

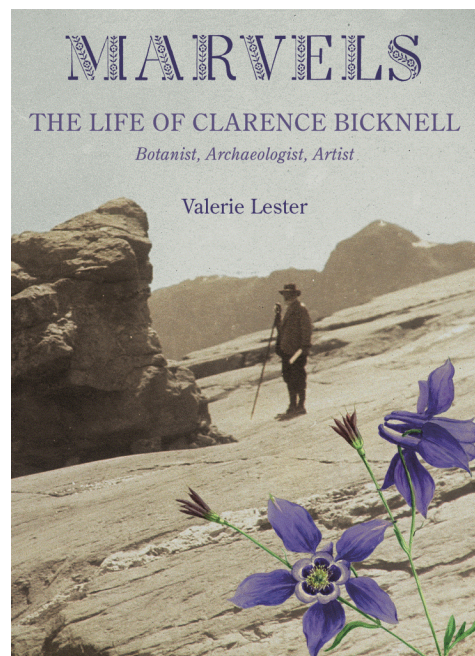
MARVELS: The Life of Clarence Bicknell, Botanist, Archaeologist, Artist

By Valerie Lester

The first biography of Clarence Bicknell was published to coincide with the 2018 centenary of his death. The launch was marked at the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, on 20th June (alongside their exhibition *Floral Fantasies* which featured some of their water colour treasures by Clarence). Subsequently there were events in the presence of the Bicknell family and others involved in perpetuating the memory of Clarence in the Musée des Merveilles in Tende, France, on 13th July and in the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera, Italy, on 19th July.

About the book

A treasure trove of research discoveries enlightens Valerie Lester's biography of the captivating scientist and artist, Clarence Bicknell. Over 5 years, Lester has pored over hundreds of newly-discovered letters, botanical watercolours and arts-and-crafts designs in archives including the Natural History Museum, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, the Conservatoire Botanique in Geneva and Genoa University. Every letter and diary entry provides Lester with Clarence's voice; and each of his vellum-bound albums reveals drawings, watercolours and whimsical creations. The biography's text, supported by more than 200 images, gives remarkable insights into how and why this man strove for perfection in each subject he tackled.

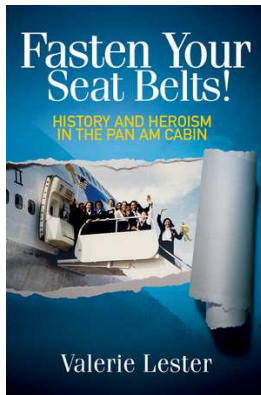


Clarence was a product of the late-Victorian Enlightenment, of the desire to understand our world and the quest to express it all creatively. Having lived for forty years in Bordighera on the Italian coast and spent summers at Casterino by the Vallée des Merveilles, now in France, he is a respected historical figure on both the French and Italian sides of the Riviera and the Maritime Alps. The irrepressible former clergyman dedicated himself first to botany, then archaeology in the high mountains and, towards the end of his life, to botanical art tinged with the whimsy of humour, narrative, affection for his friends and arts-and-crafts originality.

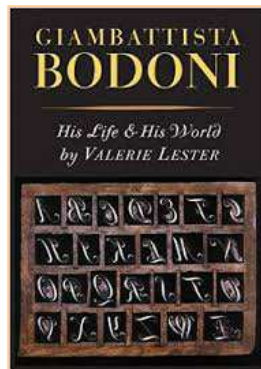
See below to read about Valerie Lester and to see the first reviews of her book. Order your copy now. Click here for our shop: <http://www.clarencebicknell.com/en/shop>

The Author. Valerie Lester

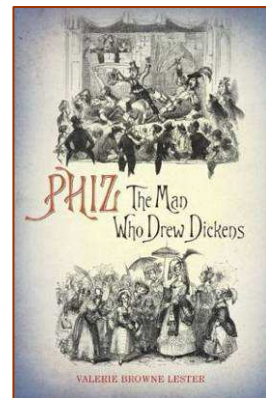
Valerie Browne Lester is an independent scholar, writer, and translator living in the Boston area.



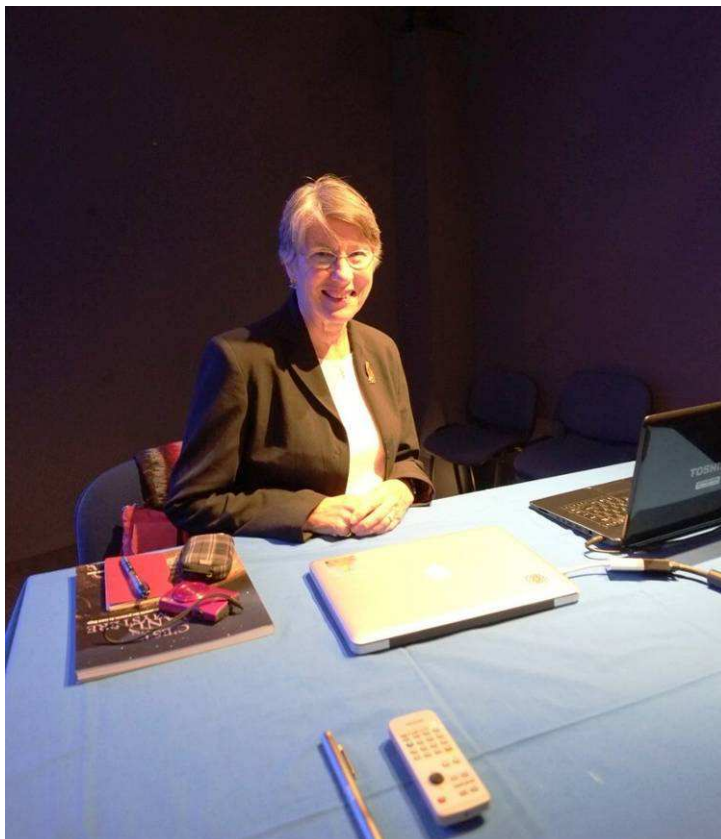
She is the author of *Fasten Your Seat Belts! History and Heroism in the Pan Am Cabin* (1995), which is a history of Pan American told in the voices of its cabin crew; and *Phiz, The Man Who Drew Dickens* (2004), a biography of Hablot Knight Browne, Dickens's principal illustrator (who was also her great-great-grandfather).



Her biography of the great Italian printer Giambattista Bodoni (1710-1813) *Giambattista Bodoni: His Life and His World* was published by David Godine in 2015.



In addition to her books and her translation of Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* (*The Magnificent Meaulnes*, 2009), she has written poetry, plays, and articles, including *A Bird's Eye View of Nepal* for The Atlantic Monthly.



She has recently completed her biography of Clarence Bicknell, published in 2018.

www.valerielester.com



The first reviews of MARVELS

Clarence Bicknell was an extraordinary Victorian. He became an ordained Anglican priest, a botanist, explorer, artist, archaeologist, and philanthropist. He was also an affectionate host to family, friends, and neighbors in Italy and around the world. Lester brings his marvelous energy and vision to life, and the copious beautiful illustrations vividly express Bicknell's wonder at the world's riches. It all adds up to a superlatively exhilarating reading experience.

Robert L. Patten, Victorian expert, biographer, *George Cruikshank's Life, Times, and Art*

In her latest biography, Valerie Lester once again brings to life an extraordinary figure from the past. This time it's the compelling Clarence Bicknell (1842–1918), whose lifelong curiosity and abundant energy carried him from religion and philosophy to botany, archaeology, and the exploration of faraway places. An accomplished author and painter, Bicknell spent much of his adult life in Bordighera and the hills of the Italian Riviera. Lester describes Bicknell's active life in vivid detail, giving her readers a sense of his sweet disposition and drive to discover, and a good taste of the places and time in which he lived. In addition to the fine narrative, the book is filled with photographs and drawings that enrich the story. A wonderful book.



Bruce Kennett, author of *W.A. Dwiggin: A Life in Design*, Boston

This is a wonderful book! The writing is full of energy and intriguing information.

Mary Anne Frye (graphic designer, artist, geologist)

Il bel libro di Valerie Lester "Marvels. The Life of Clarence Bicknell" costituisce la prima biografia completa di Clarence Bicknell e della sua straordinaria avventura. Attraverso le sue pagine, ricche di fonti e documenti inediti, riscopriamo la grandezza di Clarence, la sua vita eccezionale, empatica e geniale, la forza attuale della sua opera. E sentiamo più forte e imperativo il nostro dovere di ben conservarla, proteggerla e valorizzarla.



Translation: *This beautiful book by Valerie Lester "Marvels: The Life of Clarence Bicknell" is the first complete biography of Clarence Bicknell and his extraordinary adventure. Through its pages, rich in unpublished sources and documents, we rediscover the greatness of Clarence, his exceptional, empathetic and brilliant life and the current strength of his work. And we feel stronger and more imperative the duty each of us has to preserve, protect and enhance his work and his heritage.*

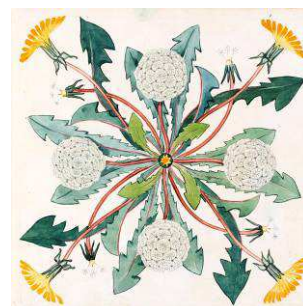
Daniela Gandolfi, Director, Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri and Museo Clarence Bicknell, Bordighera

This is a delightful book, well-written and researched, copiously illustrated, drawing on family and museum archives and showing Clarence's beautiful botanical drawings. Here is a biographer who brings to life an interesting individual instead of writing the umpteenth account of someone more famous; not that Clarence has been entirely forgotten, as his memory is preserved in his museum at Bordighera. His life began interestingly, son of a Unitarian entrepreneur who was a neighbour of the Ruskins and patron of Turner and of other artists, related to Phiz. He evidently had a mind of his own, being ordained as a High Anglican and eventually finding his metier as a naturalist.

Selby Whittingham, art expert and author, President of *The Independent Turner Society*

This book reconstructs in detail, step by step, the life of Clarence Bicknell, a great man, a tireless explorer of the human soul and of nature, who made known such wonderful rock engravings, beautiful flowers and words of universality. The book is in itself a vibrant watercolour of European culture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Certainly it is the result of intense and diligent work by the author, a volume rich in information and ideas for reflections.

Professor Mauro Mariotti, Università degli Studi di Genova, DISTAV (Department of Earth Sciences, Botany, Marine Environmental Sciences, Zoology and Biology) in Genoa.



An impressive biography, well-researched, well-written and well-illustrated. Clarence Bicknell made a contribution to botanical research and discovery in Europe that deserves to be better known. It was botany that led him to the rock engravings in the Alps, and it was his skill as a botanist that equipped him to bring the rock art out of the obscurity of antiquarian speculation into the light of scientific analysis.

Graham Avery, Oxford University

Marvels – The Life of Clarence Bicknell is a fantastic book. The abundance of wealth in the text, the beautiful layout, the multitude of images; life's very perfume rises from the pages. *Veramente bellissimo!* Compliments. Compliments.

Giuseppe Bessone, historian ¹, Bordighera

A scrupulous book, rich in information and unpublished sources, which enriches the knowledge of the great Clarence Bicknell, the history of Bordighera and of science and culture across Europe at the change of the century.

Gisella Merello Folli, researcher/historian ², Bordighera



A hugely readable book and a wonderful vignette on Victorian life. Valerie writes so well; it flows so compellingly. Imagining Herne Hill in those days and what it is like now, another world! Elhanan was a fascinating man and Clarence's mother obviously so talented and bright. She must have been a huge influence on his choices later in life. On her death bed she "hopes for a cheerful immortality"... such a wonderful phase! Well done Valerie. She is a chip off the family block in her talents!

Carolyn Hanbury, La Mortola



The marriage of Marcus Bicknell's extraordinary energy in pursuit of a worthy testament to his ancestor, with Valerie Lester's diligent research and fastidious scholarship, have produced a brilliantly informative and entertaining story about a very remarkable man. Packed with contemporary detail, it is a fascinating read. Valerie has a quality that I also saw in her books about Phiz and Bodoni. This is her ability to feel and understand what her subjects are experiencing, by imagining herself inside their lives. This allows her to pick up on nuances, and details in contemporary accounts and letters etc with such vivid accuracy and eye for details. I think this can only come from an authentically-felt reliving of their experiences. This is why Valerie always seems to *know* why Clarence's life took the turns it did.

Bob Moxon Browne QC, barrister, descendant of Phiz

¹ Bordighera architect and historian

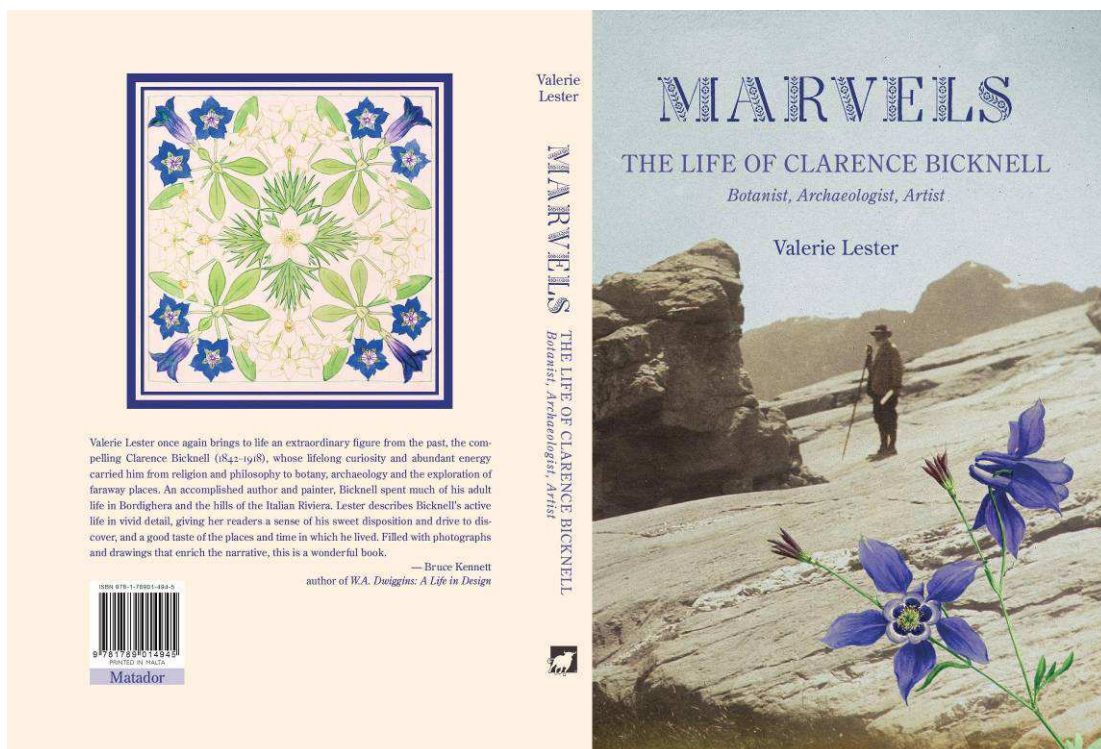
² Bordighera co-author of *Charles Garnier and the Riviera*, author of *L'immagine turistica di Bordighera attraverso le cartoline illustrate e la letteratura (The Tourist's View of Bordighera through postcards and books)* and president of the jury of Bordighera's annual cultural award, the *Parmurelu d'Oru*.

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By Valerie Lester

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