

Kew & Clarence Bicknell

by Graham Avery – 30th March 2016

The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew - better known as Kew Gardens, or simply Kew – were founded in 1759. An internationally renowned institution for botanical research and education, Kew has the world's largest collection of living plants, one of the world's largest herbaria, important archives, and a specialised library with books, prints and drawings. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of London's top tourist attractions.

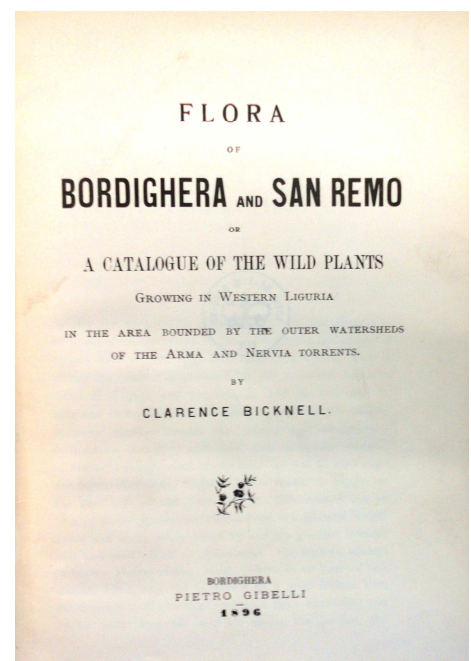
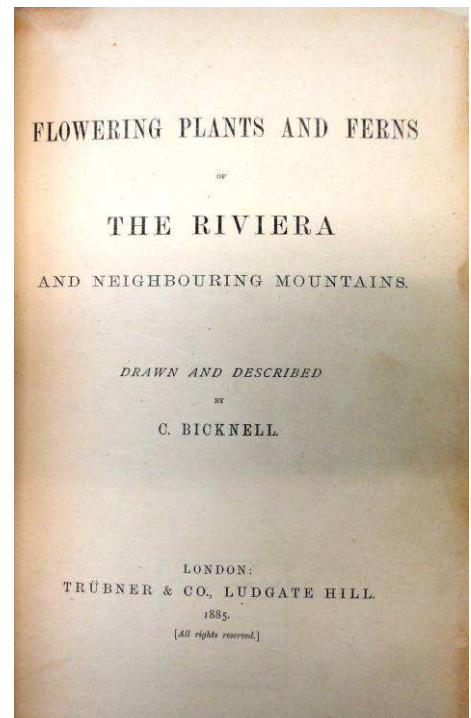
Kew has a number of materials relating to Clarence Bicknell: its Library has several of his books, its Herbarium has specimens collected by him, and its Archives have letters concerning him

Clarence Bicknell (1842-1918) studied at Cambridge, became an Anglican priest, and in 1879 took up residence on the Italian Riviera as pastor of the church in Bordighera. He was active as a botanist, publishing two books on the local flora, and later as an archaeologist and author of the book 'Guide to the Prehistoric Rock Engravings of the Italian Maritime Alps' (1913). His collections can be seen in the Museo-Biblioteca Bicknell which he founded in Bordighera, and in museums and botanical gardens in many countries.

Library

The Library at Kew has the books that Bicknell published on the flora of the Riviera:

- Flowering Plants and Ferns of the Riviera and neighbouring mountains, drawn and described by C. Bicknell, London, Trübner & co., 1885 (the Library has 2 copies)
- Flora of Bordighera and San Remo by Clarence Bicknell, A catalogue of the wild plants growing in western Liguria, in the area bounded by the outer watersheds of the Arma and Nervia torrents, Bordighera: P. Gibelli, 1896 (the Library's copy is one of only four in British libraries)



It also has a book that was owned by Bicknell:

- The Forest Trees of Britain by the Rev. C.A. Johns, SPCK, London, 1847

This book has ‘Clarence Bicknell’ inscribed in ink in his hand on the flyleaf; a bookplate of the Biblioteca Societatis Sancti Spiritus (Library of the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit); and a note in pencil ‘June 26/01 Blackwells’. The Brotherhood, of which Clarence was a member, was a High Church community that existed at Stoke on Tern in Shropshire from 1869 to 1879.

Presumably he gave the book to the Library, which was dispersed after the dissolution of the Brotherhood, and then in 1901 the book was sold to Kew by Blackwells of Oxford.



Herbarium

The Herbarium’s catalogue lists 4 specimens collected by Clarence Bicknell:

Species	Find-place	Date
<i>Andrachne telephioides</i>	Italy, Porto Maurizio, Liguria	24/05/1896
<i>Euphrasia bicknellii</i>	Italy, near mouth of R. Nervia, Ventimiglia	05/1897
<i>Carex ambigua</i>	France, on hills near Cannes	02/05/1898
<i>Taraxacum pseudohoppeanum</i>	Italy, Pian Tendasco, above Val Casterino	21/06/1911

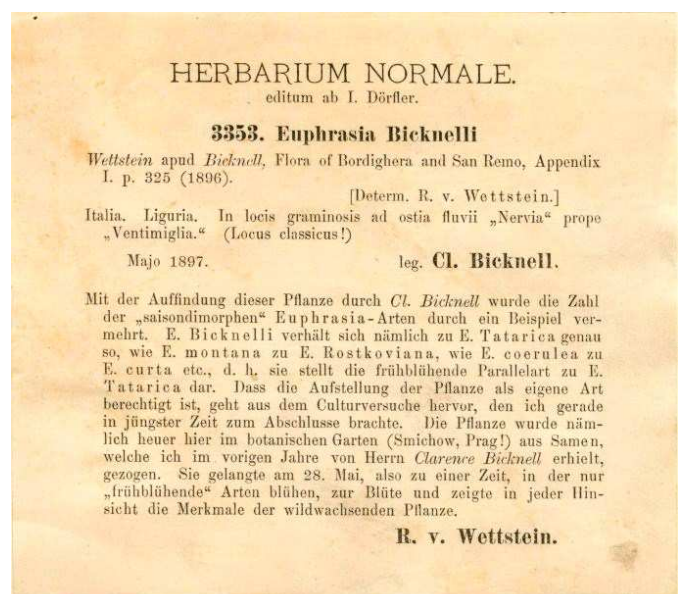
The sources of the specimens are indicated on their labels:

- *Andrachne telephioides* is from ‘Herbarium C. Bicknell Bordighera’
- *Euphrasia bicknellii* is from ‘Herbarium Normale editum ab I Dörfler’
- *Carex ambigua* is from a German source, not identified
- *Taraxacum Pseudohoppeanum* is

from ‘Flora Italica Exsiccata Series II curantibus A. Fiori et A. Béguinot’.

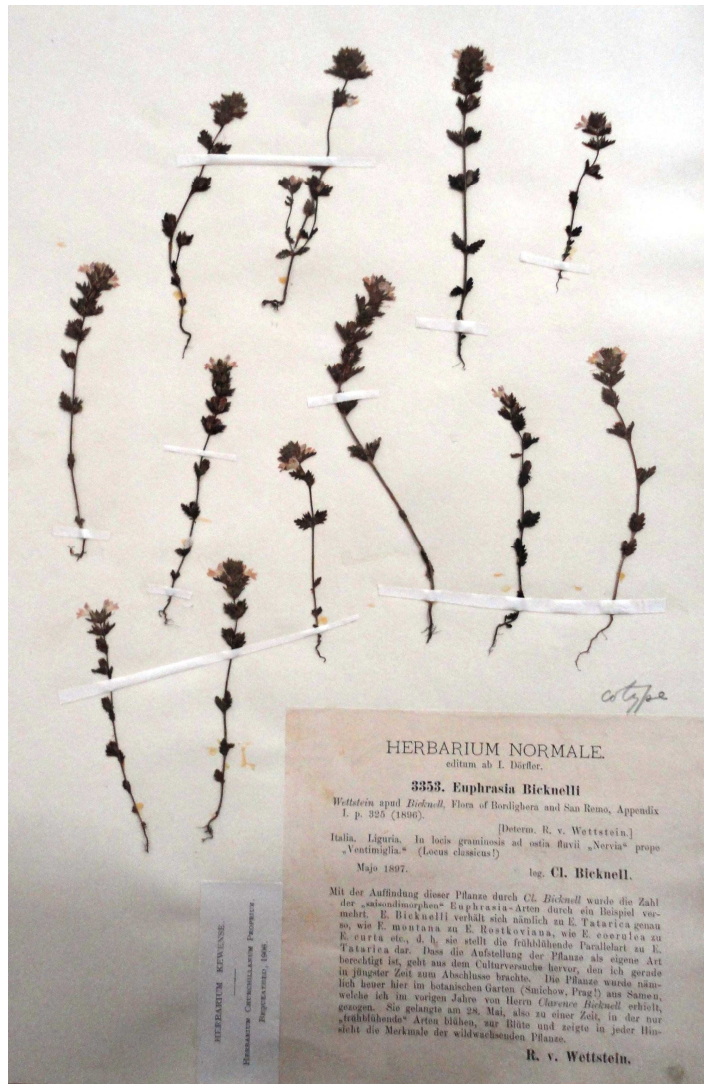
The specimen is attributed to ‘Bicknell C. & Pollini, L.’ (Luigi Pollini assisted Clarence in his botanical and archaeological work)

‘Herbarium Normale’ (Vienna) and ‘Flora Italica Exsiccata’ (Florence) were botanical exchange networks to which Bicknell contributed specimens that can be found today in several other places, for example the Oxford Herbaria.



In his 'Flora of Bordighera and San Remo' Bicknell included *Euphrasia bicknellii* in an Appendix (page 325) as a species that he had just discovered in 1896. He writes 'this *Euphrasia* growing near the mouth of the Nervia... is according to Prof. R. von Wettstein, a new species, and one whose existence he had long suspected. It is closely allied to *E. tatarica* Fisch. and stands in the same relation to it as *E. montana* to *E. Rostkoviana*... that is to say it is the early-flowering counterpart of the late-flowering *E. tatarica*'.

The Austrian botanist Richard Wettstein (1863-1931) was professor at Prague from 1892 and at Vienna from 1899. When Bicknell sent the *Euphrasia* to Wettstein for identification, he named the new species after him. The label from Dörfler's Herbarium Normale includes a text (in German) by Wettstein which explains similarly that *E. bicknellii* is closely allied to *E. tatarica*, and also says that seeds of *E. bicknellii*



sent to Wettstein by Bicknell have germinated in the botanical garden in Prague. Another specimen of *Euphrasia bicknellii* collected by Bicknell 'near the mouth of the Nervia' on 6 August 1896 is in the Herbarium of the University of Montpellier.

A list of contributors to the Herbarium of Kew published in 1901 includes the entry 'Bicknell, Clarence, Balearic Islands, 1899'. This probably relates to a consignment of seeds recorded in a 'Goods Inwards' list as

'Bicknell, C. Seeds. *Pimpinella bicknellii* Briquet, Majorca (Balearic Islands) did not germinate'

The species *Pimpinella bicknellii*, endemic to Majorca, was discovered by Bicknell in 1897 and named after him in 1898 by John Briquet, Director of the Botanical Garden of Geneva.



Archives

In the Archives are two letters concerning Clarence Bicknell: one to Sir David Prain (Director of Kew) from Sir George King, and another to Prain from Bicknell (Directors' Correspondence Volume 148 S European Letters 1901-1914 f95 & f96). Following are my transcriptions of them (with kind permission of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew):

Sir George King to Sir David Prain

Hotel des Anglais, San Remo, 17 Nov 1907

My dear Prain

In case you do not already know him I send this letter to introduce to you Mr Clarence Bicknell who has lived and worked for many years in Bordighera. Mr Bicknell has published a beautifully illustrated volume on Riviera plants, besides having collected a magnificent herbarium of the Flora of his region. He is about to go to Ceylon on a botanical tour and is anxious to get one or two introductions to people there who are likely to help him. Except Willis I know no-one there now. But I hear Willis is on furlough in England, in which case may I ask you kindly to give Mr Bicknell his address. I would be grateful if you could also give Mr Bicknell introductions to any other botanists in Ceylon. Yours most sincerely, G. King

Clarence Bicknell to Sir David Prain

Bordighera, Italy, 22 Nov 1907

Dear Sir,

On returning yesterday evening from a short visit to England I found the enclosed letter from my good friend Sir George King, together with another addressed to Mr Willis at the Peradeniya Bot. Gardens. I imagine Sir George thought his letters would be forwarded to me in England and that I should be able to go to Kew and make your acquaintance. As a matter of fact I did hope to go there last Sunday, but a sudden attack of lumbago kept me a prisoner for many days and I had to cancel all engagements and remain quiet till Wednesday when I managed to travel back here. I shall only be in Ceylon about a month but I should be very glad to have an introduction to any of the Directors of the Bot. Gardens as my chief object in going [there is] to see the tropical vegetation.... Yours faithfully, Clarence Bicknell

Notes on persons mentioned in the correspondence

Sir George King (1840-1909) was Director of the Royal Botanic Garden, Calcutta, India, from 1871 to 1897. From 1898, on medical advice, he mainly resided on the Italian Riviera at San Remo, near to Bordighera, though he worked each summer at Kew. He died in 1909 at San Remo, where he is recorded by a memorial tablet at his burial place.

Sir David Prain (1857-1944) became Director of the Calcutta Garden in 1898 in succession to King, and was Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, from 1905 to 1922.

John Christopher Willis (1868-1958) was Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Peradeniya, Ceylon, from 1896 to 1912.

Illustrations

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1. Title-page of 'Flowering Plants and Ferns of the Riviera'
2. Title-page of 'Flora of Bordighera and San Remo'
3. Autograph of Clarence Bicknell in 'The Forest Trees of Britain'
4. Bookplate of Biblioteca Societatis Sancti Spiritus in 'The Forest Trees of Britain'
5. Label of *Euphrasia bicknellii*
6. Herbarium specimen *Euphrasia bicknellii*