

“Fuchsia and Fulgora” – an overlooked plate from the Encyclopedia Londinensis

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Abstract

An engraving from the *Encyclopedia Londinensis* featuring lanternbugs (Hemiptera Auchenorrhyncha Fulgoridae) is discussed. The plate and its accompanying text seem to have been overlooked in catalogues since its publication in 1810.

Key words: Fulgora, lanternbug, Encyclopedia Londinensis.

Introduction

Around 25 years ago I purchased a framed uncoloured engraving featuring some lanternbugs (Hemiptera Fulgoridae) and a *Fuchsia* plant. Entitled *Fuchsia and Fulgora* there were few clues to where the plate had been published apart from having ‘J. Wilkes 1805’ at the bottom of the page. However, there were no references to any publication around this date under the species names of the insects included in Metcalf (1947). Over the years I showed the engraving to visitors in the hope they might offer some useful suggestion as to its publication. It was only in 2006 that someone suggested I try Google! Within minutes I knew where the plate was published and how it looked in full colour. It had been included in the *Encyclopedia Londinensis* (Wilkes, 1810). A complete copy of this work was located in the Natural History Museum, London from where the accompanying text to the engraving was obtained.

Discussion

The accompanying text (unsigned) from the plate consisted of an entry under *Fulgora* and listed 25 species known in the genus. The largest entry concerned “*Fulgora lanternaria*” (incorrect spelling for *laternaria*) and appears to be an English translation of the text on the lantern bug by Maria Sybilla Merian’s *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* of 1705. Via Wikipedia a link to Goettingen University anyone can view the plates from this remarkable volume. Merian’s plate 49 was clearly the inspiration for the engraver of the 1810 plate, which resembles Merian’s 1705 in most respects. There are some odd aspects of both plates. The nymph shown is said to be a lantern bug but is that of a cicada. Also one of the specimens seems to be made up of a cicada body and a *Fulgora* head.

Merian (1705) was not the first to make the claim that lanternbugs (or lanthornflies) were luminescent (that seems to have arisen from Nehemiah Grew, 1681) but her account and the myth that lanternbugs are luminescent persisted without any evidence at all.

Various questions have arisen from this discovery. Who wrote the English text in the *Encyclopedia*? Although the 1810 *Encyclopedia* entries are not included in Metcalf (1947) he did give a number of references to the period under *laternaria* and the misspelling *lanternaria*. Hopefully these will give a clue to the author of the text.

Little is known about the identity of the engraver ‘J.Pass’ whose name appears at the lower edge of the plate. Many copies of his wide-ranging work are on sale or in various publications but little more is known about his life.

Another mystery concerned the publication of the *Encyclopedia Londinensis* itself. It was published from 1810-1829 in 24 volumes. Parts were published weekly and there are instructions at the end of each volume for the Binder to insert the plates in the correct place. The early volumes are said to be ‘Compiled, digested and arranged’ by John Wilkes of Miland House Sussex, whose entry in Wikipedia states that “John Wilkes (1750 - March 31, 1810) was an English printer, bookseller and stationer. He was a Freeman of Winchester and proprietor of the newspaper *Hampshire Chronicle*. He compiled the *Encyclopedia Londinensis*, which was published between 1810 and 1829 in 24 volumes.”



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