

Sir Claude Francis Barry: a British master painter in Bordighera

New research shows the strong connections between Barry and Bordighera in the period 1920 to 1960

By Marcus Bicknell, October 2022

Key points

1. Claude Francis Barry (1883-1970) made at least 40 images of Bordighera and surrounds (15-20% of his total output), a fact which appears to be known neither to students of the artist nor to the cognoscenti of Bordighera.
2. Francis Barry, as he liked to be known, spent months if not years in Bordighera in the house of his cousin Edward Berry.
3. If any of Barry's artistic talent were hereditary, then some of it would have come down from Clarence Bicknell, Lucinda Browne and Phiz through his mother Kathleen Bicknell, again, an aspect which has not been noticed by those who have written on Barry.

Introduction

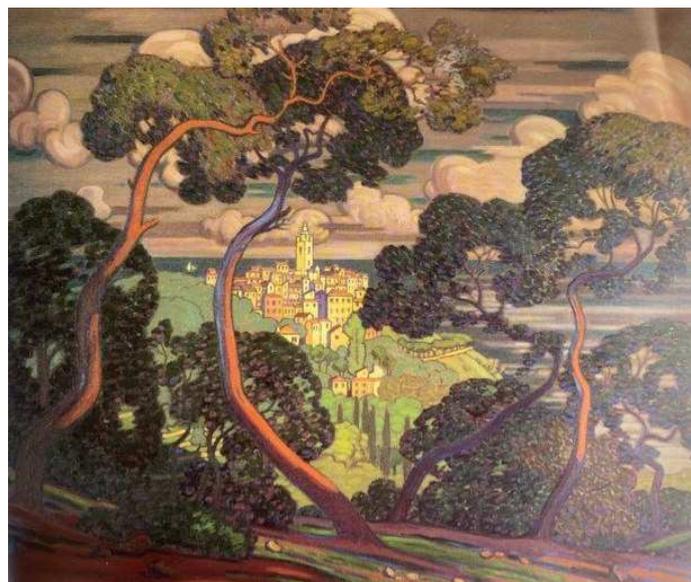
Francis Barry had been for me since the 1980s the man who Peter Bicknell referred to as "Claude Barry (not Berry)"¹. My interest has been aroused in 2022 by an email from a writer, and owner of Francis Barry art, Henry Gill of Jersey where Barry spent his later years. He contacted us via the www.bicknell.net guestbook in February 2022.

"My interest is to Sir Claude Francis Barry who provided the Aquatints for 1931 Edward Berry publication, At the Western Gate of Italy. I collect his etchings etc. and wondered why his etchings were chosen (I know he was related to Edward, and to Clarence) and what connection Otto Thamer had to the family?"

Did Barry live at Villa Monte Verde at some point?

And were his etchings produced specially for the book.

Can you help? Having collected Barry paintings and etchings for several years I was delighted to come across the book only recently. Any information would be appreciated. Thanks. Henry Gill."



Francis Barry: Old Town Bordighera c.1925

¹ <https://clarencebicknell.com/biography/>

What we read about Barry on art web sites is

“Sir Claude Francis Barry is an enigma: the most basic facts of his life are tinged with uncertainty. For thirty years he was known as Claude, until suddenly, in middle age, he adopted his second name of Francis. Though his family was extremely rich, he died in apparent poverty. A bon viveur he was also a dedicated artist. While avowing pacifism, he defended fascist despots. For such an extravagant character, Barry left very little evidence of his life. Virtually abandoned by his parents, he abandoned his own family in turn. His descendants know little about him. The few friends from his youth are now dead. Those who knew him in later life describe a tall, shy, eccentric old man.”



His entry in Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Claude_Francis_Barry,_3rd_Barondoes says “at the age of 16, he travelled in Italy with a tutor for almost a year” and “Barry went to live on the Continent in the early 1920s, probably in Menton, France and then in Bordighera and Milan in Italy” but the length of his stay in Bordighera and the amount of art he created there, does not feature. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Claude_Francis_Barry,_3rd_Baronet

In several documents, Francis Barry is referred to as “a forgotten British master”.

Francis Barry, the Berrys, the Bicknells and the Brownes

Barry was closely related to the Berrys and the Bicknells.

- a. Barry’s mother Kathleen Bicknell was the daughter of Percy Bicknell (Marcus’s great-grandfather) and grand-daughter of the Turner’s patron Elhanan Bicknell (1788-1861).
- b. Kathleen’s aunt Ada Bicknell (1831-1911) was the mother of Edward Elhanan Berry (1861-1931) of Bordighera.
- c. Among Kathleen’s many aunts and uncles was Clarence Bicknell (1842-1918) of Bordighera, archaeologist, botanist and artist.
- d. Kathleen’s grand-mother was Lucinda Browne (Elhanan’s third wife), a talented artist who taught Clarence how to do watercolours. Lucinda was aunt of Phiz², Charles Dickens’s illustrator.



Francis Barry; Little Chapel by the Sea. Unmistakably the Chiesa Sant'Ampelio at Bordighera

Barry and Bordighera

This genealogy explains why Barry came to Bordighera in 1920; it was common knowledge that the Mediterranean air was a cure for consumption, from which Barry

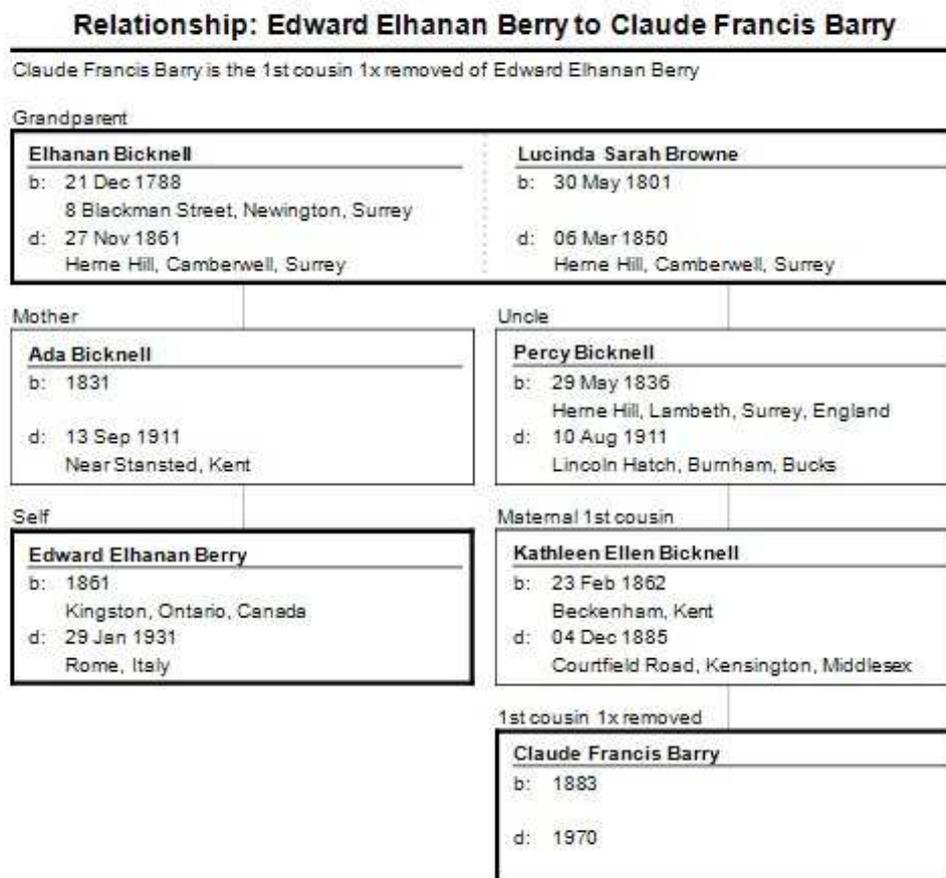
² Hablot Knight Browne (“Phiz”), Dickens’s illustrator (1815-1882)

suffered, and he was able to stay with his uncle Edward Berry and Edward’s wife Margaret, a maternal and competent hostess. Another member of his family, Clarence Bicknell, had been a personality of Bordighera until his death in 1918 and he had created both the Museo Bicknell and the international library³.

The genealogy also explains whence Francis Barry might have got his artistic talents, i.e. from the Browne side of the family through grand-mother Lucinda.

Peter Bicknell, Marcus’s uncle, writes

“Barry, (not Berry), Clarence’s sister’s son, a talented artist, came to Bordighera suffering from “galloping consumption”, and lived to inherit his father’s baronetcy and pass it on to his son Sir Rupert Barry. By a happy coincidence Mari Henderson⁴ (now my wife Mari Bicknell) as a child, long before she knew any Bicknells, was taught drawing by Barry when her family spent some months in the Berry’s (not Barry’s) Villa Monte Verde.”



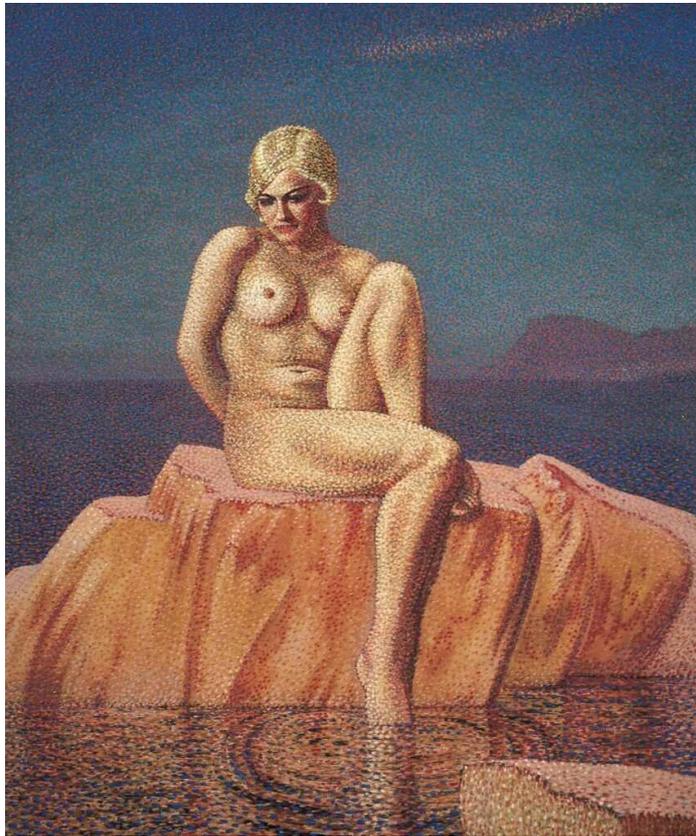
Gisella Merello calls “Francis Barry a regular guest of Bordighera” and my genealogical notes say Barry “went to Bordighera with galloping consumption” (Source; Peter Bicknell⁵). He was in his thirties. It is strange that the texts available online do not mention much about Bordighera, his consumption and not even the cause of death.

³ It is likely Barry never met Clarence who died in 1918. He would have been exposed by Margaret Berry to Clarence’s art and other work.

⁴ Mari Bicknell née Scott Henderson (1914-2003), creator of the Cambridge Ballet Workshop

⁵ Peter Bicknell’s mini-bio of Clarence at <https://clarencebicknell.com/biography/>

Edward Berry, Barry's cousin, effectively ran the ex-pat community in Bordighera. He was Thomas Cook's agent, the banker, the real estate agent and shop-keeper. Ada Bicknell was Clarence's favourite sister and her daughters spent a lot of time there. The Berry's Villa Monte Verde was a sumptuous mansion with views down to the town and the Mediterranean with space for guests. Margaret Berry, a warm hostess and ready to attend to relations, would have made Barry feel at home.



Francis Barry; "Girl on a Pink Rock Bordighera" c. 1925

Barry felt enough at home in Bordighera that when he re-married in 1927 it was in nearby Menton, the first town in France across the border.

There is no record of how he met his second wife or whether he had other female friends in Bordighera, but there is evidence that his love of the female form continued in his paintings there. The *Girl on a Pink Rock Bordighera* is in the style of many of his nudes but with the backdrop of the view west from Bordighera which features in several others of his paintings.

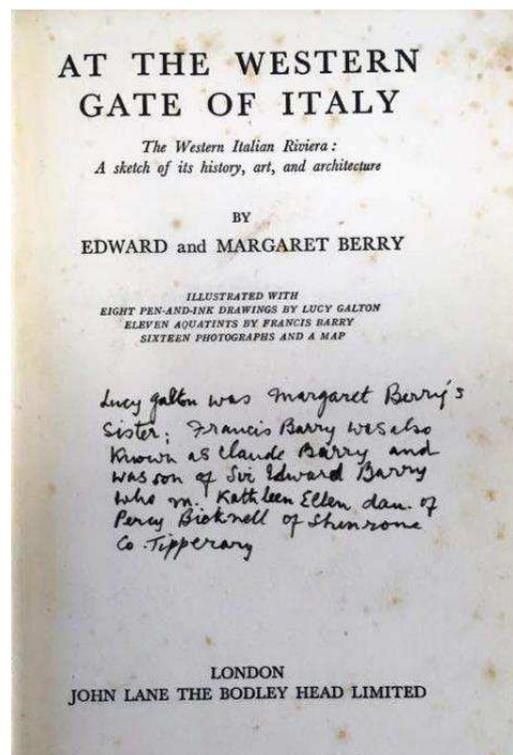
Henry Gill asked *Did Barry live at Villa Monte Verde at some point?* He certainly stayed for long periods there, certainly if he was staying there when he produced the numerous aquatints in the neighbouring mountains and villages.

Barry and the Berrys' book

My paper *Margaret and Edward Berry: Vital support for Clarence Bicknell at Bordighera and Casterino* gives useful background to the Bordighera Barry knew and a book he worked on with the Berrys.

(https://www.clarencebicknell.com/images/downloads_news/margaret_and_edward_berry_mb_1_june_2013.pdf)

"For all of their life together, Margaret and Edward explored, walked, collected flowers, visited villages and churches and recorded their findings. This was the ethos of the era... to discover and to record... which also drove Clarence to his work in archaeology, botany, art and Esperanto. The Berrys were not amateurs either; their book *At the Western Gate of Italy* published in 1931 is a guidebook or, as they call it, a "sketch", of the history, art, and architecture of the Western Italian Riviera.



“This was quite a family enterprise. Eight pen-and-ink drawings were by Lucy Galton née Serocold, Margaret’s sister. Eleven aquatints were by Francis Barry (also known as Claude Barry) whose mother was Kathleen Ellen Bicknell, Clarence’s niece. She was the daughter of another of Clarence’s brothers, Percy Bicknell of Co. Tipperary in Ireland (Marcus’s great grandfather). Either the rose tint of the spectacles faded in the 15 years since Uncle Clarence died, or the Berrys made an effort not to give any undue space to him in the book; his work on the engravings is limited to three pages of text (out of 266 pages of the book) plus three pages of his ink drawings of the engravings. Margaret also writes “It was published at the expense of Cecil Hanbury of La Mortola”; one assumes their building of the Villa Monte Verde and “entertaining many distinguished visitors there” left their finances a bit depleted.”

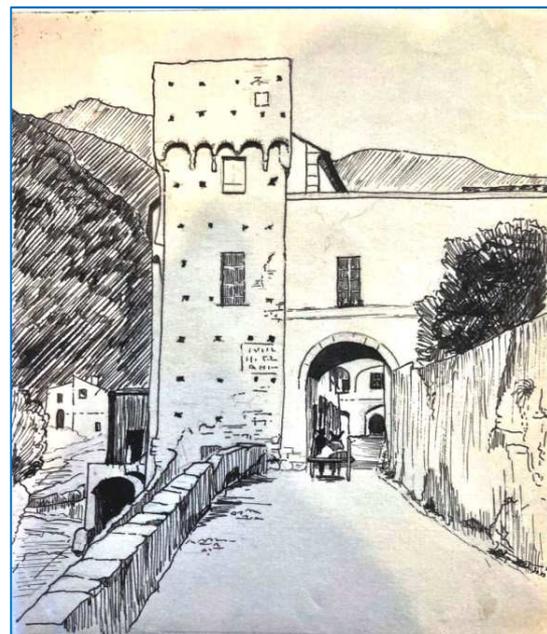
My copy of the 1931 edition of *At the Western Gate of Italy*, inherited through Peter Bicknell, was originally that of Caroline Packe and then Anthony Packe of Burnham Bucks with whom I was in touch. From the same paper I wrote...

“Margaret Berry lived to a fine old age. In about 1935 Margaret sold up the Villa Monte Verde and moved back with all their furniture to Taplow, where her father had lived, and where her sister Caroline Packe lived. Margaret died there in 1957 aged 90; only many years later did her family auction off, at Christies on 20 March 1969, her ornate Italian furniture. The complete collection of Clarence’s vellum books and other affairs, which were kept proudly by Margaret after his death, were passed on in February 1950 to Peter Bicknell, architect and fine-art-writer of Cambridge, who like Marcus was descended from Elhanan’s son Percy, Ada’s brother. Notes in Margaret’s scrapbook indicate that this inheritance was not mandated by Clarence’s will (which does not appear to exist any more) but that she felt that Peter had more interest in Clarence’s work than her siblings offspring. 30 years later in 1980, Peter Bicknell gave seven of the better vellum books with water-colours of flowers to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge to join their collection of botanical art. On the same basis, Peter’s widow Mari Bicknell passed the rest of the collection to Marcus Bicknell in about 2002.”

On the frontispiece of my copy of *At the Western Gate of Italy* is a note which I think is in Margaret Berry’s hand: “Lucy Galton was Margaret Berry’s sister; Francis Barry was also known as Claud Barry and was son of Sir Edward Barry who m. Kathleen Ellen dau. of Percy Bicknell of Shinrone, Co. Tipperary.”

For completeness, in case anyone is interested in Lucy Galton’s work, my copy of the book contained a loose original sketch in ink, in the style of those reproduced in the book, of a mountain village with a horse and cart going through an arch through a building with a perched tower (reproduced right).

Valerie Lester’s *MARVELS: The Life of Clarence Bicknell* does not mention Barry (because he went there after Clarence died).



Henry Gill asked “*Were his etchings produced specially for the book?*”. There’s no evidence either way. But in the same way that the Berrys asked Lucy Galton to do the line drawings it is likely that they encouraged their house-guest Barry to provide an output for the book that was both suitable and timely. They might have been series of pictures which Barry was doing already.

Was Barry’s time in Bordighera kept quiet?

The fact that Bordighera was Barry’s base, or even home, for months and year in the 1920s is not covered in the existing biographical material and notes to his art leads us to speculate whether an effort had been made to be discreet about his time there. Why might such an effort be made? He most obvious reason would be if his affliction with consumption were to lower his status in London as a budding artist in his mid-30s. Would it be in keeping with the image of a globe-trotting free-wheeling artist to be holed up in luxury in ex-pat Bordighera?

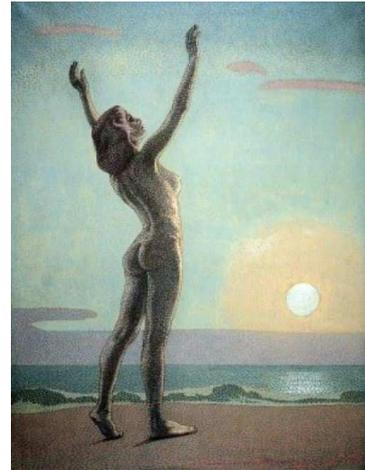


Francis Barry in St Ives in 1945. His painting *Old Town Bordighera* Cat.No.546 in the centre

Margaret Berry, his aunt by marriage, had been a “minder” of Clarence Bicknell and his legacy (especially of his private life https://clarencebicknell.com/wp-content/uploads/clarence_bicknell_in_private.pdf) during his life and after. She might have been a “minder” for Francis Barry. The art-lovers’ text say Barry was drawn to the Italian Riviera by the light and the colours. It would certainly be true that an artist, once there would find it an attractive place for painting. But going there in the first place would have more to do with having family connections and a comfortable house at which to base his stays.

If indeed he had consumption he would be drawn to Italy for two reasons 1) for the warm weather and its reputation for curing the illness and 2) the confidentiality. If he was successfully exhibiting and selling his paintings in Britain he might have wanted to keep quiet about his illness. In the event, whether or not the good weather cured him, he went on to have a full life till 1970, a second wife and one or more mistresses. Going to Bordighera was getting away from Britain. Margaret, his hostess, might have relished the task of tending to him but with discretion. It should also be noted that Barry “abandoned his wife and family in 1922 and they divorced in 1927”, that is, during the period(s) he went to Bordighera. Bordighera represented an escape for him.

Was Margaret Berry a prude and would she have preferred not to be too public about the presence in her house of a painter with a taste for women and a large portfolio of images of nude females? There is evidence, in my paper referenced two paragraphs above, that Margaret Berry threw away the letters Clarence Bicknell had received from lady admirers, for example those from the Baroness Von Taube where his letters to her were carefully kept in a London Museum. Her censorship might have been exercised on cousin Barry too.



Francis Barry; *Untitled, nude figure on the shore, probably Bordighera, c.1925*

We have seen from two sources that *At the Western Gate of Italy* was a family affair. The Berrys made a point of including works by three family members (Barry, Galton and Barker-Mill) which adds emphasis to the reason why Barry liked being there.

Barry's quantity of art in Bordighera

4. An hour on the internet and with *An Introduction to the life and work of Sir Claude Francis Barry* by Katie Campbell revealed an extensive body of work done by Barry while with the Berrys in Bordighera. Of the 300 images in Katie Campbell's book and on auctioneers' web sites, 50 images were of Bordighera and the immediate surroundings including Dolce Aqua (Annex below). That could be 17% of Barry's total output done in Bordighera, enough to give emphasis to the question why was Barry's time in Bordighera unknown to, or ignored by, biographers?



Francis Barry: *Dolce Aqua, one of many in this town near Bordighera*

Two titles (not reproduced here) imply some "belonging", i.e. that Barry was at home in Bordighera.

Firstly, the Berrys' house where he stayed is in the title of "Old Bordighera from Monte Verde".

Secondly "View from the Artist's Garden, Bordighera" is the view from the Berrys' Villa Monte Verde; "The Artist's Garden" has a proprietorial air to it.

As I wrote in the key points at the start of this paper, Barry's Bordighera work appears to be known neither to students of the artist nor to the cognoscenti of Bordighera. Similarly, it does not appear to be recorded that he spent months if not years in Bordighera in the house of his cousin Edward Berry.

Otto Thamer

Otto Thamer (1892 Hamburg - 1975) is new to me. I see no mention of him in my Bicknell or Berry archives but he was picked up by our friend Gisella Merello in her 2020 paper *Edward Elhanan Berry (1861-1931)- La vita a Bordighera del poliedrico nipote di Clarence Bicknell tra attività imprenditoriale e filantropia*.

https://clarencebicknell.com/wp-content/uploads/edward_berry_gisella_merello_giugno_2020.pdf

On the book *At the Western Gate of Italy* she writes...

Un'opera, fondamentale per conoscere il territorio, messa insieme con il supporto e la collaborazione di altri membri della famiglia: quattro disegni della loro figlia adottiva Jane Barker-Mill tratti dai calchi delle incisioni rupestri di Bicknell; sette disegni a penna e inchiostro di Lucy Galton, sorella di Margaret, e undici acqueforti di Francis Barry, dei quali tre eseguiti in collaborazione con S. Thamer.⁵⁹ Il testo sarà tradotto in italiano solo nel 1963 da Antonio Stäuble, docente universitario di letteratura italiana originario di Bordighera, con il titolo *Alla porta occidentale d'Italia*, edito dall'Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ Francis Barry, abituale ospite di Bordighera, era figlio di Kathleen Ellen Bicknell, a sua volta figlia di Percy Bicknell, bisnonno di Marcus. Sappiamo che Barry collaborava alle attività del Museo Bicknell, in quanto vi tenne la conferenza *The Riviera from an Artist's Point of View*. Cfr. Mario Marcenaro, *op. cit.*, p. 26-27.

⁶⁰ E. e M., *Alla porta occidentale d'Italia*, Bordighera, Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, 1985.

English translation: "A work essential for knowing about the area which was put together with the support and collaboration of other members of the family: four drawings by their adopted daughter Jane Barker-Mill taken from Bicknell's casts of rock carvings; seven pen and ink drawings by Lucy Galton, Margaret's sister, and eleven etchings by Francis Barry, of which three in collaboration with S. Thamer.⁵⁹ The text was translated into Italian in 1963 by Antonio Stäuble, university professor of literature, Italian native of Bordighera⁶⁰"

⁵⁹ Francis Barry, a regular guest of Bordighera, was the son of Kathleen Ellen Bicknell, in turn the daughter of Percy Bicknell, Marcus's great-grandfather. We know that Barry was involved in the activities of the Bicknell Museum, as he gave the conference *The Riviera from an Artist's Point of View* there. See Mario Marcenaro, *op. cit.*, p. 26-27.

⁶⁰ E. and M., *At the western gate of Italy*, Bordighera, International Institute of Ligurian Studies, 1985.

Gisella's source is Mario Marcenaro, *Bordighera e il Museo-Biblioteca dell'Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri da Clarence Bicknell al rinnovamento attuale*, Bordighera, Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, 1998. I was expecting to find this in the 2003 compilation by the IISL *Clarence Bicknell: La Vita e le Opere* but I could not immediately find it there.

Although Thamer is credited with collaborating on three of Barry's etchings, he is referred to as "S. Thamer". The S probably stands for Signore. This would indicate that the Berry's, when editing the credits for Barry's etchings, did not know Thamer very well and did not know that his first name was Otto. Henry Gill can probably inform us how we know it was Otto Thamer who collaborated with Barry in the three etchings rather than another Thamer.

Very little is known of Margaret and Edward Berry's adopted daughter Jane Barker-Mill.

Marcus Bicknell

14 September 2022

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Annex: Claud Francis Barry - art related to Bordighera

20 images in Bordighera	Cat No.	Date	Location	Related
Bordighera (etching)	195		Bordighera	
Bordighera (pencil)	195	1927	Bordighera	
Bordighera, Little Chapel By the Sea	148		Bordighera	
Evening Star, Bordighera	290		Bordighera	
France (The French Riviera) from Bordighera	287		Bordighera	
France from Bordighera	200		Bordighera	
France from Bordighera	793		Bordighera	The French Riviera from Bordighera
French Riviera - France from Bordighera	176		Bordighera	pencil
French Riviera - France from Bordighera	176		Bordighera	etching first proof
French Riviera - France from Bordighera	176		Bordighera	etching
Girl on a Pink Rock, Bordighera			Bordighera	
Old Bordighera			Bordighera	cf MFA Boston
Old Bordighera from Monte Verde			Bordighera	www.bhandl.co.uk and www.the-saleroom.com
The Cypress Valley (Bordighera)	181		Bordighera	
The Cypress Valley (Bordighera)	639		Bordighera	
The Old Roman Bridge, Bordighera	329		Bordighera	The Old Roman Bridge, San Remo as per Bonhams
The Old Town of Bordighera	770		Bordighera	
The Old Town, Bordighera	335		Bordighera	
The Old Town, Bordighera (oil)	546		Bordighera	
View from the Artist's Garden, Bordighera	177		Bordighera	

18 images in Dolce Aqua	Cat No.	Date	Location	Related
Castle in the Starlight (Dolce Aqua)	180		Dolce Aqua	
Church beyond the Bridge (Dolce Aqua)	328		Dolce Aqua	
Church beyond the Bridge (Dolce Aqua)	689		Dolce Aqua	
Dolce Acqua	348		Dolce Aqua	
Dolce Acqua	348		Dolce Aqua	different
Dolce Acqua	348		Dolce Aqua	etching first proof
Dolce Acqua	348		Dolce Aqua	etching
Dolce Acqua	712		Dolce Aqua	
Dolce Acqua	790		Dolce Aqua	
Dolce Aqua (Paris Salon)	836	1956	Dolce Aqua	
Dolce Aqua Moonlight (Mars Triumphant)	867		Dolce Aqua	
The Castle Dolce Aqua (Moonlight)	438		Dolce Aqua	oil on cardboard
The Frowning Fortress (Dolce Aqua)	637		Dolce Aqua	oil on cardboard
Via Cassini, Dolce Aqua	769		Dolce Aqua	etching first proof
Via Cassini, Dolce Aqua	142		Dolce Aqua	etching first proof
Via Cassini, Dolce Aqua	142		Dolce Aqua	etching
Via Cassini, Dolce Aqua	769		Dolce Aqua	
Via Castello, Dolce Aqua	323		Dolce Aqua	

Also works drawn in Albenga, San Remo, Apricale