

Q&A Interview — Marcus Bicknell

Response of 7 February 2026

Le Venezie Watercolor Festival 2026

Editor's Note

As an important academic component of the Botanical Art theme at the Venice Watercolour Festival, this interview invites Marcus Bicknell—Chair of the Clarence Bicknell Association and a leading researcher—to discuss the role of watercolour in botany, art history, and contemporary ecological consciousness. Positioned at the intersection of historical inquiry and contemporary reflection, the conversation seeks to re-examine botanical painting as a form of knowledge, a visual ethics, and a living interdisciplinary tradition with ongoing relevance today.

I. Life Transitions and the Choice of Values

1. You spent much of your professional life working in business and media—from the music industry and public broadcasting to European satellite infrastructure—an already highly successful career path. Yet later you chose to devote your main energies to the Clarence Bicknell Association, promoting art research, botanical painting, and the public dissemination of cultural heritage over the long term. In your view, was this shift driven primarily by personal interest, a call from family tradition, or a fundamental rethinking of what “success” and “responsibility” mean?

I get such satisfaction, on several levels, from working to get Clarence Bicknell and his work known to a wider public. Yes, the family link is strong; several close relations feel a bond with Clarence. I enjoy being busy in semi-retirement in my seventies; it's great therapy for good health and man likes a challenge. Promoting Clarence Bicknell's art is not easy because he lived in Italy most of his working life and his art did not filter through into the auction houses of London. But it's fun when people discover him for themselves.

There is a certain amount of “giving back”. Albert Einstein said "It is every man's obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it." In his case I think we would agree that he gave mankind more than he could ever get back! In my career, was I taking something out? Yes, a salary, but I felt I was helping the careers of creative people like rock'n'roll artists and providing multi-channel television by launching broadcasting satellite. The desire to help youngsters achieve their dreams is still a passion of mine; I support young actors at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, young musicians at the Royal Academy of Music. I am mentoring a musical duo Intesa.

I think Winston Churchill got it even better than Einstein... “We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.” Many of us in jobs at any level come to the end of life without anything to show for it, so it gives one a rosy feeling to bring pleasure to people, especially if the

fun is *pro bono*. I also think cultural heritage is worth protecting and sustaining; without our past, and knowing the people and the creativity which came before us, man is nothing.

II. Observation as Method: When Vision Becomes Knowledge

2. The Venice Watercolour Festival has long regarded watercolour as a medium for “observing the world.” From your research perspective, does Clarence Bicknell’s use of botanical painting as a tool for scientific inquiry reflect a visual-centered tradition of knowledge? Does this tradition still hold relevance today?

I am linear in my assessment of the role of watercolour in the past. We had no cameras and no iPhones, so if we wanted to record something visual, we sketched it or painted it. Watercolours were the go-to medium for centuries because the effect of a watercolour as an observation of a scene is to give immense pleasure to the beholder. They look great. Clarence Bicknell had a sketch book in his pocket all his life and watercolours in his satchel. He made watercolours where ever he went, in the Alps, up the Nile, in the Peradeniya Gardens of Ceylon, on the northwest Italian coast. His pencil or pen sketches are accurate and informative but the watercolours are so... great to look at, to be with, through which to see Clarence’s outlook on life, his botany and his landscapes. When discussing botanical art, we must admit that the image of the flower is essential to our love of it; what is written about it, its Linnaean taxonomy, its physical form, its petals, sepals, stamens, carpels and pistils are all interesting but the image is what we remember. So the historic use of watercolour is certainly a *visual-centred tradition of knowledge*. Today watercolour is an art form like any other and is used less to record events and scenes; but don’t they still look great.

3. In traditional Chinese thought, the concept of gewu zhizhi emphasizes understanding the world through careful observation of natural things. Do you see a spiritual or conceptual resonance between this Eastern view of nature and Bicknell’s approach to understanding nature through botanical painting?

Clarence Bicknell grew up drawing flowers in the park with his artistic mother Lucinda. She say it as a means of opening his eyes to the natural world, observing flowers and drawing them. This parental instinct is rather like reading to a child at bedtime and inspiring them to a life of enjoying reading. Clarence studied taxonomy and for the 15 years as a vicar in England he drew flowers regularly as a discipline. When he moved to the Mediterranean coast in 1878, aged 36, the sea, the sun, the mountains and the flora exploded into his spirit; he started painting for joy.

Over forty years in the sea-side town of Bordighera and in his mountain house at Casterino, his style evolved from accurate botanical watercolours, to decorative images and then to whimsical humour. Throughout he was observing intently; if he used a seed-pod in an arts-and-crafts style border round a flower, it was because he had seen this part of the flower and realized the beauty and rarity of its shape and function. We get the impression from his evolved botanical world that the more detailed he understood a single part of a flower, the more he understood

the beauty of nature overall. This is reinforced by him preferring wild flowers over cultivated garden flowers. He wrote in 1914 of the wild flowers by his mountain house "I would not exchange this scrap of bank for all of the gardens in Peradeniya, Ceylon, Java or Kew. Every day I think I have never seen anything quite so beautiful".

Today most people do not find the time or the encouragement to find their position in the natural world, and more's the shame. Even in Clarence's case, with his heart beating to the rhythm of wild flowers, he became an expert in the universal language of Esperanto as a means of establishing world peace. He died in 1918 in the last days of the worst war man has ever endured.

III. The Watercolour Medium: Between Scientific Image and Artistic Language

4. In the Victorian era, watercolour functioned both as an essential tool for botanical documentation and as a medium of artistic expression. How do you understand the relationship and balance between scientific accuracy and aesthetic expression in Bicknell's botanical watercolours?

Clarence Bicknell started his watercolouring for botanical documentation, with extreme attention to scientific detail, as he did in his archaeological research. He could have remained an anonymous vicar in middle England, doing the same drawings, for his whole life. But the Mediterranean and the neighbouring Alps changed him forever. He was swept away by the light and the colour that influence so many painters visited there in the same time period; Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, and Vincent van Gogh for example. Bicknell painted with stronger colours, more vivid poses, more decorative borders and more artistic expression as his life progressed

5. From a contemporary perspective, do Bicknell's botanical paintings belong more to the realm of "scientific illustration," or should they be regarded as an independent form of visual art? Do you think this ambiguity of identity is one of the key reasons they have regained attention in contemporary discourse?

Bicknell's art is gaining attention because he is rare among those who delivered both, scientific illustration early in his life and visual art later. The man was a workaholic and created over 40,000 watercolours, rock art copies and pressed flower samples which are in universities and collections in 10 countries of Europe, that's an average of 30 a days for 40 years. 4,801 of these are botanical drawings of which about 1,500 are visual art, i.e. his evolved arts-and-crafts, decorative and humourful styles. As an artist he was versatile. He would try any medium. He had a particularly strong sense of design; he did poker work on bellows and boxes; he made furniture; he made rugs of many coloured wools; he decorated ceramics, such as the splendid umbrella stands in the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera which he built. Late in life he was studying a new method of sketching in sanguine and pastel, under the instruction of two Belgian artists, father and son Van Biesroech. The symmetrical flower patterns in the Fitzwilliam Museum in

Cambridge must have been inspired by the kaleidoscope, such a popular toy in the Victorian era.

It is the later botanical works and his creativity which make Clarence Bicknell a visual artist.

IV. Contemporary Resonances of Botanical Art

6. In recent years, many watercolour artists have returned to themes of plants, ecology, and field observation. In your view, why have Bicknell's botanical works re-entered academic research and public cultural awareness today?

Specialist researchers in universities like Nottingham, Oxford, Cambridge, Nice, Genoa and Turin show that Bicknell's instincts about the strength and beauty of the natural world, of the danger presented by the human race and therefore the need for environmental protection were as sound in his time as they are now. He was ahead of his time in many respects. Dr. Christopher Chippindale of Cambridge University points out that the humane rational spirit which Clarence Bicknell showed, particularly in old age, was characteristic of liberal progressive thinking of the period. He was a pacifist who devoted himself to works of war charity in times of war; an enthusiastic supporter of women's suffrage who deplored the excesses of the suffragettes; a vegetarian who never embarrassed others with his prejudices; a man of means who lived in simplicity and devoted his means to others; a master who treated his servants as friends, and embarrassed hosts and hotels by expecting his companion Luigi Pollini to be treated and accepted as a guest and not a servant. In his archaeology and his botany, Bicknell put emphasis on a thorough field search, on a meticulous field record and inventory, on classification, and on considered inference from studious observation in the field and comparative analysis of the record. In short, Bicknell's efforts make his work the model for work more than a century later.

7. Within contemporary discussions on ecology, the environment, and the relationship between humans and nature, does Bicknell's botanical research provide an important historical depth? Why is this kind of "historical perspective" still necessary today?

Confucius is quoted as saying "Study the past, if you would divine the future". Indeed, to assure our future, we need to understand the past. Where has the human race been? Where are we going? With this in mind, I believe that we each have an obligation to preserve our cultural heritage. What does this mean? Looking after our tangible heritage – that's artefacts, bricks and mortar - is relatively easy when we have the money; a huge percentage of our cathedrals, churches, museums, palazzi, châteaux, country houses and archaeological digs are funded and preserved, even if it is as much by individual initiative as by the public purse. The parts of culture which we cannot see and handle are intangible cultural heritage. What is it? It is the intellectual wealth which you and I have inherited from those who went before. Looking after it requires a firm hand but a soft touch. The best guardians of the past are individuals who for profession or for hobby play their part in preserving memories and the positive influence they have on our present but is good to see that bodies like the European

Union provide financial support for initiatives designed to protect cultural heritage. When today's humans are made aware of their heritage then they are more likely to continue to protect it themselves.

V. The Contemporary Value of Interdisciplinary Traditions

8. Bicknell integrated botany, archaeology, painting, and writing into a single practice, embodying the Victorian ideal of the "polymath." In today's highly specialized academic and artistic systems, how do you assess the contemporary value of such an interdisciplinary approach?

Today it is difficult for anyone to be a polymath. Study and disciplines are so specialised that each of us would have to dedicate a career and a lifetime to one subject and the volume of knowledge in any single field has increased exponentially. Historic polymaths – take Leonardo da Vinci as an example - might have mastered all known science in their time. There is an additional quality needed by a multi-disciplinarian to qualify as a polymath; that is the development of their abilities in all areas of accomplishment - intellectually, artistically, socially, physically, and spiritually. Is that possible today I think not.

Modern polymaths are more likely to have high-level proficiency in one or two subjects and possibly the ability to connect those fields to solve complex problems. Also they can harness the infinite depth of the Internet and artificial intelligence to master the various subjects they are working on. Clarence Bicknell only had a few books and his written correspondence with a network of like-minded botanists and archaeologists round Europe. And Bicknell was not only an archaeologist and a botanist, but he was a writer, a humanist, a philanthropist, a man who built museums, libraries hospitals for charity, a man who 15 years serving the church and an expert in the language of Esperanto - written and spoken, factual and creative. Bicknell had the good fortune to be living in the last. When a polymath could thrive, a period dominated by an explosion of science, of the new theories of creation espoused by Darwin and of the explosion of industry and technology We might never see a polymath again.

9. For contemporary watercolour artists, does this interdisciplinary practice suggest possibilities that go beyond technique and style? Might it offer watercolour a renewed pathway into the production of knowledge?

Watercolour is tool. It is a medium. The medium is not the message. What lies in the soul of the artist is a much deeper and sometimes secret set of qualities. If we see in a watercolour a glimpse of what is in the soul of artist then we are blessed and the artist has immense talent to have communicated it. This can only be a subjective analysis; each of us that looks at a watercolour will come away with a different impression. The nuance of a flower, a pet or a landscape communicates different things to different people. I would say that watercolour offers a pathway into imagination creativity and of course romanticism.

In the case of Bicknell, his early botanically-accurate watercolours of flowers do not have soul. It is only later in his life when he himself exploded with joy and the thrill of the nature around him that we see in his paintings that glimpse of his soul; a joyous man interested in other people, perceptive of the world around him, willing to dare in how he expressed himself, how he put his heart with the written word and his art. It's a privilege to look at his watercolours and see those glimpses of a man.

VI. "Slow Looking" as an Artistic Ethic

10. Bicknell's botanical paintings are grounded in prolonged and patient observation. In an age of rapid image consumption and accelerating visual rhythms, how do you view the artistic and ethical values embedded in this practice of "slow looking"?

Everything in modern life is rushed. We rush for the train, we rush for work, we rush through a book, we rush through a social media posting. This means we have become more superficial, especially if we skim read a book and this in turn means that we do not get to the core of the subject. Bicknell had a very keen sense of observation, encouraged by his mother in the park around their home. His powers of observation stayed with him all his life. Details of a wildflower - petals, sepals, stamens, carpels and pistil – were, in his observant eyes, not just functional parts of an organism but atomic particles in beauty and form. He demonstrates this by taking individual details and embedding them the borders and other decorations of some of his wildflower watercolours. He has observed these details, he celebrates them and he incorporates them in ways which make his painting decorative and memorable. Bicknell was certainly "slow looking" but is it not incredible that nonetheless he created 40,000 pictures and artefacts in his life, all of which are preserved today?

VII. Public Dissemination and the Sharing of Knowledge

11. Through the Clarence Bicknell Association, you have made a large body of botanical paintings and historical documents accessible to the public. Within a public cultural platform such as the Venice Watercolour Festival, how do you hope these works will be viewed, understood, and used?

We all love to discover a hidden genius. Discovery is one of the joys of mankind. Those who come across images by Clarence Bicknell relish the joy of the experience, then immediately wonder why they did not know his work already. Bicknell is not one of the heralded members of the Arts-and-Crafts movement like William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, Walter Crane, Charles Voysey and William de Morgan because he did not practice in Britain, his pictures did not come up in the big auction houses and 100 kilometre stretch of the Ligurian coast where he practised could be thought of as a relative back-water in that respect. It is very rewarding to be part of an effort to make his work known to a bigger public such as at the Venice Watercolour Festival.

Our efforts to make his work available online, both botanical watercolours and research papers by experts in various fields, are a way of making his legacy and what he left behind available to researchers. We have been successful in bringing together people who would otherwise be ignorant of certain aspects of a study they are making. The power of Internet search and how it can help researchers is fundamental.

Bicknell did not do his paintings with the intention that they should be publicly displayed. His best works are in the vellum-bound albums which he laboriously filled with watercolours each year for his niece Margaret Berry; each picture is therefore a gift of love and dedication to somebody who would cherish it. It is fair to say that Bicknell had no idea that the albums would be passed down the generations and seen in public. So we have the additional thrill of discovering works which were never even meant for our eyes, a sophisticated form of voyeurism. We wait patiently for the time when the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, displays the 400 pictures in the 7 albums they hold in their archive, a gift of the Bicknell family in the 1980s, which have never yet seen the light of day. His exhibition at such a prestigious event as the Venice Watercolour festival will provide extra incentive to the Fitzwilliam to make a grand reveal of them in the future

12. In your opinion, why is watercolour particularly effective as a “bridge” between academic research and public understanding? What does this medial quality mean for the dissemination of contemporary art today?

Watercolour certainly does make a bridge between academic subjects and the way in which people can interpret them. Watercolour has a long history of use in recording precise botanical or anatomical details, where accuracy in colour and texture is essential for identification. Watercolour is illustrative, even in subjects such as science, environmental change or public health data, because it is both accurate and informal. It makes complex information more digestible and less intimidating. The human brain connects easily to the natural brushstrokes of watercolour more than with a line drawing or a computer-generated image. Some other methods of drawing like oil painting are clumsy by comparison, more difficult to reproduce and weigh more heavily on the eye of the beholder. An oil painting might even detract from the viewer's understanding.

Did Clarence Bicknell know how effective watercolour was when he was doing it? No, I think not. He just used it as a medium for recording flowers and he was able to represent the whole and its details, whether integral or separate. And he realised with the passage of time how much pleasure it gave him and to the people round him.

I find it gratifying that watercolour as a medium of nuance and representation is still flourishing today. I'm not a fan of abstract art where in many cases the connexion between the soul of the art and his or her intention with the final result is very tenuous. Certainly it is difficult to find emotional attachment or significance to the Spirit when it comes to an installation, a canvas of plain colour or a rectilinear block of stone as a sculpture. Some say that Wassily Kandinsky and Mark Rothko, intentionally used non-representational forms, colours, and textures to evoke

inner emotions and spiritual experiences; but the detractors disagree. For some artists it might be easy to make an abstract work and then post-justify it with wordy explanations of its significance. Let's show some talent in creating the piece. Let us see the artist's hands relaying what is going on inside his and her brain.

VIII. Botanical Painting in the Venetian Context

13. Venice is a city deeply connected to water, nature, and history. When Bicknell's botanical watercolours are presented within the exhibition spaces of the Venice Watercolour Festival, what kind of dialogue would you like them to establish with the city itself and with contemporary audiences?

In the work of Clarence Bicknell in the Venice Watercolour Festival we'll see the work of a man deeply connected to nature. He did travel widely but he seldom visited cities except for those where the annual Esperanto congress was taking place. He shunned London. The only image of an Italian city which he made is in Florence, a landscape of the sluggishly but rather beautiful Arno passing by some low buildings on the south bank. We have an accurate record from his notebooks and diaries where he went; there is only one visit to Venice and that is in 1863 on a brief vacation from Cambridge University when he went round some Italian towns. This was long before he got into his stride as an artist; his mind was on mathematics and high doctrine of a fervent sect of the Anglican Church. Visitors to the exhibition will see as in previous years a wide range of fabulous art which transports the viewer into different worlds. Bicknell's will transport them into high mountains of the Mediterranean alps, to the ultra-rare *Saxifraga florulenta* which he called the Mountain King, wild flowers of extraordinary vigour and mountain landscapes of another world.

IX. Activating Tradition Today: A Message to Watercolour Artists

14. Finally, as a key academic interlocutor for the Botanical Art theme of this year's Venice Watercolour Festival, what insights or inspirations do you hope Clarence Bicknell's practice will offer to today's watercolour artists?

The early scientific botanical watercolours by Clarence Bicknell can inspire an artist to perfect the detail of the flower and of the whole plant that supports it. They will be inspired to see both the complete form and the intimate detail as being essential to the finished work of art. They will be inspired to take the time necessary to observe each detail and bring it forth in the most positive way. I see excellent observation and detailed depiction of it in many of the works displayed in previous editions of the Venice Watercolour festival and I look forward to seeing more of those in 2026.

There will be other artists who look in wonder at his later work where humour, fantasy borders word play, Arts and craft embellishments and story-telling dominate. A contemporary artist will

certainly know that whatever is in the soul, or whatever fantasies spring to the imagination, watercolour is such ready and expressive medium in which to communicate them to the viewer. Of great interest to me are the criteria which are not just the botanical accuracy of the work but also its colour quality; brush-work; skills expressed by the artists which are superlative not average; splendour; context; decorative qualities when hung in a typical domestic situation; its longevity and importance; its "topping and tailing" i.e. how it is finished, bordered, captioned and signed; how it draws on other influences such as realism, arts-and-crafts, art nouveau etc; and provenance i.e. where the image comes from in the mind of the artist.

I must speak for myself in ending with anticipation and excitement. I look forward to experiencing soul and imagination from all over the world expressed in watercolour. I look forward to the joy and understanding it will give me.



Initial interview with Marcus Bicknell for Le Venezie Watercolor Festival, Treviso, 17 October - 1 November 2026

This initial interview preceded the Q&A responses in the 9 pages above.

How would you describe yourself, Marcus, In the context of exhibition

Marcus Bicknell is chairman, web-master and researcher at the Clarence Bicknell Association (where he won the 2017 Parmurelu d'Oru prize for services to culture in Bordighera, Italy, and the Freedom of the City of Genoa 2025). The Association works to make Clarence and his work, especially his botanical art, better known to a wider public across France, Italy, the UK and worldwide. All research work and a wealth of his artworks are published and available free of charge online. Other researchers have a place to share the results of research.

Are you a painter or a botanist?

No, I have been a businessman all my life. I managed the rock group Genesis when they were unknown, worked for 15 years in the rock music industry across Europe, was the founder director of Astra the satellite which carries Sky, BBC, ITV and hundreds of channels across Europe and I worked for the BBC. My interest in painting and botany is as an amateur. There is a lot of artistic talent in our family and among my antecedents are Phiz, the illustrator of Charles Dickens, and Elhanan Bicknell one of the greatest sponsors of the arts in the 19th century, and first patron of JMW Turner. I enjoy sketching but very badly.

When admiring art personally, especially Botanical art, or making a judgement on it, what do you appreciate most?

Of great interest to me are the criteria which are not just the botanical accuracy of the work but also its colour quality; brush-work; skills expressed by the artists which are superlative not average; splendour; context; decorative qualities when hung in a typical domestic situation; its longevity and importance; its "topping and tailing" i.e. how it is finished, bordered, captioned and signed; how it draws on other influences such as realism, arts-and-crafts, art nouveau etc; and provenance i.e. where the image comes from in the mind of the artist. I have been involved in seminars where these often-unspoken characteristics are shown and discussed.

What creative pastimes do you pursue?

I enjoy writing and have tried my hand at novels, biographies and obituaries for The Times. I carve the names of newly-married couples in a gift of a hard-wood board. I am still sportive in my late seventies as a motor racing driver Hot rod road races in California and horse riding

How did you come to be the promoter of Clarence Bicknell?

My wife Susie (a history of art specialist) were living and working in the south of France near Cannes in the 1990s and had organised visits Bordighera (where Clarence Bicknell lived for 40 years, built a church and a hospital and practised his own art) and to Casterino (high in the mountains above, from which Clarence launched his expeditions for botanizing and painting wildflowers as well as discovering and cataloguing rock art in the mountains). So when Peter Bicknell my uncle had to decide where to leave the Clarence Bicknell collection of which he was the curator, he chose me. I house the valuable collection of Clarence Bicknell albums, paintings and ephemera at our house in the Chiltern Hills northwest of London And I make as much of it as possible available to students and the public.

What is your impression of Clarence and your motivation in working on him?

Clarence Bicknell was talented in so many areas that he is known in each area less than he should be. For many years he was considered an archaeologist for his work on the rock engravings in the Vallée des Merveilles and the Val Fontanalba. He was highly respected as a botanist especially as he published a book - *Flowers of Bordighera and the surrounding mountains* - which is still considered a classic. The way in which he drew flowers evolved from the strict botanical to, later in life, humourful watercolours of flowers with arts-and-crafts details and borders, some of them illustrating a theme or a poem. I find it very rewarding to publish papers by various experts on Clarence and to help the effort bring his talents to a wider public.

How long have you worked on Clarence Bicknell?

Back in the 1980s Susie and I were first visiting the sites that he frequented on the French Italian border in the alps where the mountains drop into the Mediterranean. It's been 40 years so far with no let-up.

What is the geographical scope of your work?

Most of the followers of the Clarence Bicknell Association and his work are in Italy, France and the UK. France because Tende and Casterino were in Italy in Clarence's time became French after the Second World War. But we have a good following the USA and other parts of Europe. It will be exciting to expose him in other major markets of the world like China.

Did Bicknell train as a botanist?

Clarence Bicknell did not train as a botanist. He went to university at Trinity College, Cambridge University, where he read Mathematics. But he fell under the thrall of eminent churchmen and was a vicar for 15 years after graduating. He ended up in The Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit in Shropshire with the Reverend Rowland Corbet. His mother had spent a lot of time walking with Clarence and observing and painting flowers So the instinct was nurtured early in his life. Even as a vicar he mentions in his diaries that he drew flowers and went botanizing but it was only when he moved to Bordighera and renounced his position in the church that he opened himself up to the light, the colour, the mountains and the flowers of the Mediterranean. His early work was strictly scientific ; technically accurate and aligned with Linnaean species structure. He spent the rest of his life doing watercolours of flowers, among other things, and 4,900 of these watercolours are still preciously kept in museums and institutions round Europe. 22,700 herbaria - flowers pressed and preserved by Bicknell – are also stored in museums. Certainly he became a knowledgeable and respected botanist.

How did he learn how to paint?

Clarence's mother Lucinda was the aunt of Hablot Knight Browne, commonly known as Phiz, the illustrator of the books of Charles Dickens. The Browne family had immense artistic talent and Lucinda was able to convey this to her youngest son Clarence mostly walking round the garden of their mansion in Herne Hill near London in the late 1840s.

Bicknell went through artistic phases. Can you define them?

Clarence Bicknell had a degree in mathematics and had a structured mind. When he first collected and painted flowers in and around Bordighera on the Italian Mediterranean coast, he organised them in according to Linnaean structure. The 104 watercolours in his *Flowering Plants and Ferns of the Riviera and Neighbouring Mountains*, published in 1885, are extraordinarily accurate.

The second phase came 20 years later when he was in his 60s. His niece Margaret Berry, also living in Bordighera would give him a vellum-bound album of cartridge paper each year; it was a Victorian tradition that the artist would return it full of images. Three of these albums are in the Bicknell family collection and are among the best known as they have been reproduced and distributed widely by the Clarence Bicknell Association and the family. The Casa Fontanalba Visitors' Book is typical; on the left side Clarence has painted an image of a wild mountain flower with borders and decorations which take on the colours and details of the plant. On the opposite page Clarence's visitors at the house signed their names - archaeologists, botanists, mountaineers, geologists, from many countries. The Casa itself is decorated throughout the interior with friezes, images and sayings in Esperanto in a William Morris arts-and-crafts style.

His third phase is shown in his later albums for Margaret Berry where the flowers and associated imagery are just a part of his illumination of poems (both in their original and translated by Clarence into Esperanto) and fairy tales with word-plays and anthropomorphic characters in a whimsical Victorian parlour style. He created kaleidoscopic flower patterns like those by William de Morgan. Of Clarence's 14 albums, the 7 in the Fitzwilliam Museum University of Cambridge contain these 415 extraordinary watercolour images.

In the later years of his work, did the arts-and-crafts movement influence him or was he working in a vacuum?

The Museo Bicknell in Bordighera has made a list of all published books which were in Clarence's own library and indeed two or three books on arts-and-crafts designs were available to Clarence. But he took his whimsy and his creativity in his own direction. If Bicknell had been living and working commercially in London it is certain that he would be comparable to William Morris and the other arts-and-crafts devotees in their notoriety.

Has Clarence Bicknell's botanical art been exhibited?

Yes there have been exhibitions of Clarence's work in Bordighera, Ventimiglia, Finale, Genoa and Parma in Italy; Tende and Nice in France; Oxford, London and Cambridge in the UK; Hingham, Boston in the USA. But these have been mostly small exhibitions and we look forward to his art being seen on a major stage.

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