Count D'Orsay and Sir Edwin Landseer, devised a little plot to defeat the result of this antipathy. Whilst 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, when necessary, Landseer, sketching 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, print-seller in the Haymarket, for twenty guineas". Sixteen copies of this print were included in the Bicknell sale at Christie's in 1863 after Bicknell's death.¹ One of them, image right, is the property of Marcus Bicknell.



¹ As recounted by Brian Green in his *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>

Herne Hill – the details of the mansion

Sidney Bicknell, one of Elhanan's 13 children, wrote in his memoirs² in 1907 about Herne Hill

He [Elhanan] moved into a house he had built on the top of Herne Hill in 1819, and on that spot he lived till his death.

Later that year [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. 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.

When his next door neighbour, 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.

One more alteration in his domain took place when his former partner, Mr Langton, died on Aug. 4, 1858, and the whole of his meadows, and a part of his gardens, were added thereto, this bringing the total area occupied by him up to twelve and a half acres. By this time he had become owner of nearly all the best houses on Herne Hill, and his ownership extended on both sides of the road from Red Post Hill to Herne Hill church, scarcely with exception.

On June 30, 1861, after about 50 years in business, he retired from the firm of Langton & Bicknell at Newington Butts, but he was then a partial invalid from chest disease, and usually consulted Dr Williams, physician at the Brompton Consumption Hospital, once a week at his London residence, Still he remained sufficiently well to dine as usual on November the 19th, though he rained in bed on the 24th, and died in the afternoon of the 27th. Only about a couple of hours before, he had signed an important codicil to his will, and conversed in full possession of his faculties, till he expressed a desire to sleep a little, and never woke again.

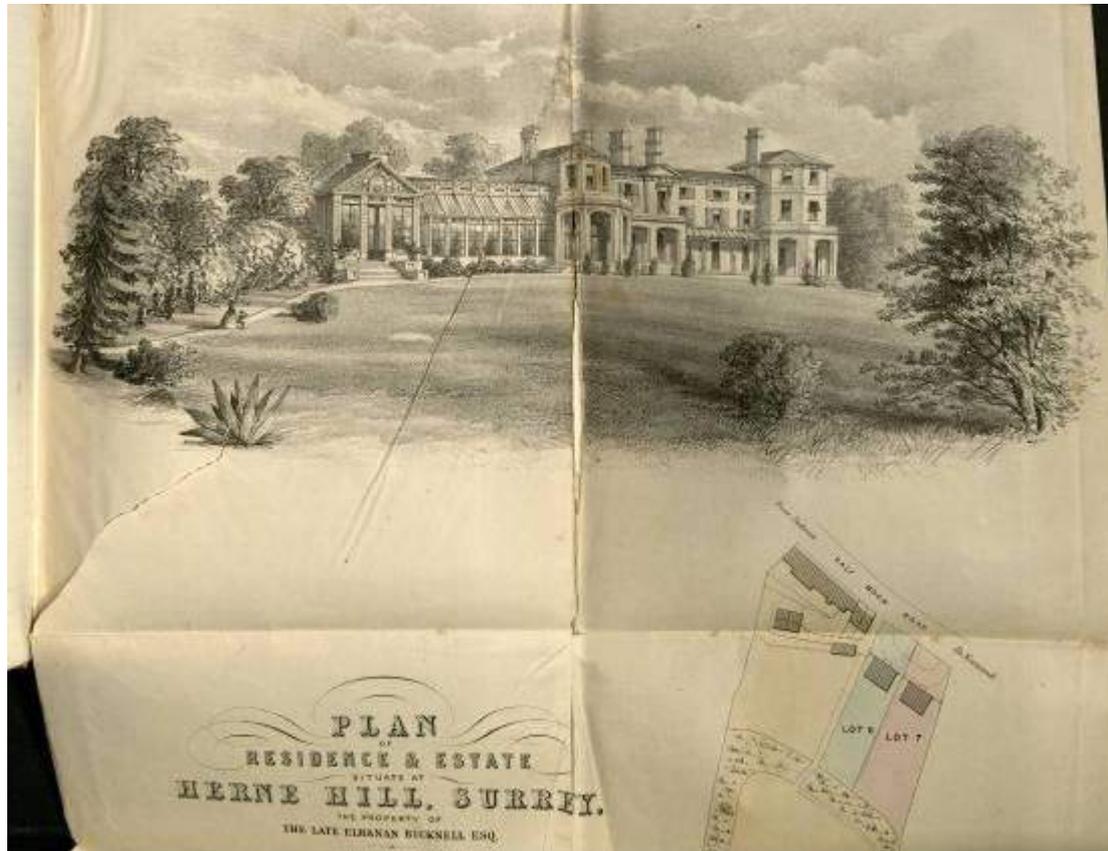
His will disposed of £350,000 [immediately] and ultimately his estate realized an amount close on half a million. His house, pictures, and grounds, with the two smaller residence adjoining sold by auction, on April 15, 1863 for £14,250, this amount including £500 for the kitchen garden and forcing houses in Poplar Walk, leading from Herne Hill to Cold Harbour Lane. The works of art Messrs. Christie, Manson, & Woods disposed of on April 25 and six following days, for £75,055.8s. and the furniture remaining, after Mrs Bicknell had taken a very considerable selection of the best, brought £4133.7.4, making a grand total for the Herne Hill estate of £93,438.15.4, which did not include the other houses belonging to him close by, or the 40 acres and gardener's cottage at Knight's Hill.

The next owner, a Mr Nicholson, pulled down the centre of the house built in 1818-9, and rebuilt it in the worst taste, christening it Carlton House, and the whole building was destroyed in 1905, and the site covered with rows of streets and cottages. Till 1850, and even later, none of the environs of London surpassed the district of Dulwich in beauty and quietude. From the

² From Sidney Bicknell's EXCERPTA BICONYLLEA. A.S. Bicknell. Vol. II. Barcombe House, 1907 in the East Sussex Record Office at The Keep

verandah at Herne Hill, as far as the Norwood range of hills bounding the horizon, dense woods and meadow foreground filled the view, no houses were visible, and it was constantly a matter of surprise to the artist visitors, that London should be only 5 miles instead of 100 distant.

It is indeed sad that at the present day no vestige of all this loveliness remains.



This printed presentation of Elhanan's residence at Herne Hill was made to attract buyers at the auction of 15th April 1863, a year and a half after Elhanan's death on 27th November 1861. One imagines Sidney had a hand in the preparation of this brochure and the auction. Sidney has pasted this copy of it into the back of his hand-written memoir *Excerpta Biconyllea*.³

³ From Sidney Bicknell's EXCERPTA BICONYLLEA. A.S. Bicknell. Vol. II. Barcombe House, 1907 in the East Sussex Record Office at The Keep

The Bicknell Residence at Herne Hill today

That was Sidney writing in 1907. Elhanan's mansion on Herne Hill has been gone for over a century, so, indeed, *no vestige of all this loveliness remains*. The site is now rows of semi-detached houses in streets which did not exist till the early 1920s.

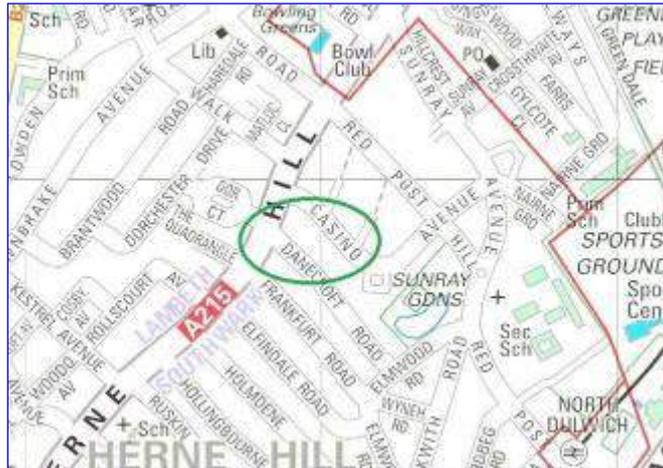
The visitor to the site can easily be misguided, as I was on my first visit twenty years ago. A search for Bicknell, Herne Hill, provides a Google map of Bicknell Road between Loughborough Junction and Ruskin Park in East Brixton, about 600 metres to the north of the site of the mansion. Bicknell Road is nestled into the contour of Ruskin Park – John Ruskin, Elhanan's great friend and neighbour – so one assumes this must be the site of Elhanan's 19th century mansion. But Bicknell Road only exists since 1937 when approval was given for Anstey Road to be renamed "Bicknell Road" according to locals historian Patricia Jenkyns ⁴. To add to the confusion, there is an Anstey Road in Peckham, a mile to the east.



No. Elhanan's mansion was about 600 metres south of Bicknell Road. Please read on.

⁴ The Bicknells of Herne Hill – Patricia Jenkyns, available at www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/bicknells_of_herne_hill_jenkyns_1986.pdf

Elhanan’s mansion was right on Herne Hill, both on the top of the physical hill and near the top (north east end) of the road⁵ today still called “Herne Hill” (A-Z map right).



The mansion was between Casino Avenue and Danecroft Road at their north end.

When I purchased the 1875 and 1894 high definition maps of Herne Hill from the National Library of Scotland in late 2018, I was able to see for the first time exactly where the mansion lay. Not only did the descriptions of its whereabouts tally but also the ground plan of the house on the maps is the same as the available photos of the house.

The 1875 map, below, shows Elhanan Bicknell’s residence south and a bit west of Casino Lodge opposite one of the two distinctive crescent-shaped drives on the north side of Herne Hill. Elhanan had died in 1861 so this 1875 map shows all his enlargements; the house in this map shows its biggest extent towards the south west.

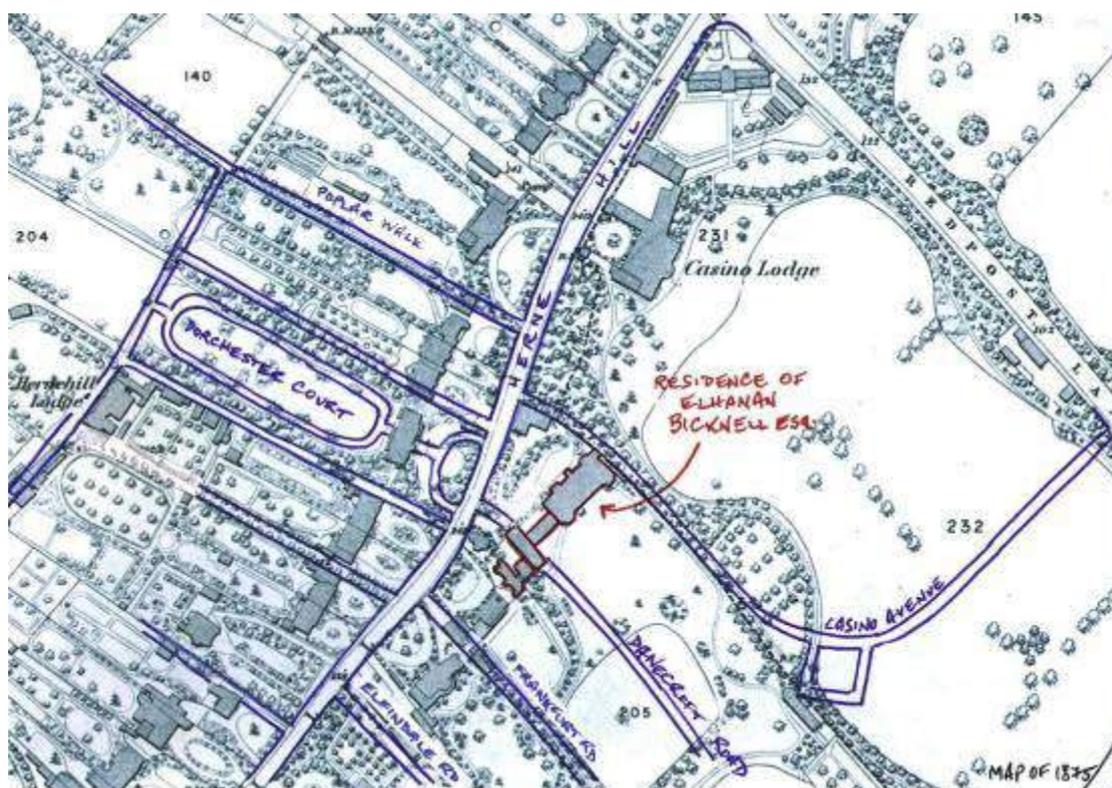


Map of 1875 showing the Bicknell residence

⁵ Herne Hill was called Denmark Hill in the first half of the 19th century)

It was quite a task to superimpose today's map on the 1875 map. I used both Google maps and the A to Z, cross-checking with two other historic maps between then and now. I correlated the modern streets over quite a wide area to be certain of the overall scale of each map.

Note that Sidney Bicknell tells us (full text above) that after Elhanan died "The next owner⁶, a Mr Nicholson, pulled down the centre of the house built in 1818-9, and rebuilt it in the worst taste, christening it Carlton House, and the whole building was destroyed in 1905, and the site covered with rows of streets and cottages.." Indeed the terrace houses in Casino Avenue and Danecroft Road are dated 1907, which tallies with Sidney's account.



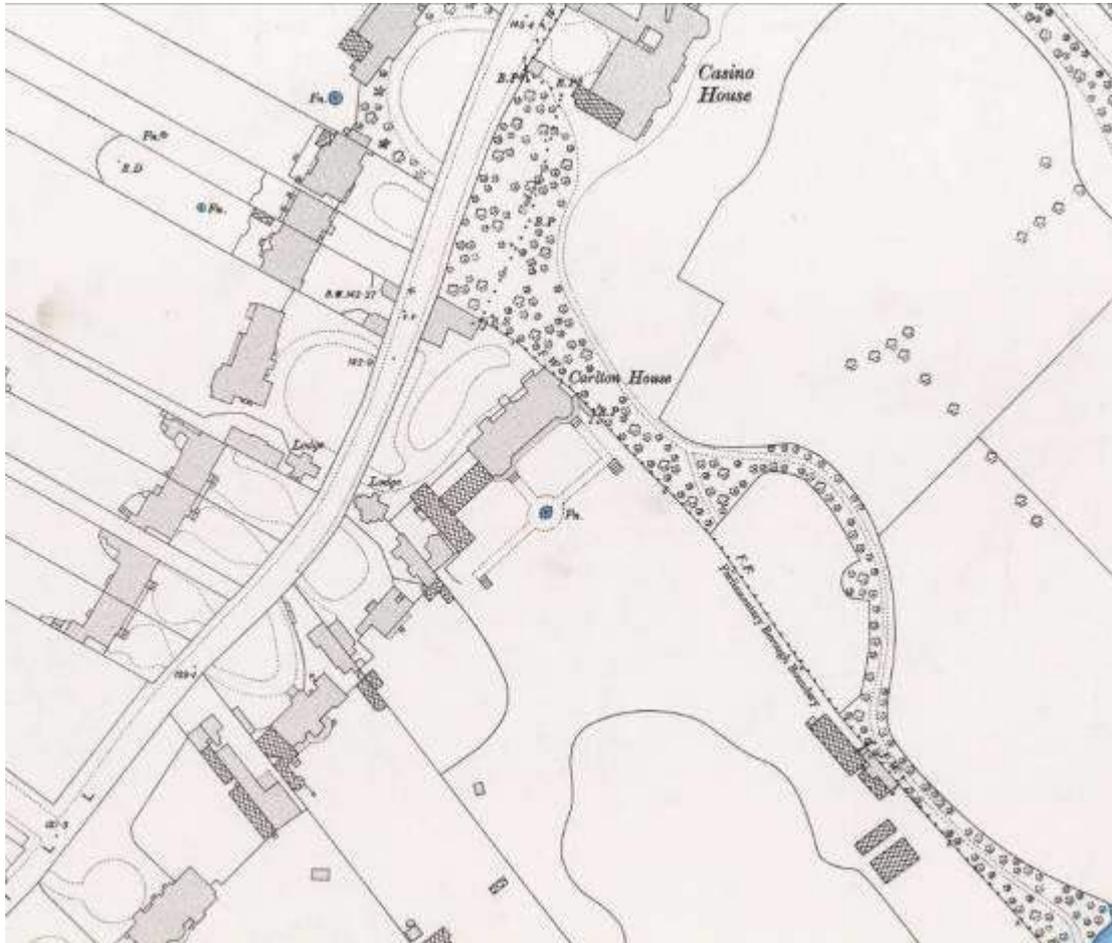
Map of 1875 showing the Bicknell residence, un-named, with modern roads superimposed in blue by Marcus Bicknell.

It is extraordinary that Elhanan's house was so long that it extended from the present Casino Avenue to well the other side of Danecroft Road (map above). As far as I could see from the roads there is nothing to see of the house or garden in the space between the two roads, but I do invite residents there to let me know (marcus@bicknell.com) if there is anything to see from the private gardens.

The crescent-shaped drive on the north side of Herne Hill, opposite Elhanan's house, is there today, as is the shape of Dorchester Court.

⁶ The house was sold at auction in 1863 so we can assume that the house was named Carlton House shortly after.

How do we know that this house is indeed Elhanan's? Armed with the knowledge (from Sidney's memoir, above) that the house was renamed Carlton House shortly after 1863, I looked at the detail of the map of 1894. Here the house is marked Carlton House (map below). We should assume that the map-makers of 1875 did not have the new name of the house to hand, but did by 1894.



Map of 1894 showing the Bicknell residence, renamed Carlton House.

Many references to Elhanan Bicknell's house in Herne Hill use the name Carlton House. However we now have two pieces of evidence that the house was never called this in Elhanan's lifetime, firstly the map of 1875 (where many other mansions are named, like Casino House, Hernehill Lodge, The Vicarage, The Cedars and Springfield) and secondly Sidney's authoritative info about the owner after 1863 (above).

Today the site of Bicknell's residence is taken, (partly, i.e. between Casino and Danecroft), by the Herne Hill Hand Car Wash... industry certainly, but not of the scale and profitability of the whale oil business which made Elhanan his fortune.





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.

Bicknell's neighbour John Ruskin

John Ruskin (1819-1900) was famously a neighbour of Bicknell in the same street, Herne Hill, and spent time as a guest in Elhanan's house. Ruskin was the leading English art critic of the Victorian era, as well as an art patron, draughtsman, watercolourist, a prominent social thinker and philanthropist.

Published comments by Ruskin and other art experts made Bicknell's collection well known and may have contributed the high prices it fetched when broken up after his death. 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." (The Times, 7th April 2006). Bicknell bought many of Turner's finest works before Ruskin's advocacy brought the artist to public prominence. In 1841 he paid Turner £250 for a painting of gondolas in Venice. That painting, Guidecca, La Donna Della Salute and San Giorgio (1840), changed hands in 2006 for US\$35.8 million, setting a new record for a British work of art sold at auction.

Nothing remains of any of the three Ruskin houses. 163 Denmark Hill is now partly covered by a council estate and Nos 28 & 30 Herne Hill have been rebuilt with modest houses.

No.28 Herne Hill in December 2018



Acknowledgements and sources

The writing of this paper was triggered by the discovery of the memoir of Sidney Algernon Bicknell⁷ in the East Sussex records office at The Keep near Brighton during the 5 years of research by half a dozen volunteers 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.

I am grateful to ...

- Valerie Lester for letting us quote from her book;
- 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;
- to Brian Green of the Dulwich Society for his support, intelligence and his paper of 2014 in annex;
- the late Patricia May Jenkyns for her paper of 1986 (in annex);
- Laurence Marsh of The Herne Hill Society (www.hernehillsociety.org.uk);
- Brian Green of The Dulwich Society (www.dulwichsociety.com);
- Martyn Webster, a Sussex family historian, who alerted us to the Sidney Bicknell collection in The Keep;
- Philip Bye of The Keep, East Sussex Record Office (www.thekeep.info)
- National Library of Scotland for the 19th century maps (www.nls.uk)
- The Clarence Bicknell Association and their researchers under the guidance of Valerie Lester (www.clarencebicknell.com)



⁷ Sidney was Elhanan's 8th child. See family tree in *MARVELS The Life of Clarence Bicknell* by Valerie Lester.

Annex 1 - References to Herne Hill in Valerie Lester's 2018 biography of Clarence Bicknell

Page 4

He grew up surrounded by a beautiful garden, its long view reaching from the verandah to the distant Norwood hills. Even though London was only five miles away, no houses interrupted a vista that incorporated woods and meadows. Mature specimens of oak, ash, elm and a magnificent cedar of Lebanon cast their shade across closely clipped lawns. Young trees of exotic species and large shrubs were planted at intervals close to the sinuous paths that meandered around the large property and down the hill. As a budding botanist, Clarence could not have wished for a more entrancing environment. He was soon collecting wildflowers and making drawings of them, and he was devoted to drawing and painting from his earliest youth.

The mansion in which he was born 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.

Elhanan had a sharp eye for contemporary British artists but no time whatsoever for Old Masters. 'On returning from an extensive tour in Italy, undertaken for the purpose of seeing works of art, I remember hearing him say he had not seen a picture he would give a damn for', recounts Clarence's cousin and direct contemporary, Edgar Browne, Phiz's son. Elhanan made a point of getting to know both the person and the work of modern British painters such as Turner, Landseer, Stanfield, Etty, Collins, Denning and Callcott, and fashionable sculptors such as Baily. A special friend and contemporary was the artist David Roberts, a prominent orientalist, whose daughter Christine married Henry Sanford Bicknell, Elhanan's son by his second wife.

Elhanan avoided dealers like the plague, buying directly from the artists themselves, befriending them, commissioning them, and entertaining them at Herne Hill, some of them long before they became famous. He had a special eye for Turner, and at a time when that artist was not yet in fashion, before Ruskin singled him out for fame, Elhanan bought a number of his paintings that had been left unsold after being exhibited at the Royal Academy. His association with and admiration for Turner endured for many years.

Cont., page 5...

The old drawing room in the centre of the house, whose walls were lined with mahogany to keep out damp and then covered with white and gold rococo panelling, was used to display watercolours. Instead of framing the paintings, he set them into panels in the walls and, according to Edgar Browne 'if I remember correctly' even went so far as to decorate the door panels with Turner's Rivers of France. In the new drawing room, he hung several of Turner's masterpieces including Giudecca, La Donna della Salute and San Giorgio.

Later, on page 12...

In the 1851 census, five people are listed as living at the Herne Hill mansion: Elhanan, shipowner and merchant; Ada, who is given no role; and Matilda, little Lucinda and Clarence who are referred to as 'scholars at home.' It is surprising that no live-in servants are mentioned.

Approaching Elhanan's death (27 November 1861), page 15...

David Roberts visited his old friend regularly, enjoying dinners at Herne Hill with Elhanan, especially if 'that lout Sid' was absent. Roberts continued to visit up until the evening of 22 November 1861. Then he writes to his daughter: 'I passed The Evening with poor dear Mr Bicknell . . . But I can see he is breaking fast. The swelling in his legs increasing. See him as often as you can.'²¹

Later, on page 18...

Two years later, on 25, 29 and 30 April and 1 May 1863, the auction of Elhanan Bicknell's collection took place at Christie, Manson and Wood's. It turned out to be the art sensation of the season. Potential bidders flocked to preview the works while they were still in the gallery Bicknell had constructed in his Herne Hill mansion. Outside the house carriage after carriage lined up in the road, the occupants waiting their turn for a chance to take a look at one of the largest collections of modern British art ever accumulated.

Elhanan Bicknell would not have approved of this scene. His great hope had been that his art collection would go to the nation after his death, and some of his heirs agreed. However, the majority favoured selling the collection, along with his land holdings. As the editor of *The Art Journal* of London commented: 'It is certainly much to be regretted that a collection of pictures got together with so much judgment and at a large expenditure of money should be dispersed. What a noble addition would it have made . . . if bequested to the nation! This, however, could not be expected with justice to Mr. Bicknell's family.'

Once the property auction had taken place, the art collection was crated up and transported to Christie's auction house in King Street. As soon as the objects were ready for display, Christie's opened their doors for three days of private viewing, days in which their rooms were thronged. The first day's sale of oil paintings and sculptures broke all records for British art by realizing the unheard-of sum of £58,600, or roughly £127,000,000 in 2017. Most of the buyers were dealers, principally Agnew's, but in the case of three paintings, including Turner's *Palestrina* (1828), the buyer was Elhanan's own son, Henry Sanford Bicknell.

At the Exposition Universelle, the great World's Fair of 1878, page 35...

Paris was crammed with visitors attending the Exposition Universelle, the great World's Fair of 1878.

'What a sight on entering the exhibition grounds!' Clarence exclaimed the following morning. He was right to be amazed. The fair covered sixty-six acres, received thirteen million visitors in the course of six months, and displayed art, architecture and inventions from all over the world. These wonders included Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, Augustin Mouchot's solar-powered engine that converted solar energy into mechanical steam power and the newly completed head of the Statue of Liberty. Clarence and Parrett were unflagging in their sightseeing, even though Clarence was suffering pain (this must have been the reason why he brought along the *revalenta Arabica*). They visited the various national pavilions and salons. Clarence particularly enjoyed their architecture and the flower beds surrounding them, and he was full of admiration for new American inventions such as envelope folders and needle threaders. He was pleased to see familiar artists represented in the English salons, but 'alas I saw no Turner, Stanfield, Roberts &c.', those painters he remembered so well from Herne Hill. He deemed the French salons the best, even though the paintings included 'an inordinate number of naked women in anything but graceful attitudes.'

End of excerpts

MARVELS - THE LIFE OF CLARENCE BICKNELL Botanist, Archaeologist, Artist

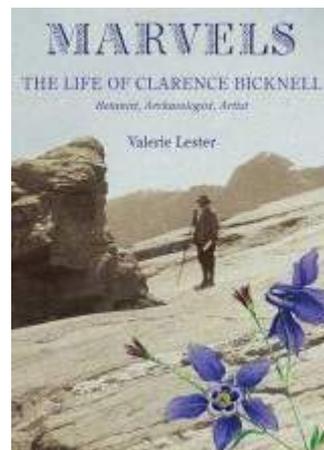
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Annex 2 - EXCERPTA BICONYLLEA. A.S. Bicknell.

Vol. II. Barcombe House, 1907.

p. 190. Elhanan inoculated with his sisters for smallpox on April 7, 1798. (According to Wiki this is when vaccination became available in England.)

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.

On Oct. 16, 1810, married his 1st cousin, Hannah . . .” Mary Jones, his second wife was a witness at their wedding.

“On Sep. 26, his wife died of consumption, aged 27.”

“He married again Feb 13, 1817; the lady being Mary Jones, a daughter of the Assistant Secretary to the India Board, and sometime Private Secretary to Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister. He moved into a house he had built on the top of Herne Hill in 1819, and on that spot he lived till his death.

191. “A fire broke out in his manufactory in 1820, and several thousand pounds worth of damage occurred, with total loss to that account, for he never insured either life or property. He began picture collecting on Dec. 13, 1828, by buying a marine view painted in oil by C.M.Powell.

“His wife had never been strong, and she died of heart failure, April 9, 1827, after which calamity his brother’s daughter Christiana kept house for him till he married a third wife, Lucinda Sarah Browne, daughter of William Loder Browne, a merchant, and sister . . . at Brixton church [St Matthew’s, consecrated 1824], May 5, 1829.”

Later that year 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.”

“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.”

p. 192. The greatest loss of his life befell him when his third wife died on March 6, 1850, of enteric fever, in twelve days, and for months he appeared quite inconsolable, but after a year and a half had passed away, finding his eldest daughter Ada unsympathetic and difficult to live with, as well as a solitary existence impossible for him with happiness, he married again, to obtain companionship in his remaining years. The lady chosen was a widow named Louisa Jones, and the ceremony took place at St. George’s church, Brighton [with Dr. Laing officiating], n August 14, 1851. No man however, having grown up children, I presume married a fourth wife and introduced her into his house where they lived, without trouble following, and hence the unpleasant consequences ensued which might have been expected.

“When his next door neighbour, a very cantankerous man named Prior died, 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.

p. 193. “All his life he had enjoyed perfect health—indeed I heard him say on several occasions that during more than forty years he had never taken a dose of the simplest medicine—that it came quite unexpectedly his having a sever attack of fever at Bologna when making a tour in Italy at the close of the summer of 1857, and it left permanent ill effects.

“One more alteration in his domain took place when his former partner, Mr Langton, died on Aug. 4, 1858, and the whole of his meadows, and a part of his gardens, were added thereto, this bringing the total area occupied by him up to twelve and a half acres. By this time he had become owner of nearly all the best houses on Herne Hill, and his ownership extended on both sides of the road from Red [?] Post Hill to Herne Hill church, scarcely with exception.

“On June 30, 1861, after about 50 years in business, he retired from the firm of Langton & Bicknell at Newington Butts, but he was then a partial invalid from chest disease, and usually consulted Dr Williams, physician at the Brompton Consumption Hospital, once a week at his London residence, Still he remained sufficiently well to dine as usual on November the 19th, though he rained in bed on the 24th, and died in the afternoon of the 27th. Only about a couple of hours before, he had signed an important codicil to his will, and conversed in full possession of his faculties, till he expressed a desire to sleep a little, and never woke again.

“The funeral, by his express desire of the plainest kind, took place on [Tuesday] December 3, when he was buried in the unconsecrated division of Norwood Cemetery, near the chapel used by Nonconformists. A plain altar tomb marked the spot till 1875, and then the executors replaced it with a handsome monument designed after a sketch by David Roberts, R.A.”

FN, P. 194. Mrs Bicknell became a Roman Catholic directly her husband died, and spent the remainder of her life with her daughter and son in law, Mr. and Mrs Hamilton Baillie, at Chudleigh, Devon, when she deceased, aged 80, Sept. 9, 1884. She was buried at Abbotsleigh Convent, near Newton Abbot.

“His will, read aloud by his solicitor the same day, disposed of £350,000 personalty [?], and ultimately his estate realized an amount close on half a million. His house, pictures, and grounds, with the two smaller residence adjoining sold by auction, on April 15, 1863 for £14,250, this amount including £500 for the kitchen garden and forcing houses in Poplar Walk, leading from Herne Hill to Cold Harbour Lane. The works of art Messrs. Christie, Manson, & Woods disposed of on April 25 and six following days, for £75,055.8s. and the furniture remaining, after Mrs Bicknell had taken a very considerable selection of the best, brought £4133.7.4, making a grand total for the Herne Hill estate alibe if £93,438.15.4, which did not include the other houses belonging to him close by, or the 40 acres and gardener’s cottage at Knight’s Hill.

“The next owner, a Mr Nicholson, pulled down the centre of the house built in 1818-9, and rebuilt it in the worst taste, christening it Carlton House, and the whole building was destroyed in 1905, and the site covered with rows of streets and cottages. Till 1850, and even later, none of the environs of London surpassed the district of Dulwich in beauty and quietude. From the verandah at Herne Hill, as far as the Norwood range of hills bounding the horizon, dense woods and meadow foreground filled the view, no houses were visible, and it was constantly a matter of surprise to the artist visitors, that London should be only 5 miles instead of 100 distant. It is indeed sad that at the present day no vestige of all this loveliness remains.

p. 195. “In the Dictionary of National Biography, an article for which I supplied the details, and which I corrected, gives a brief outline of Elhanan Bicknell’s life, but naturally it does not touch on his private character. Very properly however I may here record how excellent a life I think he led. Without the advantages of high education, and starting in his career with very modest help in means, he acquired what was for those days an extraordinary fortune by his own energy, integrity, and judgment. He never worked longer than six or eight hours a day, and he never talked of business in his home. Most good natured and liberal to all his poorer relatives and friends, of most even temper too, he never made an enemy, and in all his commercial dealings he never employed those devious methods of making money so often resorted to by capitalists. He loved scenery, travelling, music, as well as painting, and I do not think any place or honour would have tempted him to spend his evenings away from the home he had made so beautiful. I have never heard him pass a harsh judgment on those who differed from him in religion, politics, or other exciting topics. Like his father he believed everything was directed for the best by an all-wise and merciful God though he might not always understand his ways. He gave a perfect example of the virtuous simple domestic life, and he aimed at nothing more.

P. 196. “In one respect he has not received the praise he deserved because no patron of art up to that time ever did so much to encourage the English school of painting. He bought pictures from pure delight in looking at them on his walls, and never with the idea of profit or of sale: however he lost a large sum in causing the best works to be engraved for Finden’s Gallery of British Art. Ruskin only began to preach of Turner’s genius years after Elhanan Bicknell had bought many of his neglected masterpieces, and even then he only wrote and talked, without investing money in the treasures he so loudly praised. The courage of admiration is made easy to practice than that of spending, and I doubt if Turner would have been appreciated till much later if the sale of the Herne Hill collection has not called attention to his supreme talent. The Athenaeum in an obituary notice truly said: ‘Mr Bicknell not only readily acknowledged, but munificently sustained, and also aided in calling into existence, many of the more important efforts of the British School as well in the watercolours as in oil. With the decease of this gentleman terminates the career of the last of the four principal collectors of modern art, at a time when it was a

spectacle to behold the hand extended to any but an established and long cherished favourite. The names of Vernon, Wells, Sheepshanks, and Bicknell stand prominently forth as those of men uninspired by desire of profit, unimpelled by motive of investment—men who collected works of the painter’s skill because of the pleasure and the instruction they derived from their contemplation, and of their love for the art exhibited in the works—who sought companionship with their authors because of the interest that extended beyond the surface of the picture. Mr Bicknell died deeply lamented by a large circle of the artists of his county.”

Annex 3: THE BICKNELLS OF HERNE HILL

by Patricia M. Jenkyns.

Scanned, transcribed by OCR and formatted by Marcus Bicknell from a photocopy of an A4 typewritten document. The spelling errors (archaeology, scientific etc.) have been left as written.

In 1937 approval was given for Anstey Road near Loughborough Junction to be renamed "Bicknell Road", and on older maps a row of shops on the crest of Herne Hill is known as "Carlton Parade". These are the only reminders of the large and interesting family who once lived on Herne Hill. Few people know much about them now. Despite the entries of Bicknell and one of his sons in the "National Biography"; the fact that another son founded a Museum; that he and yet another son wrote books on the flora of the Mediterranean which are still used for reference purposes by the Royal Horticultural Society; that another son was one of the first Englishmen to climb the Matterhorn; and that the family vault is on the West Norwood Cemetery Tomb Trail.

Elhanan Bicknell was born in Southwark in 1778, the son of a schoolmaster. After short periods working as an assistant teacher at his father's school in Tooting, and training to be a gentleman farmer, he entered into partnership with a cousin in a business with interests in shipping and the Pacific sperm-whale industry. In a later census he is described as a "shipowner and merchant". Certainly by 1818, at the age of 30, he was successful and wealthy enough to purchase land on Herne Hill (next to the Casina House Estate) and there build the substantial "Carlton House"⁸. His estate covered most the present Danecroft Road to Frankfurt Road, opposite No.28 Herne Hill, the first home of the Ruskins. He married four times and had thirteen children. By the time he was 37 he had been widowed twice, but his third marriage lasted 21 years, and produced eight children. I think that this wife, Lucinda, was the love of his life, for it was she who, despite having died eleven years previously, and that he had been married for ten years to his fourth wife, was transferred from the catacombes to lie with him in the family vault in West Norwood Cemetery.

Besides being a very successful business man, Bicknell was a collector of modern English paintings, drawings and prints, many of which were bought directly from the artists. He was the friend of, and benefactor to, artists and connoisseurs, among them Turner, David Roberts and Ruskin. When he died, at the age of 72, Bicknell's art treasures were sold at Christies. His oil paintings, sold on the first day of the first three-day sale, realised £58,600, a great sum for those days (1863). The third sale, held at "Carlton House", was of its contents. Interest was so great that in the time running up to the sale, Herne Hill was blocked by crowds, and there was a row of carriages a mile long.

In common with other substantial properties in that era, his estate was largely self-supporting, with its own dairy and small herd, its carpenter's shop, green houses, stables, chickens and a beautiful garden (a gardener lived in a house on the estate). In addition, he had, what I think was a kitchen garden in Poplar Walk, where pigs were also kept.

Not only was the appreciation of art encouraged in the family, but there was also a fine library, scientific instruments (such as microscopes and telescopes) and musical instruments. The lighter side of life was not forgotten. There was a full-sized billiard table, and a very fine cellar. The house was certainly very comfortably furnished, with carpetting throughout, including the servants quarters. At some time there must have been an invalid in the household, for two invalid carriages were mentioned in the catalogue of the sale.

Elhanan was very conscious of the need for his children to be well educated, and being a Unitarian, his sons went to various Universities abroad and at home, but they, and the girls, were taught privately in the first instance, for there was always a governess resident in the household.

Elhanan worshipped at the Unitarian Chapel in Essex Street, The Strand, although from time to time he probably attended the Effra Road Chapel, Brixton, for he is reported to have been a substantial contributor to the foundation of that chapel. His funeral service was conducted by the Minister of the Essex Street Chapel, as were those of other members of the family. The family vault at West Norwood is in unconsecrated ground (so are the graves of David, Roberts, Spurgeon and Henry Tate, all non-conformists). However, it would seem that at least two of Bicknell's sons were members of the Church of England, for his eldest son's funeral service was conducted by Matthew Anderson, first Vicar of St. Paul's Herne Hill, who was a very near neighbour, and probably a friend,

⁸ The house was never called Carlton House during Elhanan's lifetime, just "Herne Hill" (V. Lester 2017)

and the grave is in the consecrated part of the cemetery. His youngest son, Clarence, took Holy Orders at Cambridge University. He later became curate at St. Paul's Walworth. Eventually, he migrated to Italy, and it was he who founded the Museum Bicknell at Bordighera, Italy. (Recently, descendants of Elhanan went to Italy to commemorate the centennial of his book "Flowering plants and ferns of the Riviera and neighbouring mountains").

Elhanan Bicknell is largely forgotten locally, as is Henry Bessemer. They both deserve better. They played significant roles in their particular fields of interests, Bessemer in the scientific and industrial worlds, Bicknell in the early Victorian art world, for he compiled one of the largest private collections of British art in the country, and had helped many a struggling artist by his support and friendship. There is not even a mention of the house, or the Bicknells, in "Ye Parish of Camberwell", by Blanche.

Judging from a picture painted in his 40's, Elhanan Bicknell was a very attractive man; it's not surprising to find that he had four wives. These days four wives might seem excessive, but in Victorian times, the death rate of women in childbirth, and from other causes, was much higher than now, with our modern medicine and improved public health measures. There were no efficient birth control methods practised, and families were often large, and extended over the woman's child-bearing years. This was not good when circumstances were poor, but in well-to-do circles large families were often considered a blessing. The Bicknell family was one such. Elhanan married for the first time in his early twenties, his wife (Harriett) died five years later, only one son survived; his second wife (Mary) only had two children in the first couple of years of marriage. She died after ten years, thus, Elhanan was twice widowed by the age of 37. But Elhanan and Lucinda Browne were married for 21 years, and had eight children. When the youngest was born the eldest was 12 years, but Elhanan's eldest surviving child was 29 years old (there were no children of the 4th marriage).

Lucinda's brother was 'Phiz', the illustrator of 'The Pickwick Papers' and 'Nicholas Nickleby'. His real name was Hablot Knight Browne. His son, Edgar, wrote a book called 'Phiz and Dickens', in it was one chapter about the Bicknells and the home on Herne Hill. (Thus we have a picture more complete than any we could hope to obtain from the assumptions' based on the sales catalogues of 1863). He describes Elhanan as 'a biggish man, with a florid complexion, and a slight speech impediment'. (Some of the children inherited speech difficulties, all had elocution lessons to help overcome the defects, and they showed no sign of this when adult, although one grandson was completely deaf).

Edgar thought his aunt Lucinda managed the house with 'early Victorian skill', but that she always had time for other interests. (How she found time for other interests is hard to imagine. There were three children in the household when she married Elhanan, she had eight more, and would have had to supervise the servants and the running of the household, and of the home farm, for food provision was a matter of forward planning. Elhanan and she were a convivial couple, who often entertained a wide circle of friends. Elhanan kept a good cellar, he was, after all, a Warden of the Worshipful Company of Vintners. Edgar said that John Ruskin was very attached to Lucinda, he 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.

The house on Herne Hill was relatively modest when Elhanan and Mary moved there in 1819, but it grew apace with the years, the art collection, and, later, when Elhanan married Lucinda, with the size of the family. The children were well educated, and, as so often happened when admission to Oxford and Cambridge was debarred to non-conformists, several of the boys were sent to foreign Universities. The boys' early education was at home, the censuses show that a Governess was in residence over the years, and this could also mean that the girls were educated at home. Elhanan would have been aware of the advantages of a good education, his father and brother ran a school in Tooting, and he, himself, had some teaching experience. Little is known about the girls, it seems that all but Matilda married, for they did not appear on later census returns, and were not buried in the family vault. We know that one, Ada, was a forceful character, an attractive, somewhat imposing non-conformist, who enjoyed organising social events. She married a Canadian, and certainly visited his home in Hamilton, Ontario, on at least one occasion.

Several of the boys made a mark in their fields of interest. Henry Sandford⁹, the son by the second marriage, went into his father's shipping business, and followed him in his art interests. He was the executor of his father's will, and arranged the record breaking sales of the art treasures. At the sales he bought 15 of the lots, including three Turners. He married Christine, the only daughter of David Roberts, the Scottish artist, who had been the first painter of note to work on a commercial basis in Egypt and the Holy Land in the 1830's.

Christine's father, who had been Elhanan's closest friend, gave her many of his works, and she inherited his remaining works (all 1004 of them) on his death. Henry Sandford, in turn, inherited them after her death. The couple lived on Tulse Hill before moving to Cavendish House, Clapham Common. There, in their principal rooms, were displayed 154 watercolours and oils painted by David Roberts. There were eight children from the union of Christine and Henry. Henry was treasurer to the Unitarian Church, Effra Road, the foundation of which church, his

⁹ Henry Sanford not Sandford (MB 2017)

father had contributed towards in the 1830's. Henry was a friend of many artists and authors, and when he died he left a substantial fortune in money and works of art.

Herman, the eldest son of the third marriage, achieved a place in the Dictionary of National Biography, as did Elhanan. After studying in Paris, Hanover and University College, he 'walked the wards' at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, later becoming a military surgeon with the 39th Regiment in Hong Kong and in India. While in these regions he studied oriental dialects and explored Java, Tibet and the Himalayas before returning home in 1861, eventually to resign his Army Commission. He devoted himself to the study of oriental languages and travel. He was the first European to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, quite undisguised, and visited the sacred shrine of Kum in Persia. He travelled in the Arctic and the Andes, in the Americas and in the Far East. While in Persia he made a study of the Persian poet, Hafiz, translating his odes into English. Some of these were published posthumously. He was said to be a linguist of un-surpassed ability. He attempted an ascent of the Matterhorn in 1870, but had a serious accident, which left him permanently damaged hands, but two years later he made a successful ascent. He died in 1875, at the age of 45. Ruskin said it was of cancer of the tongue, but it was thought his death was hastened by the hardships and constant exposure he endured during his expeditions.

It was Sidney, his younger brother, who arranged and saw through, the publication of the translations of the odes of Hafiz, the Persian poet, after Herman's untimely death. He had many things in common with his brother, and although David Roberts thought him a 'young lout', he, too, was an adventurous traveller and mountaineer. He was lucky enough to possess sufficient means to pursue his interests of botany, astronomy and alpine exploration. He crossed the Andes four times, and went on a expedition in the Everest regions. He made ten ascents of Vesuvius, six during eruptions, and one alone by moonlight. He also made a winter ascent of Mount Etna. He was in Naples shortly after Garibaldi's triumphal entry, and having seen some of the fighting in the region, wrote a book 'In the Tracks of the Garibaldians through Italy and Sicily, 1861'. He witnessed at first hand many of the battle in the Franco-German War, and was one of the first Englishmen to make an ascent in a balloon. Later in life he retired to the country, and contented himself with adventures of the mind, studying archeology, astronomy and fungi. He had a well-equipped observatory (I think in Sussex) and compiled a very good collection of books about fungi. In 1887 he staged a large exhibition on fungi at the Royal Horticultural Society. He had memberships a number of scientific societies, such as the Royal Geographical Society, and he was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society. The results of the work that he did in the latter part of his life can still be seen at the Royal Horticultural Society. He also compiled a study of his family's history.

Another brother, Clarence, was the youngest member of the family. From an early age he had a passion for plants and flowers, which he collected and illustrated. He was 19 when his father died. Maybe the Unitarian influence was not so strong towards Elhanan's end, for he took Church of England Holy Orders at Cambridge in 1865. After a period as Curate at St. Paul's, Walworth, where he was assiduous in his care of the poor of the Parish, he joined a Church of England Order in Shropshire, but while there he was able to travel extensively in Ceylon, New Zealand, Morocco and Majorca. After the closure of the Shropshire centre, he went to Bordighera, in Italy, where he acted as Chaplain to English visitors. He began to feel he could serve humanity as well outside the Church as in it, and that a common language rather than religion would unify humanity. He was an early enthusiastic exponent of Esperanto. He left the Church, and bought a house in Bordighera, where he lived for the rest of his life. In 1885 he published a volume on 'Flowering Plants and Ferns of the Riviera and Neighbouring Mountains'. It contained 80 plates, each showing two or three species chosen from 1,100 drawings he'd made during his studies. Shortly afterwards he provided illustrations for H.S. Thompson's book 'Flowering Plants of the Riviera', and 11 years after his first publication Clarence published a further volume called 'Flora of Bordighera and San Remo'. He had a summer house in Val Casterino, and while exploring one day he discovered an extensive series of prehistoric rock drawings. He studied these, and later published 'A Guide to the Prehistoric Rock Engravings in the Italian Maritime Alps'.

Clarence always cared for the poor people of the Bordighera region among whom he'd made his home. When he died he left his house to the Commune, where was established the Museo Bicknell and an International Library for the study of the languages of the area. His collection of European plants went to the Institute of Botany in Genoa, to which in his lifetime, he had contributed many of his specimens

I think that you will agree that the Bicknell's were a remarkable family, well worth researching and remembering.

Annex 4: Artist in Residence – Stephen Poyntz Denning and the Herne Hill Art Set

The Dulwich Society from <http://www.dulwichsociety.com/> Winter 2014

by Brian Green

It is quite a coincidence that two major movies are being released at the moment, the principle characters of which were members of the Herne Hill art set. However, like the elephant in the room, a central figure - Elhanan Bicknell, has been excised in Mike Leigh's award winning film *Mr Turner*. As indeed has the subject of this article, the artist Stephen Poyntz Denning, a prominent member of the Herne Hill art set and friend of the Bicknell family.

The early life of Stephen Poyntz Denning is something of a mystery. His father, Thomas Denning was born in Gloucestershire in 1767 and moved to Newington, Southwark where Stephen was born in 1795. There is no information regarding his mother. His middle name, Poyntz had customarily been used by the Denning family.

There must have been some tragedy or misfortune early in Denning's life. It was partially revealed, when, soon after he was elected curator or custodian of the newly opened Dulwich College Picture Gallery he received a group of Royal Academician visitors, led by Joseph Farington and including Sir Thomas Lawrence. The reason for the visit was to inspect the pictures and select some to be copied by students at the Academy. Denning, who may already have been acquainted with Lawrence, got into conversation with them and clearly impressed Farington who wrote in his diary, "Mr Denning is an artist and excels in miniature painting. He gave us an account of his low extraction saying that when he was a boy, he was a beggar. He told us he acquired some knowledge of art - of his being an apprentice for 7 years to a person who employed him colouring prints. He informed us how he was enabled to go to Italy and the whole story of his progress is extraordinary...."

Through what good offices we do not know, but the young Denning had been taken under the wing of the miniaturist artist John Wright. John Wright was well connected, being acquainted with the leading artists of the day such as John Hoppner as well as Lawrence. Stephen's apprenticeship with Wright may have required him to spend seven years employed in colouring prints but he also learnt the art of miniature painting from his mentor. Denning actually lived with the family from 1814-17 in Burlington Gardens, perhaps as a companion to the Wright's son, John William, whose mother had died when he was an infant. John William was a delicate child; and had to be withdrawn because of his poor health from school at Loughborough House, Brixton. John William Wright was apprenticed to Thomas Phillips and became noted for his illustrations of characters from literature, especially Shakespearean subjects, many of which were engraved.

After his own apprenticeship with John Wright, Denning travelled to Italy and had lodgings in both Bruton Street and Conduit Street, not then a fashionable area but a masculine one where single gentlemen might find a room above the shops and ticket agencies. It was in one such agency that admission tickets for Dulwich College Picture Gallery might be obtained.

Denning had his first painting, a miniature, accepted at the Royal Academy in 1814, when he was only 19 and still living with the Wrights. He had pictures accepted annually at the Academy until 1852, 48 in total. At some point he became the great friend of the artist and engraver John Burnet and co-operated with him by painting reduced size copies of Burnet's oil paintings of both Chelsea and Greenwich pensioners for engraving purposes. In 1842, Burnet dedicated his *Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds* to Denning.

In 1821, Denning succeeded Ralph Cockburn, the gallery's first custodian, who had died the year previously. As well as being responsible for the collection, his job description included instructing in drawing, such of the poor scholars at the College as he recommended. He received a salary of 200 guineas per annum and accommodation. He was assisted by James Bonham who was paid £80 per year and had rooms in the former French Horn and had his livery supplied. The gallery was the open daily except Fridays and Sundays and admission was free on production of a ticket. Perhaps inconveniently, tickets were only available in London at principal printsellers and bookshops

It is not known how or when precisely, Denning came to the notice of the Royal Family, but the association certainly had started by 1823 when he painted the famous portrait of Princess Victoria aged 4. The painting was never engraved despite its significant popular appeal and remained in the artist's possession. It was purchased by Dulwich Picture Gallery for 30 guineas in 1891 and immediately became the most popular picture in the collection.

Another commission for the Royal Family, possibly by Denning, took place in 1825 when a miniature (6cm) of the future Queen Victoria was painted and inscribed: "Presented by the Princess Victoria to her dear old General Wetherell". Wetherell was the ADC and equerry to the Duke of Kent, Victoria's father. It seems likely that

Denning was actually engaged by the household of the Duchess of Kent, which was at Kensington Palace, as a portrait by Denning exists (now in New York) of a sitter once believed to be Lucinda Bicknell, Elhanan Bicknell's third wife, but now believed to be that of the Duchess herself.

There has also been some discussion as to whether the painting of the infant Queen Victoria at Dulwich Picture Gallery is in fact that of her eldest daughter, also named Victoria and painted twenty years later. The fact that Denning's style never altered throughout his career makes identification difficult. However, expert opinion comes down in favour of Queen Victoria.

Other Royal commissions followed; William IV ordered a copy from Denning of Lawrence's portrait of Sir Jeffrey Wyattville, the architect and garden designer which was presented by the King to Wyattville. It was also engraved. Denning is also credited with painting a portrait of the future Prince Albert which is now in Gotha. Finally, in 1846 Queen Victoria commissioned a copy of Franz Xaver Winterhalter's portrait of the Royal Family from Denning for a fee of over £200 and lithographs were made in Paris of the portrait, one of which was given to Louis Phillipe, perhaps as a 'thank you' to the French king for giving permission for Winterhalter, who was France's court painter, to carry out the commission from Queen Victoria.

Denning must have had an engaging personality because he made friends easily and widely among those living in Dulwich. One amusing observation is given in the diary of Joseph Romilly, a Cambridge academic and bachelor who lived at The Willows, on Dulwich Common. In December 1834 he unwisely attended the tea and supper party of his nephew, George Romilly. At first all went well, "they danced 2 Quadrilles & a country dance - some very pretty fireworks of George Allen's were let off extremely well by him - they lasted about an hour and a half. George Romilly appeared to great advantage, he danced very gracefully, did the honour of the table well and was altogether a complete gentleman - some of the children behaved like rude blackguards, these were the Pages, Denning and Warner. The young ladies were very correct".

Numerous Dulwich residents had their own, or their children's portraits painted by Denning. They included the political radical and classical historian George Grote and his wife, who lived at Woodhall, the Rev John Vane, chaplain and 1st Fellow of the College and Ozias Linley the 4th Fellow who bequeathed his family portraits by Gainsborough to the Gallery. Indeed, it might have been the latter's friendship with Denning which commanded this gift.

Over the years Denning made numerous copies of pictures from the collection at Dulwich. A Murillo and a Rubens copy hang in the Cottonian Collection of Plymouth Art Gallery, and their donor, William Cotton and also his wife's portraits were also painted by Denning.

In 1844 John Ruskin, who was a regular visitor to Dulwich College Picture Gallery received permission to make water colour copies of some of the collection. Both Ruskin and his father were part of the circle of friends and artists, which included Denning, who was also a family friend, who gathered at Carlton House on Herne Hill (now the site of Danecroft Road), the home of Elhanan Bicknell. The Ruskins had lived at 28 Herne Hill, on the opposite side of the road to the Bicknells, since 1815 when John Ruskin was aged 4, and four years before Bicknell moved in opposite. John Ruskin senior and Bicknell had something in common other than a love of art, in that they had, through their own efforts, both risen from fairly modest origins to positions of considerable position and wealth, the former as an agent of the wine company, Domecq, the latter through the importing of whale oil for lighting purposes.

Elhanan Bicknell (1788-1861), named after the American preacher Elhanan Winchester, was the younger of William Bicknell's two sons. William had dutifully carried on the family business of serge manufacture in Blackman Street, Southwark until the death of his devout mother, a friend of John Wesley, and then commenced a second career as a schoolmaster, opening a school firstly in Ponders End and afterwards in Tooting. It was at this school that his son, Elhanan, acted as a junior teacher until he was 19. Elhanan Bicknell then tried his hand at being a gentleman farmer with a friend who lived near Shrewsbury. Elhanan abandoned this venture and in 1809 entered into a partnership with a cousin, John Bicknell Langton at the invitation of his uncle who was considering retiring from his business which comprised whale oil importing and ship-owning. Langton had earlier discovered a process of refining sperm whale oil which would produce candles and smoke-free oil lighting. The new partnership prospered and the firm expanded, owning 30 ships and monopolizing the Pacific sperm whale oil fishery.

By 1840, Bicknell had anticipated that his whaling empire would suffer as a result of free trade opening up the market to competition, but he continued to direct the business for another twenty years. He married and was widowed four times. His first marriage was in 1810 to Hannah Wooton Langton, his cousin and the sister of his business partner. They had a son, Elhanan (1813-1860) and two other children, one who died along with his mother in childbirth in 1815. His second marriage was to Mary Jones in 1817 which produced two children. In 1829 he married Lucinda Browne, the sister of Dickens' illustrator, "Phiz" - Hablot Browne. The marriage lasted 21 years until her death in 1850 and produced a further eight children. In 1851 he married his fourth wife, Louisa Holland, a widow.

He was a close friend of the artist David Roberts (who does feature in the Mike Leigh film), and one of his sons married Christine, Roberts' daughter. It was Roberts who introduced Elhanan Bicknell to the art world. It was a world he completely embraced and established a sort of club where social gatherings were held at Carlton House.

In 1838 Bicknell began to collect British modern art, the collection adorning the principal rooms of the house. Edgar Browne, whose aunt was Bicknell's wife Lucinda, describes the drawing room of Carlton House, "The pictures in this room were all water colours, and were not hung in the usual manner, but inset, the gilded mouldings acting as frames". (A similar method was employed at Petworth to showcase some of Turner's London scenes) ... "Turner's 'Rivers of France', if I remember rightly, served as decoration of the doors".

Bicknell had a flair for correctly judging the value of modern sculpture and painting, rather like an earlier version of Charles Saatchi. His wealth and enthusiasm for contemporary art drew numerous artists, sculptors and connoisseurs of modern art around him. He collected art and also commissioned works from his circle. When Turner's fame was at a low point and before he was championed by the young John Ruskin, Bicknell had bought a number of paintings which Turner had exhibited at the Royal Academy and which were unsold.

Although Turner was a frequent visitor, there was on one occasion some tension between him and Bicknell. Turner had written to Bicknell, somewhat tongue in cheek, - My Dear Sir, I will thank you to call in Queen Anne Street at your earliest convenience, for I have a whale or two on the canvas. Turner's 'Whalers' now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is one of four, and seems to have been painted and offered to Bicknell because of the latter's involvement in whaling. Bicknell declined the picture, even complaining that when he rubbed it some chalk came off on his finger! It debuted to mixed reviews at the RA exhibition of 1845.

Another mixed review greeted 'The Snowstorm'. "Turner", wrote Ruskin, "was passing the evening at my father's house, on the day that this criticism came out; and after dinner, sitting in his armchair by the fire, I heard him muttering low to himself, at intervals, "Soapsuds and whitewash" again, and again, and again. At last I went to him asking why he minded what they said. Then he burst out, "Soapsuds and whitewash! What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea's like? I wish they'd been in it." He was referring to the discomfort and danger he had endured in preparation for the painting. At the age of 67 he had, according to Ruskin, put to sea in a hurricane and ordered the sailors to lash him to the mast, from where he studied the scene for four hours. The Ruskins also possessed Turner's controversial painting, the Slave Ship.

Bicknell had 10 oils and 18 water colours by Turner in his collection. He purchased Giudecca, La Dionna della Salute and San Giorgio from the RA Exhibition 1841 for 250 guineas. This oil painting of Venice now holds the record for the most expensive British painting sold when it went under the hammer earlier this year to the owner of the Bellagio Hotel, Las Vegas for \$35.8m. His purchase of the water colour, The Blue Rigi: Lake Lucerne, Sunrise, in 1842 for 80 guineas was arranged by the art dealer Thomas Griffiths of Norwood who also arranged the sale of the companion picture, The Red Rigi, to John Ruskin senior. It was Griffiths who introduced John Ruskin to Turner. Ruskin said of these pictures, "Turner had never made any drawings like these before and never made any like them again. He is not showing his hand in these, but his heart." The Blue Rigi was sold in 2006 for £5.8m, a record for a water colour. Dulwich resident and honorary chairman of Christies, Noel Annesley, took the gavel himself at the sale. A ban was placed on its export and it was saved for the nation through the Art Fund.

According to Clarence, one of Bicknell's sons, Turner, frequently dined at his father's house, and objected to having his portrait taken. At one such dinner around Christmas 1845, "Count D'Orsay and Sir Edwin Landseer, devised a little plot to defeat the result of this antipathy. Whilst 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, when necessary, Landseer, sketching 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 were included in the Bicknell sale at Christie's in 1863 after Bicknell's death.

One of Stephen Poyntz Denning's most interesting sitters was also a member of the Bicknell family. Sabrina Bicknell's portrait was painted in 1833 when she was 73 years old, and was engraved a number of times. The reason for this interest was that Sabrina was the subject of an experiment carried out by Thomas Day (1748-1789) who was influenced by the writings of Rousseau, which was to acquire and educate a young girl to become the perfect wife. In 1769, at the age of twenty-one and in possession of an inheritance he went with an old school friend, Thomas Bicknell, to the Foundling Hospital in Shrewsbury where he picked out a girl and named her Sabrina Sidney (after the River Severn and his hero, the Whig martyr Algenon Sidney). They then went to Coram's Fields in London where a second girl, Lucretia was selected. The girls were aged 11 and 12.

All Day was required by the hospitals to do was to promise he would apprentice one girl to a trade, and give her £400 on her marriage, the other he intended to marry, and if he did not he would place her in a good family and give her £500. He also "solemnly swore not to violate her innocence". He took the girls to France, teaching them to read and lectured them "to hate dress and luxury, and fine people and fashion and titles". He tired of France, the girls squabbled and a French officer spoke to the girls too freely and had to be challenged to a duel. After eight months Day was exhausted by his experiment and returned to England. Lucretia was apprenticed to a milliner but

Sabrina he kept, lodging her with Bicknell's mother. He then embarked on a further experiment, if Sabrina was to be a model wife she had to teach her own children fortitude and endurance. Day's eccentric methods of imparting such qualities were a disaster - when he dropped hot sealing wax on her arms she screamed, when he fired pistols at her petticoats she leapt aside and shrieked. She never came round to the regime and was packed off to a boarding school. (For further information on Thomas Day and his experiment see - Wendy Moore *How to Create the Perfect Wife* 2013.)

When Sabrina left school, Day gave her an allowance and at the age of 26 she married Thomas Bicknell who by this time had become a successful barrister. Day gave her the promised dowry of £500. She was widowed within a decade and with two small sons to raise she was apprenticed to a dressmaker who went bankrupt. She then became housekeeper in the family of Fanny Burney's brother, Dr Charles Burney, nursing Burney through an illness and becoming his assistant at his academy at Greenwich. She continued to assist at the academy when Burney's son succeeded as principal on his father's death. Her two sons prospered, benefitting from Burney's education, one becoming a founder of the Westminster Bank, the other becoming senior Registrar in the Court of Chancery.

Elhanan Bicknell died in 1861. His plan to retain his collection for the benefit of the public apparently frustrated by so many claimant children. He is buried in West Norwood Cemetery with his third wife Lucinda and beside his friend David Roberts. His collection of 112 paintings was sold at Christies in 1863 and realized £80,000, the Marquess of Hartford purchasing half the collection.

Stephen Poyntz Denning died in 1864. His son, the Rev Stephen Poyntz Denning was headmaster of St Andrew's College, Reading and had assisted his father in the preparation of *An Historical and Descriptive Catalogue of the pictures in Dulwich Picture Gallery*. The catalogue was only in manuscript and was removed by Denning's widow but acquired later by the Gallery.

Mr. Turner is a forthcoming 2014 British biographical drama film, written and directed by Mike Leigh, and starring Timothy Spall, Dorothy Atkinson, Paul Jesson, Marion Bailey and Ruth Sheen. The film concerns the life and career of British artist J. M. W. Turner (played by Spall). It premiered in competition for the Palme d'Or at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival, where Spall won the award for Best Actor

Effie Gray is a 2012 British biographical drama film directed by Richard Laxton and scheduled for release in 2014. Its subject is the love triangle involving Victorian art critic John Ruskin (played by Greg Wise), his wife, Euphemia "Effie" Gray (Dakota Fanning), and Pre-Raphaelite artist John Everett Millais (Tom Sturridge). The script was written by Emma Thompson, who also appears in the film as Lady Eastlake.

Annex 5 – incorrect naming

References naming Bicknell's house as Carlton House

The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?isbn=0300081642>

Caroline Dakers - 1999 - Art

“In that year, two or three Greek houses were established in London, with ... Elhanan Bicknell, ranked by the Athenaeum on his death in 1861 as one of four major ... lived close by at Carlton House, Herne Hill with his third wife, sister of Hablot ...”

The above reference is from a book written before 1999

[Lewisham Archives Catalogue 1971 to 1980](#)

<https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/.../LewishamArchivesCatalogue1971To19...>

Bicknell, the second son of the art patron Elhanan Bicknell (1788–1861) who became ... Elhanan lived at Carlton House, Herne Hill [1819 – 1861] and his son. Bigger excerpt below. This could have been written in 1971 (Date of accession) or 2007 (date of archive entry)