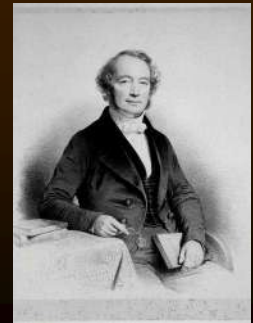


The
Independent
Turner Society
London - Great Britain

London, 20th November 2019

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



By **Marcus Bicknell**
London, 20th November 2019
The Independent Turner Society

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. ...

The Star

The Star, 28 April 1863

... 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.

The Star

The Star, 28 April 1863

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

Elhanan ~ not of the landed gentry

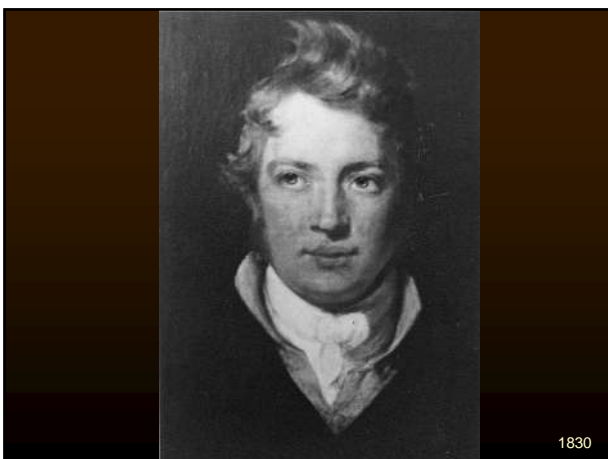
- Father William was a school master.
- Elhanan was an usher in his father's school
- Worked on a farm in Shropshire.
- He had a speech defect, “an extreme difficulty with the letter 'r' and had speech therapy”.
- Aged 20, joined his uncle John Walter Langton in his existing whale oil business alongside his cousin John Bicknell Langton.

1808

“... a man engaged in mere trade”

“A man engaged in mere trade”

- Elhanan had business skills
- The oil business thrived



“A man engaged in mere trade”

- Elhanan had business skills
- The oil business thrived
- Elhanan became an investor in whaling expeditions - South Seas Whale Fishery
- Owned shares in at least six whalers; Foxhound, Hope, Elizabeth, Anne, Samuel Enderby, Favourite and others



The Samuel Enderby (1843-1848)

“A man engaged in mere trade”

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- The oil business thrived
- Elhanan became an investor in whaling expeditions - South Seas Whale Fishery
- Owned shares in at least six whalers; Foxhound, Hope, Elizabeth, Anne, Samuel Enderby, Favourite and others
- Elhanan Bicknell became a key figure in the whaling industry in Britain

- An article reporting on a meeting of ship owners in 1812.

Hull 1,008,168 | 1,466,057

COLONIAL WHALE FISHERIES.
 At a meeting of the owners of vessels and others engaged in the British and Colonial whale fisheries, held on the 18th April, 1812, at the George and Vulture Tavern, Cornhill, to take into consideration the necessity of petitioning Parliament not to sanction any law reducing the duties on oil and whale fins of foreign fishing as proposed by Her Majesty's Ministers. Joseph Soles, Esq., in the chair, the following resolutions were carried unanimously:—

Proposed by W. Bennett, Esq., seconded by J. Hill, Esq.:—That it is the opinion of this meeting the proposed alteration of the duties on oils and whalebone of foreign fishery, if carried into effect, will prove destructive of the British and Colonial fisheries.

Proposed by Captain Poppewell, seconded by E. Bicknell, Esq.:—That the destruction of the whale fisheries will not only prove a national loss, as a nursery for seamen, but will also throw out of employment some thousands of seamen, artisans, and others, engaged in the navigation and equipment of the said vessels.

Proposed by C. Enderby, Esq., seconded by B. T. Crichton, Esq.:—That those ship-

“Simply and absolutely a Londoner of the middle class”

The industrial revolution and art patrons

- Explosion of trade and wealth in the first half of the 19th century
- Leading art patrons ... “newly-enriched members of the mercantile class”
- “Trade” has deep connotations of inferior class

Paul Oppé

“... actively occupied in business”

“... actively occupied in business”

- Collecting art was Elhanan's leisure activity
 - Art occupied much less time than Elhanan's business life
 - ...and created much less value.
-
- His estate at death £350,000
 - His art collection £ 75,000

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

But Elhanan had good taste

- “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 “

Edgar Browne, Lucinda's nephew, son of Phiz.

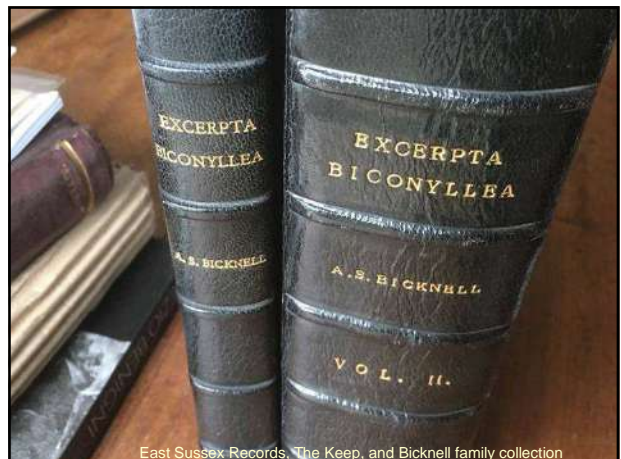
Trusting his own judgement

- Elhanan disdained agents and the apparatus of the art world
- Self-opinionated enough to pick fights with Turner:
 - “Bicknell is quarrelling 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.”
 - Letter to Ruskin from his father, September 1845 after the Academy Exhibition,
- He returned from a tour of Italy to see Old Masters, and announced that he had “seen nothing he would give a damn for”.
- Not a single work by a foreign painter was in Elhanan's collection

The start of the collection

- Elhanan began picture collecting on Dec. 13, 1828, by buying a marine view painted in oil by Charles Martin Powell (1775-1821).

Sidney Bicknell



East Sussex Records, The Keep, and Bicknell family collection

Other early purchases

- Grandiose landscapes
- Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788)
- Richard Wilson (1711-1782).
- Painters who are English and had died relatively recently
- They could be considered modern even if the style was classical.

1828

Elhanan's purchases were conservative

- Elhanan had been in business for twenty years, had bought Herne Hill 11 years before
- Was 40 years old and between wives.
- A productive mid-life crisis
- Purchases were high in kudos and certain to boost his status
- ... but low in risk and "safe" for a rich man new to art

1828

Then influence of Lucinda

- Third wife, Lucinda, the love of his life, Phiz's sister, an artist and musician, whom he married in 1829.
- "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 she always seemed to have leisure for various pursuits."



1829

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

Alive, modern, vibrant artists

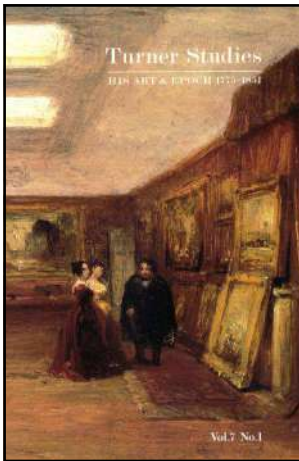
- No interest in Turner until 1835 and did not buy any till 1838, ten years after buying the landscapes.
- Now the artists he bought were active on the London scene,
- willing to meet their patron and take direct commissions from him.
- Roberts gave him *The Chapel of Ferdinand and Isabella at Granada* as a fiftieth birthday present: "the foundation stone of the collection"
- His first Turners were two watercolours of *Himalayan Mountains* which were designs for White's *Views in India*.

1838

Buying seriously

- Oils:
 - William Etty
 - William Hilton
 - Edwin Landseer
 - David Roberts
 - Clarkson Stanfield
 - J.M.W. Turner
 - Thomas Webster
- Watercolours:
 - Copley Fielding
 - Gastineau
 - Muller
 - Prout
 - J.M.W. Turner
 - de Wint

1838

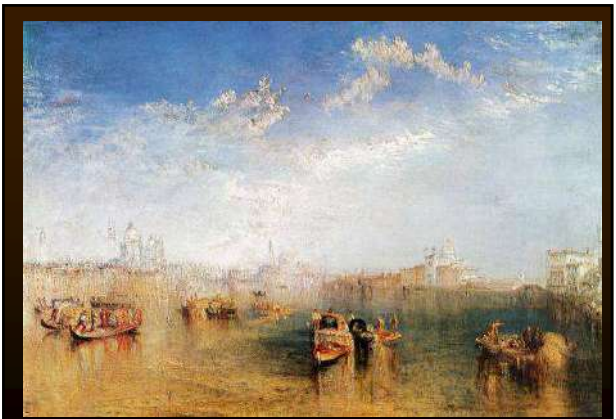


The Turner Collector: Elhanan Bicknell
 PETER MICKLELL, Cambridge and HELEN GUTTMAN, Leeds

There was after his death a great deal of talk about the value of his art, and it was not until the late 1840s that the public began to appreciate the value of his work. It was not until the late 1840s that the public began to appreciate the value of his work. It was not until the late 1840s that the public began to appreciate the value of his work.



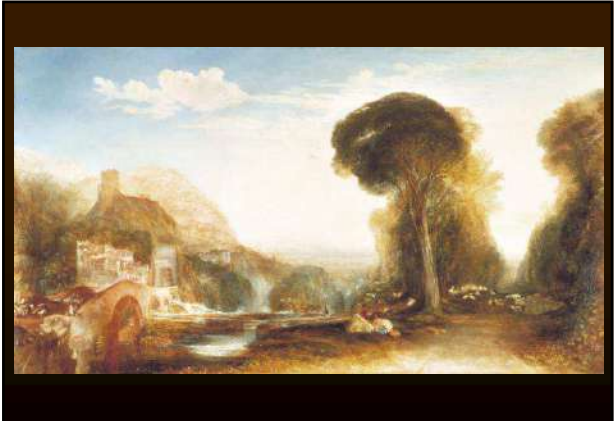
Elhanan Bicknell (1811) was born in the Devonshire Hotel in London. He was a collector of art and a patron of the arts. He was a collector of art and a patron of the arts.



Venice: the Giudecca, la Donna della Salute and San Giorgio 250gs/£20.5m 1841



Campo Santo, Venice (commissioned by Bicknell) 1842



Palestrina - Composition (1,000 gs) 1844



Calder Bridge 1844



Ivy Bridge Mill 1844



Port Ruysdael

1844



Wreckers - Coast of Northumberland

1844



Ehrenbreitstein

1844



Helvoetsluys

1844



Antwerp

8 Turners bought in one year

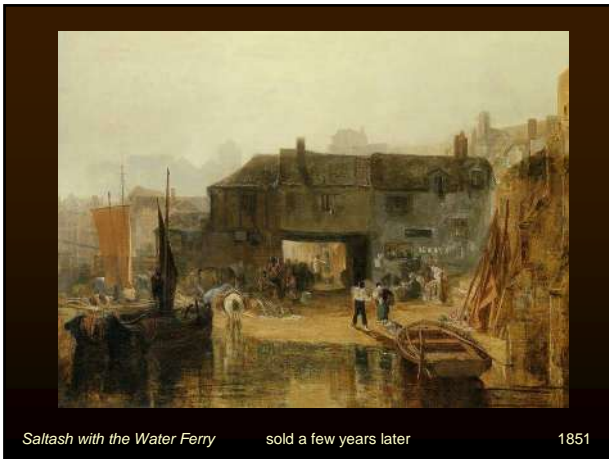
1844



Grand Junction Canal at Southall Mill

sold a few years later

1851



'nonsense colouring'...

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

Peter Bicknell with Helen Guiterman 1987

Two sets of three watercolours

- Vignettes connected with illustrations for *Wanderings by the Seine*
- Miniature drawings of *Rouen*, *Chateau Gaillard* and the *Castle of Elz*
- Perhaps for the drawing room at Herne Hill

1844

Four watercolours: The Yorkshire Drawings

- **Scarborough Castle:** boys crab-fishing
- **Mowbray Lodge, Ripon,** Yorkshire: Earl Ripon's seat
- "**Grouse Shooting,**" the Moor, with portrait of the Artist, the dogs painted by STUBBS.
- "**Woodcock Shooting,**" scene on the Chiver, with portrait of Sir Henry Pilkington

Wallace Collection - watercolour 1844

“Four early watercolours”

- **Winchester Cross** (Whitworth)
- **A View near Rome**
- **Ruins in Italy**
- **The Bay of Naples**
- **The Lake of Nemi or Lake Avernus**



1854

1863 watercolours undocumented

- Lot 116: The Lighthouse at Havre ~ moonlight
- Lot 117: The Lake of Geneva, from the Jura: Mont Blanc in the distance.
- Lot 118: Lighthouse of the Hève: mouth of the Seine.



Bicknell's Turners

- There were 31 works by Turner in Elhanan Bicknell's collection at one time or another
- Another 4 which may have been his or whose existence is in doubt.
- Bicknell had financed Hogarth's print of *The Fighting Temeraire* and quarrelled with Turner about his fee
- Bicknell never bought a whaling picture by Turner

William Huggins (1781-1845)



Courtesy of Mark Bicknell

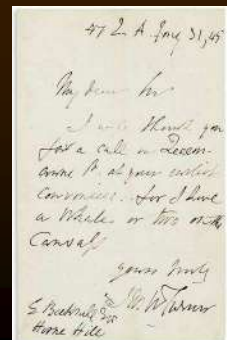
J.M.W. Turner, *Whalers*



Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

“a Whale or two”

- Letter from Turner to Elhanan of 31 January 1845
- “I will thank you for a call in Queen Anne Street at your earliest convenience for I have a Whale or two on the Canvas”
- ...which led to the argument mentioned in slide 21



A rare picture of Turner

- Turner frequently dined with Elhanan and friends at Herne Hill.
- Turner objected to having his portrait taken
- Count D'Orsay and Sir Edwin Landseer devised a little plot
- D'Orsay placed himself to hide Landseer who sketched Turner
- D'Orsay re-drew it and sold it to J Hogarth to print



1845

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

“His name is probably still hardly known”

- Elhanan was not boastful
- He did not join learned societies
- He was hardly known to the public
- But he had notoriety as a collector
- Master of the Vintners, The prices of the 1863 were “due as much to the name of the collector as the merit of the picture”



Oil painting by T Philips in 1853 (courtesy Vintners)

Types of collectors

“Collectors can be divided into those who

1. Bought art to fill up wall spaces,
2. Had little wall space (like Windus and the Ruskins) and so went for few or small pictures, 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 1th Marquess of Hertford, used his houses, such as the present Wallace Collection house, as store rooms.

Selby Whittingham 2019

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Selby Whittingham 2019



- In 1829, the year of his marriage to Lucinda “two wings were added to his house”

Extensions to Herne Hill

- No extension to the house for 22 years
- “The pictures had indeed long been so crowded that they could only be hung by their occupying frames of unsuitably narrow dimensions”
- Great extension of the drawing room in 1851
- Works of art now properly seen.
- In 1856 a billiard room was also joined to the conservatory.

1851-1856

The house as an art gallery

- “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* served as decoration of the doors.”
- Elhanan was buying art for display in his home
- The house as an art gallery was an oeuvre in itself.

Edgar Browne

Herne Hill at Elhanan's death



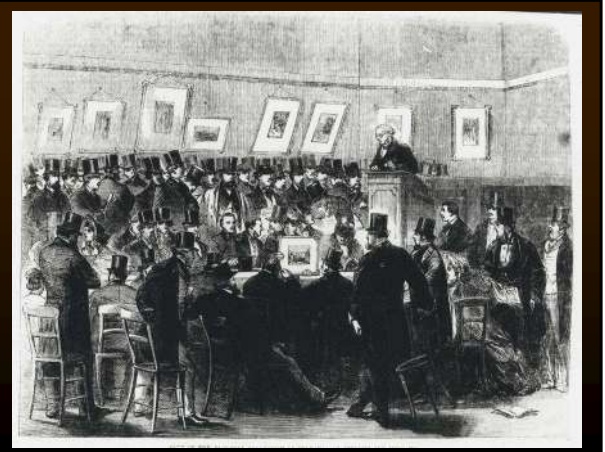
- The house was gigantic, covering a whole block of terrace houses built in 1907 in Casino Avenue and Danecroft Road.



“The sale of the century”

- The six-day sale was opened 25th April 1863 at Christies in London
- Before the sale the collection was on view at Herne Hill
 - ~ “Great numbers of visitors flocked to Mr. Bicknell's residence.
 - ~ “There was a line of carriages stretching more than a mile from the house”
- The auctioneers took £75,000.85 (£9m today)

Sidney Bicknell



Who got the collection?

- “Bicknell had wanted to leave his collection to the nation” (Jeanette Humphreys ODNB and other sources)
- Elhanan’s 1861 will is clear. He leaves the art with the estate to his children
- Percy oversaw the decline of the whale oil industry and Langton & Bicknell; he died penniless in Ireland
- Clarence led a productive life in botany, archaeology, art and letters without ever having a job. Financed 1 hospitals and homes for the poor

Read more about Elhanan Bicknell

- The house at Herne Hill (Marcus Bicknell): www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/elhanan_bicknell_herne_hill_mb_22feb2019.pdf
- Oil merchant and shipowner (by Mark Howard): www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/elhanan_bicknell_oil_trade_mark_howard.pdf
- Peter Bicknell and Helen Guiterman’s article: www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/turner_studies_peter_bicknell_1987.pdf
- Elhanan’s will: www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/elhanan_bicknell_will.pdf
- The full version of Marcus’s 20 November 2019 paper: www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/elhanan_bicknell_turner_collector_mb_nov2019.pdf
- Or email me at marcus@bicknell.com

Elhanan Bicknell (1788-1861)

of Herne Hill

Turner Collector

By Marcus Bicknell

20th November 2019 in London

The Independent Turner Society

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