

Anne Lister, illustrator of Martin Lister's *Historiæ Conchyliorum* (1685–1692)

By J. D. WOODLEY

Discovery Bay Marine Laboratory,
P.O. Box 35,
Jamaica,
WEST INDIES.

THE *HISTORIÆ CONCHYLIIORUM*

Martin Lister (1639–1712)¹ was an English physician, naturalist and early Fellow of the Royal Society, whose best-known work of natural history is the *Historiæ Conchyliorum* (1685–1692). In its final form, it is a collection of more than 1,000 prints from copperplate engravings of pictures of shells, briefly described in Latin polynomials. Preliminary sets of plates were prepared, at first under the title *De Cochleis* (1685) and then, as the collection grew, as *Historiæ Conchyliorum Liber I* (1685), II (1686), III (1687), IV (1688) and finally as the whole (*Historiæ sive Synopsis Methodicæ Conchyliorum*) with an appendix, some time after 1692 (Wilkins, 1957; Keynes, 1980; 1981). At the foot of each title page is the line “Susanna et Anna Lister Figuras pin(xerunt).” or “delin(earunt).” Who were these industrious artists, presumably members of Martin Lister’s family?

WIFE AND DAUGHTER? OR TWO DAUGHTERS?

Lister married Hannah Parkinson in 1669.^{2,3} They lived in York from 1670 to 1683, when they moved to London. By this time they had several daughters and at least one son. Historians and bibliographers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries report that the illustrations for the *Historiæ* were made by two of the daughters (De Bure, 1764; Da Costa, 1776; Maton and Rackett, 1804; Turton, 1819; Johnston, 1850; Davies 1873; Boulger, 1893). In the present century, this has been questioned. Gunther (1945) wrote, without comment, that the drawings were by Lister’s “devoted wife and daughter, Susannah and Anna Lister” and Raven (1942) that they were made by “Lister’s daughter Susannah and his wife, Anna”.⁴ Stearns (1967) pointed out that “because of the occasional identification of the names Anna and Hannah, the womenfolk may have been Lister’s wife and daughter. There is uncertainty on this point”. Keynes (1980; 1981) devoted several pages to demolishing what he calls “the legend” that the illustrations were the work of two of Lister’s daughters.

Keynes pointed out that some of the earliest engravings in the *Historiæ Conchyliorum* were reprints of plates used in *Historiæ Animalium Angliæ tres Tractatus* (Lister, 1678). These, like that illustrating Lister’s article on snails in the *Philosophical Transactions* (1674), were made by William Lodge, who, with Lister, was one of a “club of virtuosi” at York (Walpole, 1771). Further, knowing that Lister married in 1669, Keynes suggested that “His eldest child, not necessarily a daughter, could not have been more than sixteen years old when the earliest title-page for the book was

dated 1685 . . . which virtually rules out any daughter as having worked on either drawing or engraving at that date; yet it does not exclude the wife as having been the first family collaborator, most probably as draughtsman or water-colourist rather than as engraver". Keynes developed this idea, suggesting that Lister's wife was "the first to profit by instruction from Lodge", a friend and neighbour in York, "in both drawing and engraving, perhaps watched by the child, Susannah". Later, when the initials of mother and daughter were added to the title-page, "the daughter's were put above the mother's, perhaps to encourage her". Because Keynes found no other reference to a daughter Anna, not even in her father's will, written in 1704, he questions whether she ever existed.

THE TWO DAUGHTERS: CONTEMPORARY COMMENTS

Susanna, the eldest child of Martin and Hannah Lister, was born in the summer of 1670.⁵ Her eldest sister, christened Anne, was born in October 1671.⁶ So she did exist; but was she an artist? Did the "legend" of the two young artists arise in the eighteenth century by confusion of the names of wife and daughter, to be copied from one author to another for 200 years? We can answer these questions directly, from the words of Martin Lister and his colleagues in letters that are now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

First, a letter from Lister in London, "to his wife Anne" in York, that was evidently written when on his way to France with his sister Mrs Jane Allington, on 17 July 1681: "I did send home a box of colour in oil for Susan & Nancy to paint with. As for the pencils sent with them, and the colours in shells, which are for limning, I would have thee lock them carefully up, till I return, for they know not yet the use of them" (Goulding, 1900).⁷ Evidently the two daughters, Susan aged about eleven and "Nancy" not yet ten, were budding artists. Moreover, their further instruction was to be given (or arranged) by Martin Lister and not by his wife.

Second, a letter from Lister (29 October 1692) to Edward Lhwyd, then Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, in which he writes of sending "a few more of the original drawings of my daughters, because you desired them for the museum" (Goulding, 1900). No mention of his wife. The original water-colour and pencil drawings for the *Historiae Conchyliorum* are now in the Bodleian Library (transferred with other papers bequeathed to the Museum by Lister), labelled "Original draughts by Mrs Anne Lister of Lister's Synopsis", although some of them are signed "S.L.". ⁸

Third, an undated letter from Richard Waller (who became Secretary of the Royal Society in 1687) to Martin Lister: "my hearty thanks for your book of shells so curiously designed by your young ladies".⁹ Finally, a letter from John Place to Martin Lister (16 May 1694) records "the Great Duke's singular satisfaction with the ingenious and elaborate book. I told him that the figures were the work of your daughters, which surprises him extremely".¹⁰ It need no longer surprise us, though it was in danger of being forgotten!

Anne Lister was 13 or 14 in 1685, when her initials were engraved, with those of her elder sister, on the title page of *De Cochleis*, forerunner to the *Historiae Conchyliorum*.¹¹ It is not unusual for (exceptional) children to draw skilfully at an early age. By the time that the work was finished, both young women were in their

early twenties, and Lhwyd wrote to Lister "I do not wonder your workw(omen) begin to be tired; you have held them so long to it" (Gunther, 1945).¹²

I agree with Keynes that William Lodge (who died in 1689) probably engraved some of the early plates, from drawings made by Susanna and Anne. Keynes also records Lister's occasional impatience with the tardiness of Lodge, and it is likely that he encouraged his talented daughters to practice engraving. A plate illustrating one of his letters in *Philosophical Transactions* (1685) is signed "S. sculp(it)" and Susan lightly scratched her name on plate 556 in the *Historiae Conchyliorum* (Keynes, 1980; 1981); was it her first? It certainly seems sketchier and less confident than the work of Lodge, although it is executed in a similar style. Wilkins (1952, 1957) was the first to point out that two styles are evident in the book. The bold engravings of Anne Lister are characterised by the shading; she used parallel lines of graduated thickness, rather than the cross-hatching favoured by Lodge and Susanna. The painting styles of the two sisters are even more different than their engraving.¹³ Anne painted as she engraved: bold and precise, with the same graduated shading lines, but done with a brush. Susanna used puddles of wash and some of her pictures are not very good!

Anne Lister's last signed plate is dated 1693 (Keynes, 1980; 1981). We have not yet found any record of her death, but guess that she died between 1695 (when her mother's memorial tablet (Parker, 1992, Plate VI b) reported "six children in tears") and 1704, when her name did not appear in her father's will (Davies, 1873) among those of Alexander, Barbara, Dorothy, Frances and Susanna, although she would have been only 33 years old at that time.¹⁴

Let the last words be those of Maton and Rackett (1804) on the illustrations to the *Historiae Conchyliorum*: "We ought not to omit mentioning that the delineations of all these, for the most part so accurate, came from the fair hands of this celebrated naturalist's daughters, Susannah and Ann Lister, whose names deserve to descend to posterity with their father's, and whose truly meritorious industry and ingenuity are patterns for their sex".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to record, with love and respect, that much of the research for this article was done by my late parents, Gilbert Matthew and Ruby Woodley. I am grateful to Paul Clifford, Chairman, and Michael Risk, for accommodation in the Department of Geology, McMaster University, where this paper was written, and to the Canadian National Science and Engineering Research Council for a Visiting International Fellowship. I thank A.J. Jamieson of the West Yorkshire Archive Service for reading an entry in the Carleton parish register, and Catherine Hopwood, John Parker and Lee Peachey for reading earlier drafts of this article, which is Contribution Number 555 from the Discovery Bay Marine Laboratory, University of the West Indies.

NOTES

¹ Hitherto, Martin Lister was only known to have been born in about 1638, but the record of his birth on 10 April 1639 may be seen at the County Record Office in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, in the Bishop's Transcripts of the parish of Radclive.

² 15 August 1669 at St Sampson, York (photocopy, in the York City Library, of the original register). John Ray offered his congratulations in a letter dated 15 November 1669 (Gunther, 1928) not 7 May as reported by Stearns (1967).

³ Hannah's father, Thomas, was a nephew of John Parkinson (1567–1650), herbalist and gardener, author of *Paradisi in sole Paradisus terrestris* and *Theatrum Botanicum*. I like to think that the families of Hannah and Martin were acquainted through the friendship of their great-uncles (John and Sir Matthew), who had been colleagues (as Botanist and Physician) at the court of Charles I.

⁴ Raven acknowledged that he had the use of Gunther's manuscript, prepared before his death in 1940: hence my order of citation.

⁵ "Susanna the daughter of Martin Lister, Clerk and Anna his wife was baptized the nynth of June in the yeare 1670" (Parish register (P 18/3) of Carleton in Craven, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds).

⁶ Born 13 October 1671, baptised 24 October at Holy Trinity, Micklegate, York.

⁷ Bodleian Library, Oxford University, MS Lister 4, f. 77; (hereafter MS Lister).

⁸ MS Lister 9. Lister himself (1698, in Stearns, 1967) referred to the finished work as the *Synopsis Conchyliorum*.

⁹ MS Lister 3, f. 235–6.

¹⁰ MS Lister 3, f. 211–8.

¹¹ "Anna", used on the Latin title pages, is the Latinised form of the name with which she was christened.

¹² P 155; MS Lister 3, f. 154, 18 February 1692.

¹³ MS Lister 9.

¹⁴ Martin Lister's will: Surrey 1712, Barnes February 33, at Somerset House.

REFERENCES

- B[OULGER], G.S., 1893 Martin Lister. *Dictionary of national biography* 33: 350–351.
- DA COSTA, E.M., 1776 *Elements of conchology, or an introduction to the knowledge of shells*. London.
- DAVIES, R., 1873 A memoir of Martin Lister. *The Yorkshire Archaeological and Topographical Journal* 6: 297–320.
- DE BURE, G.F., 1764 *Bibliographie instructive: ou traité de la connoissance des livres rare et singulier. Vol [2] de la jurisprudence et des sciences et arts*. Paris.
- GOULDING, R. W. 1900 Martin Lister, M.D., F.R.S. *Associated Architectural Societies' Reports and Papers* 25 (2): 329–370.
- GUNTHER, R.W.T. 1928 *Further correspondence of John Ray*. London. Pp. 332.
- GUNTHER, R.T., 1945 *Early science in Oxford 14: Life and letters of Edward Lhwyd*. Oxford. Pp 576.
- KEYNES, G., 1980 Dr Martin Lister, F.R.S. Some uncollected authors LI, Part II. *The Book Collector* 29: 50–81.
- KEYNES, G., 1981 *Dr Martin Lister: a bibliography*. St Paul's Bibliographies, Godalming. Pp 52.
- JOHNSTON, G., 1850 *An introduction to conchology; or, elements of the natural history of molluscous animals*. London. Pp 614.
- LISTER, M., 1674 Letter concerning the first part of his table of snails, with some quære's relating to these insects, and his table. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 9 (105): 96–99.
- LISTER, M., 1678 *Historiæ animalium Angliæ tres tractatus*. London. Pp 250.
- LISTER, M., 1685 Letter to Mr Ray concerning some particulars that might be added to the Ornithology. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 14 (175): 1159–1161.
- LISTER, M., 1685–92 *Historiæ sive synopsis methodicæ conchyliorum*. London. Pp c. 920.
- MATON, W.G and RACKETT, T. 1804 An historical account of testaceological writers. *Transactions of the Linnean Society* 7: 119–244.
- PARKER, J.R., 1992 Dr Martin Lister, F.R.S.: physician and zoologist. Pp 1–27 in Parker, J.R. and Harley, B.H. (eds) *Martin Lister's English Spiders 1678*. Colchester.
- RAVEN, C.E., 1942 *John Ray, Naturalist, his life and works*. Cambridge. Pp 506.

- STEARNS, R.P., (Ed), 1967 *A Journey to Paris in the year 1698, by Martin Lister*. Facsimile Reprints in the History of Science, No.4. Urbana, Illinois. Pp 308.
- TURTON, W., 1819 *A Conchological dictionary of the British islands*. London. Pp 272.
- WALPOLE, H., 1771 *Anecdotes of painting in England* Vol. 5: *A catalogue of engravers*. Strawberry Hill.
- WILKINS, G.L., 1952 The shell collections of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. (1660–1753). *Journal of Conchology* 23: 247–259.
- WILKINS, G.L., 1957 Notes on the *Historia Conchyliorum* of Martin Lister (1638–1712). *Journal for the Bibliography of Natural History* 3: 196–205.

(Accepted 18 October 1993.)