



Scratches on the Face of Time

The newsletter of the Clarence Bicknell Association

N°2 - Autumn 2015

REPORT - Meetings in July 2015, Bordighera and Tende

As in May 2014, we presented talks at the Musée des Merveilles in Tende on Friday 17th July 2015 and at the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera on Saturday 18th July. Marcus Bicknell, Dr. Christopher Chippindale and Graham Avery presented different aspects of "Clarence Bicknell – the research scientist". The papers are available on the downloads page of www.clarencebicknell.com.

We also held a General Meeting of the Clarence Bicknell Association; the minutes are on the same download page. Marcus Bicknell informed the meeting of the very positive spirit among the committee members/researchers. Some of their work is in this newsletter and on the website ("News & Views") such as research into Bicknell's life and times, his network of researcher friends and his work pattern. Geoff Bicknell and Titus Bicknell were confirmed in their appointments to the committee of the Association, Geoff to the post of treasurer. The Association has also been supporting Valerie Browne Lester who has been commissioned to write a biography of Clarence Bicknell, and the Bicknell-Merveilles European research project (for which there was a fascinating interchange of ideas among 30 academics from 5 countries, and plans for an application for EU funding, at a meeting in Genoa in July).

Clarence's Pendants

Valerie Browne Lester, author and relation of Clarence Bicknell, spent much of January 2015 in the Museo Bicknell in Bordighera researching her biography of Clarence Bicknell. This is one of her dispatches from the front line.

A series of large plastic boxes and a bookcase contain Marcus Bicknell's family collection of works by and about Clarence Bicknell, photographs, and other memorabilia. The strangest item is a leather strap which from which hang the silver medallion of the Societas Sancti Spiritus (the brotherhood to which Clarence belonged when he was at Stoke-on-Tern) and two green pendants. Is it a keychain? Is it a watch chain?

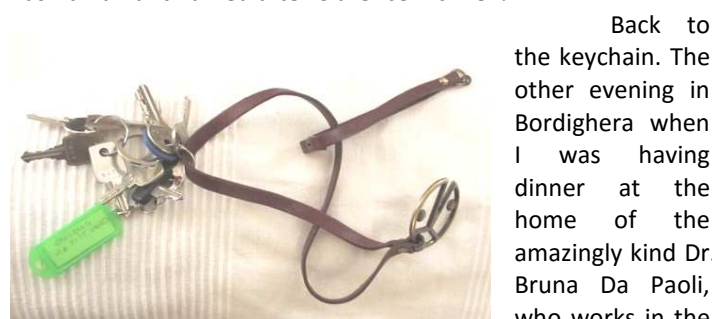
The note written by Margaret Berry that accompanies the strap declares that Clarence brought the jade pendants back from Ceylon, but there's something funny about this. The stones are typical Maori pendants, made from New Zealand greenstone. I double-checked with a New Zealand friend about this and here is what he said: "No question at all, at least not in regard to the one on the left; it's a classic shape (a slightly stylized war-club in fact). The one on the right isn't familiar to me, but the pendant style and colour of the stone is. Even



though I don't recognize the shape, I wouldn't have hesitated to call it greenstone rather than jade."

The pendants are, thus far, the first chip of hard evidence that points to Clarence's legendary trip to the Antipodes. Time and again, those who write about Clarence, including Marcus's uncle Peter Bicknell, mention his trip to New Zealand but do not provide any proof. If he did indeed go there, he must have gone at some point during his year of travels, his lost year, the hiatus between his time in Stoke-on-Trent and his arrival in Bordighera in 1878.

Another tiny clue about a visit by Clarence to the Antipodes surfaced the other day in a letter that Marcus received from Dr. Peter McQuillan of the School of Geography & Environmental Studies at the University of Tasmania. McQuillan says: "I stumbled upon your excellent website on Clarence Bicknell in my attempts to discover something of how his name became attached to one of the most common and conspicuous ants in south eastern Australia: *Iridomyrmex bicknelli*. . . Do you have any evidence that he may have visited Tasmania? Because this is where the original ant specimens were apparently collected, and it is a common ant to this day in the vicinity of the port at Hobart, the capital city of Tasmania." The mind boggles, but is not stunned with surprise, at the thought of a large Tasmanian ant named after Clarence Bicknell!



Back to the keychain. The other evening in Bordighera when I was having dinner at the home of the amazingly kind Dr. Bruna Da Paoli, who works in the Museo Bicknell, I happened to notice an item on a small table in her entryway. I took a photo, and I think you'll agree that Bruna's key strap bears a remarkable resemblance to the photo at the top of this page.

NEWS - Clarence Bicknell & Émile Cartailhac - archaeologists and the best of friends

Two new documents were published on www.clarencebicknell.com in late 2014, both on **Clarence Bicknell** (1842-1918) and the eminent French archaeologist **Émile Cartailhac** (1845-1921) the French prehistorian and cave-art expert (portrait, right).

In 2007 Pierre Machu, then Conservateur de Patrimoine, Direction des Musées de France, Inspection



Générale des Musées in Paris, wrote an article for "Antiquités Nationales" on Bicknell and Cartailhac. This paper highlights 63 sheets of rubbings and squeezes by Bicknell of rock engravings held in the Musée d'Archéologie Nationale in St-Germain-en-Laye, a collection which had not been analysed before Machu. It becomes apparent from letters between Bicknell and Cartailhac, who had become friends more than just colleagues, that these 63 rubbings had been made by Bicknell for Cartailhac "to order". The paper draws expertly on documents provided to Pierre Machu from the Bicknell family collection (especially the Casa Fontanalba visitors' book) and the work notebooks written by Bicknell and kept at Genoa University.

Pierre Machu also informed us of letters between Bicknell and Cartailhac from this same period which he had located in two museums; he subsequently transcribed all the letters he had found and made them available to us to share with you. Alongside the exchange of views about the rock engravings are comments from both men on travel arrangements, weather, health, death, the First World War and even a person who both greatly disliked. In November 2014 I compiled the Machu transcripts together with my comments on the people mentioned in the letter, and you can download it off the website. I think these are among the documents which reveal the most about Clarence Bicknell, the man. I have also logged all the dates given in the letters in a chronology of Bicknell's life (more detailed than the one on this website) which will support Valerie Browne Lester who is currently researching a new biography of Clarence Bicknell to be published in advance of the 2018 centenary celebrations.

In Clarence's Time - George MacDonald in Bordighera

Susie Bicknell, February 2015

George MacDonald and Clarence Bicknell both settled in Bordighera in 1878. George was already an established literary personality with a large family and little money. Clarence was unknown with no particular vocation except as a priest, a bachelor (which he remained) and with enough private means to support himself. Within a few years, they had established themselves as pivots of society in Bordighera. However, it seems strange that the two men who had much in common appeared to have had little contact with each other.



They both had stints as priests early on in their lives. Clarence was ordained in 1866 and came to Bordighera in 1878; he became chaplain to the Anglican church there. Eighteen years older than Clarence, Scotsman George MacDonald became pastor in 1850 at a Congregational Church in Arundel, Sussex. However, three years later, he was forced to resign, accused of heresy as his sermons became more and more imbued with mysticism. So he decided to pursue his literary vocation in which he had considerable success, particularly with his many fantasy and fairy-tale novels. MacDonald's reputation became such that he moved in the top literary circles, acquainted with Tennyson, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Trollope, Ruskin and Lewis Carroll. In fact MacDonald's children were so

enthusiastic when the Alice books were read to them that Carroll was encouraged to present them for publication.

But health-wise, things were not so good in MacDonald's large family of 11 children. The "family attendant" – as MacDonald called tuberculosis - was hovering over them and the decision was taken to find a home on the Italian Riviera. Queen Victoria, having enjoyed reading his books to her children, had accorded MacDonald a Civil List pension in



1877, and friends clubbed round to help him build a very large house in Bordighera. So in 1878, just as Clarence arrived also, the MacDonalds installed themselves in Bordighera where they spent the winter season for the next 20 years and where MacDonald wrote twenty books. However, the curative powers of the local air were not enough to prevent four of his children dying there.

Clarence was only the Anglican Chaplain for one year. But occupied by his botanical and archaeological pursuits, he decided to settle in Bordighera and devoted himself to philanthropic projects for the local Italians and animating the British community. He bought the "Villa Rosa" from the Fanshawe-Walkers. The house was large for a bachelor but remained his home till he died. And between 1907 and 1917, Clarence received more than 250 visitors at the Casa Fontanalba who had made their way up the twisty mountain road from St Dalmas de Tende to Casterino.

Clarence had literary aspirations too, though of a lighter variety than MacDonald's. As Peter Bicknell writes: "His delight in playful fantasy has much in common with the nonsense of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. He loved puzzles, riddles, jokes, puns and parlour games. For Margaret Berry he made a botanical version of the popular Victorian game of happy Families." These fantastical works were wonderfully illustrated.

Image, below. A part of the MacDonald's enormous living room where plays, lectures and all manner of activities



took place.

The “Museo Bicknell” is Clarence’s great creation. It was opened in 1888 to provide a cultural centre for local history. Concerts, plays and exhibitions were held there, many of them fund-raisers for local charities. Later an additional library was built. With a British population in this period of over 5000 there was no shortage of potential audiences.

Meanwhile, MacDonald’s large home, the “Casa Coraggio”, became a cultural centre in itself. The 130 square metre living room was the venue for concerts, mainly, lectures, oratorios, *tableaux vivants*, plays staged and acted by the whole family, fancy-dress balls and charity parties for the locals. Italian fishermen hobnobbed with British aristocrats and literary figures.

So we wonder if Bicknell and Macdonald frequented each other’s gatherings and events? After all, they lived only 100 yards from each other. They certainly had some similarities: very industrious, sociable, open and caring. Both helped after the bad 1887 earthquake. MacDonald’s huge living room became an emergency hospital. In 1917, Clarence’s Museum was used for war victims, as was the Casino. Clarence remarks in a letter to Pelloux in the same year “What a good thing it is to see useless or mischievous places being turned to good account”.

George and Clarence may both have been pivots of Bordighera society, but both also had passionate and time-consuming interests. They were not dilettante ex-pats just wintering on the Riviera. Clarence concentrated on botany, archaeology and Esperanto, MacDonald on his writing.

But as far as we know, they were not great friends, or even very well acquainted. Why not? Clarence used Robert Falconer MacDonald, one of George’s sons and an architect, to design the Casa Fontanalba, but so far that is the only sign of contact between them. Perhaps it was simply that Clarence was an outdoor person and George an indoor person.

(A full version of this article can be found on the downloads page of www.clarencebicknell.com)

NEWS - An Early Influence On Clarence Bicknell: The Rev. Rowland William Corbet (1839-1919)

By Valerie Browne Lester, researching a new biography of Clarence Bicknell, January 2015

Clarence Bicknell entered Trinity College, Cambridge, when he was 19. Recently orphaned — his father Elhanan died that very year and his mother Lucinda had died when he was 9 years old — he was sorely in need of supportive friends and role models.

Clarence had been brought up in his father’s Unitarian faith, a tolerant, open-minded faith that was an offshoot of the Protestant Reformation. It eschewed ritual and preached religious freedom, the oneness of God, and the unity of creation. It was condemned by the mainstream Church of England, and its members were often persecuted and referred to as “Dissenters.” When Clarence arrived at Cambridge, he drifted away from Unitarianism and fell under the influence of members of the Oxford Movement, whose principles were in direct opposition to the Unitarians’. They wanted to return the Anglican church to its pre-Reformation, Catholic roots. The zeal of its adherents attracted Clarence, and he soon joined the movement, finding solidarity with its members and a sense of purpose. Rowland Corbet, two years ahead of Clarence at

Trinity, was the member of the Oxford Movement at Cambridge to have the greatest influence on him, and would be a central figure in Clarence’s life in the years to come.

Clarence’s interest in theology was also enhanced by conversations with his tutor at Trinity, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, arguably the greatest Bible scholar of his day, who later became Bishop of Durham. Soon after his arrival at Cambridge, Clarence had himself christened in the Church of England, firmly turning away from his father’s Unitarianism.

As soon as he was awarded his B.A. in mathematics, Clarence took the first steps towards becoming an Anglican priest. In 1866 he was ordained a deacon in the Church of England and was soon appointed as a curate of St. Paul’s, Walworth, Surrey, along with two of his friends from Trinity. The three young men, the vicar’s “three gallants,” toiled arduously for the good of this poorest of parishes, all the while celebrating the Christian faith in the most flamboyant and ritualistic Anglo-Catholic manner. Visiting preachers made a point of coming to the church, and among those was Clarence’s mentor from Cambridge, the Rev. Rowland Corbet.

Image, right. The reverend Rowland Corbet, rector of Stoke upon Tern, in 1862. Son of Richard and Eleanor Corbet of Adderley Hall.

Corbet must have had something of the appeal of a snake charmer to have succeeded in tempting 12 young men to follow him to his newly-formed Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit (Societas Sanctus Spiriti) at Stoke-on-Tern, a tiny village in the depths of the Shropshire countryside. Corbet preceded them to Stoke-on-Tern, where his father, the lord of the manor, offered him the living at the parish church. The church itself having been ruined in a fire, Corbet set about rebuilding it with the help of the local population (including Thomas Dutton, the Shropshire giant) and the newly-arrived band of brothers, including Clarence.

Clarence lived at Stoke-on-Tern for nearly six years (1873-1878). He was housed with the other brothers in parish buildings, and they all continued to uphold the ideals and rituals of the Anglo-Catholic church. Clarence was a founding member and administrator of the Stoke-on-Tern Temperance Society at whose meetings he often performed, singing, playing the piano, reciting poems, and giving lectures. His lecture on “Wild Flowers” was particularly well-received.

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But how did he spend the rest of his time in such a remote enclave? No doubt, he spent many hours in prayer and religious debate, and we can count on Clarence’s rambling throughout the countryside, botanizing. But the hours must have dragged and spiritual questions must have constantly



plagued him. Corbet himself was beginning to have serious doubts about his mission, and that too may have affected Clarence who finally made the decision to leave Stoke-on-Tern. At the beginning of 1878 he headed out into the wider world, and began the process of turning his back on organized religion. Image, right. As for Corbet, he disbanded the brotherhood, became a mystic and a popular speaker, and married in 1884.

To provide information to Valerie, please email her via www.valerielester.com

Can you help with research?

Between 2015 and 2018 there will be two ongoing research initiatives, the EU-funded Clarence Bicknell 2018 Research Project involving 6 or more institutes from round Europe and the work of Clarence Bicknell's biographer Valerie Browne Lester aided by members of the Clarence Bicknell Association including Susie and Marcus Bicknell, Helen Blanc-Francard, Christopher Chippindale and Graham Avery. If you have any source material on any of the topics covered on this web site or relating to Clarence's life, please email info@clarencebicknell.com or via www.valerielester.com. In particular, we have doubts or need for further source material on the following details:

1) Clarence's education, including in Brighton like his brothers, before Trinity College Cambridge. Which school or which tutor?

2) At Cambridge Clarence Bicknell fell under the influence of religious thinkers including those in the Oxford Movement. Who were they? With which of them was he in contact?

3) At Walworth and thereafter in Stoke-upon-Tern as a curate, Clarence Bicknell was active in the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit (Societas Sancti Spiritus) with Roland Corbett and others. What can you tell us about this order, their beliefs and their influence?

4) Among those at Stoke-upon-Tern, and in Bordighera shortly thereafter, were the following individuals. Do you have a diary by one of them or any source material which can shed light on their beliefs and their relationship with Clarence Bicknell?

- Rev Hubert George Morse (Clergy House, Walworth)
- Rev Frederick William Puller (Clergy House, Walworth)
- Rev John Going, Pastor of St Pauls Walworth
Rev Luke Rivington
- Rev Rowland William Corbet (1839-1919), Walworth, Oxford Movement", founder of the Societas Sancti Spiritus (Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit)
- Richard Meux Benson, founder with Corbet of the Giovanni Battista Society of Oxford
- Rev Charles Egerton Fiennes Stafford at Stoke on Tern.
- William Ding, Lichfield
- Rev Percival Clementi-Smith, member of Societas Sancti Spiritus (Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit) and visited other churches with Clarence in 1874
- Rev Arthur Heintz Paine
- Mrs Russell Gurney (Lord Mount Temple)
- George MacDonald (Lord Mount Temple), Scottish writer living in Bordighera

5) What was the extent of Clarence Bicknell's inheritance from his rich father Elhanan, how did he invest it, and can it really have lasted him all his life including investment in hostels

for the poor in Walworth, Stoke-upon-Tern and Bordighera, the Museo Bicknell, the library and the Casa Fontanalba?

6) Who was Alice Campbell? Enzo Bernardini in 1971 and others refer to Clarence Bicknell's close friend Alice Campbell at his deathbed and buried alongside him at Tende. We have no trace of any original source material to this effect. Help us please.

7) Another myth might be that Clarence Bicknell died of mushroom poisoning. True or false? What source material, in an academic sense, can you provide?

8) Some considered him influential in the early days of the Esperanto movement and he participated in the Universal Congresses of Boulogne, Barcelona and Cambridge. Was he a leader with a role, or an ardent follower?

If you have source material please email info@clarencebicknell.com or Valerie Lester via www.valerielester.com.

REPORT - Bordighera, Museo Bicknell, 15 luglio 2015, visita guidata al Cimitero degli Inglesi in Arziglia

Mercoledì 15 luglio, l'Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri in collaborazione con gli "Amici del Museo Bicknell", e con il patrocinio del Comune di Bordighera, ha organizzato una visita guidata in Arziglia (Bordighera) al "Cimitero degli Inglesi", dopo il successo dell'analoga iniziativa dello scorso anno.

Il singolare itinerario ha preso avvio al 2° ingresso del "Campo B" da dove è iniziato un viaggio "parlato" alla riscoperta dei tantissimi stranieri - artisti, nobili, religiosi, marinai, scienziati - che dalla seconda metà dell'Ottocento sino allo scoppio della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, scelsero la Città delle Palme come loro seconda patria e dove conclusero la loro vita in una terra straniera diventata la loro casa.

Tra le tombe visitate, quelle di Sir Edward Talbot Thackeray, del Generale Charles Mansell Fasken CB, del reverendo Edward Archeson Gillespie, di Fanny Cecilia Bell e dei coniugi Charles Pearce-Serecold e Marie Grentell, genitori di Margareth Berry, colei che tanto ebbe a cuore le sorti del Museo Bicknell, nipote acquisita di Clarence Bicknell, avendone sposato proprio a Bordighera il nipote Edward, figlio della sorella Ada.

L'iniziativa, che si è articolata con soste evocative davanti alle tombe molte delle quali appartenenti ad illustri ospiti inglesi e che ha riscosso notevole successo e partecipazione, oltre a rappresentare una originale e personale "Spoon River" bordigotta, ha voluto anche attirare l'attenzione sullo stato del Camposanto di Bordighera e sulla necessità di una costante manutenzione che dia onore alle tombe illustri che fanno parte del patrimonio cittadino e dell'intero Ponente Ligure.

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