

Obituary

Lionel George Higgins, 1891-1985 (*)

Pamela GILBERT, W. G. TREMEWAN & R. I. VANE-WRIGHT

British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, UK.

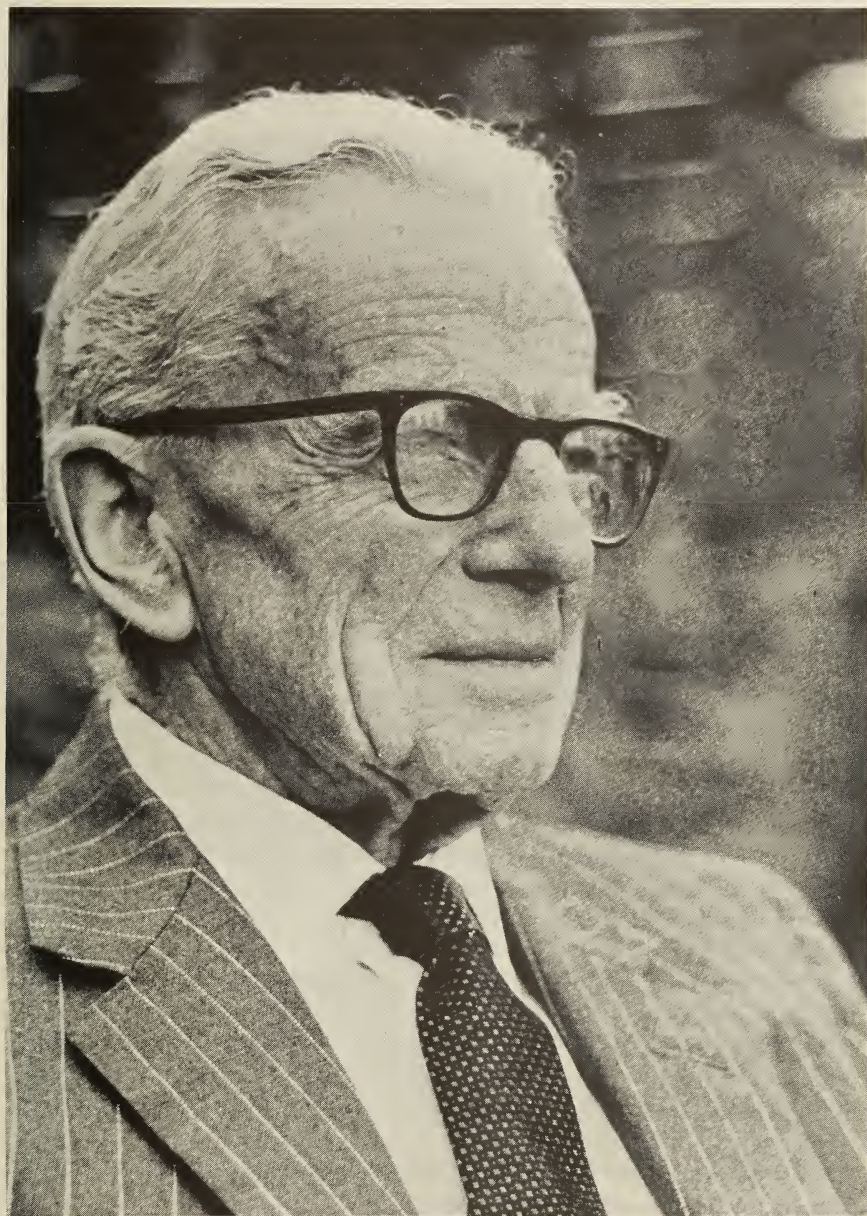
Lionel George HIGGINS, MA, MD, FRCS, FRCOG, FRES, one of the great lepidopterists of this century, died on October 9th 1985, at the age of 94. The son of Frederick and Mabel Higgins, Lionel was born in Bedford on May 26th 1891. His childhood was spent in rural Hertfordshire — this, and a bout of rheumatic fever at the age of eight, with the consequent need to find a relatively gently hobby for a delicate child, probably laid the foundations for his life-long interest in natural history. He was also interested in classical music, and was a good violinist. His career, however, was to be in medicine : after taking a medical degree at Clare College, Cambridge, he qualified at St Thomas' Hospital in 1917, and was elected FRCS in 1920. He served in the Royal Navy, as a surgeon-lieutenant, during the latter part of the First World War. After moving to Woking in 1922, the area of Surrey in which he was to live for the rest of his life, he married his wife Nesta (née Farquhar) in 1925. Initially in practice as a family doctor, he later specialised as an obstetrician and gynaecologist, skills not entirely inappropriate for a man who had four children. During the 1940s he was instrumental in the opening of Woking Maternity Hospital, and he received a doctorate for his study of anaemia in premature babies. He never lost contact with his chosen profession, and was active as a locum even in his 90th year.

By 1922 he had also decided on the speciality he was going to follow as a hobby : the taxonomy and systematics of Palaearctic butterflies. His first entomological publication appeared in 1924 (a 60 page paper on Ethiopian *Hesperia*, which appeared in the Society's (**) then premier journal, the *Transactions*) and he pursued such work with so much vigour that sixty years later he had published nearly 2000 pages on the subject, amassed a collection of 35.000 specimens, and built up an outstanding library containing many rare and valuable entomological works.

The collection was carefully developed from a variety of sources. He had many contacts, and was always trying to get people to collect or send material from remote parts of the world, especially the Palaearctic region. In recent

(*) Reprinted from *Antenna* 10 (2) : 65-67, 1986.

(**) The Royal Entomological Society of London.



Lionel George Higgins, FRES – a portrait taken on his 80th birthday.

years he was successful in obtaining specimens from Nepal and the U.S.S.R. However, a vital part was contributed by his own net, and that swung with equal dedication by his wife Nesta, on trips to most of the European countries — and a great variety of exotic locations, including Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Kashmir and North America.

Lionel selected his library books as carefully as he collected his butterflies. Titles were acquired only if they related to his research, and were the best copies available. The magnificent collection of HÜBNER's works, purchased by the BMNH Entomology Library about ten years ago, is reputed to be the finest set in existence. Previously it had been on loan to the museum for many years because he was afraid that his house might be burgled. However, he was in constant need of the "European" volumes, and one day he informed the librarian, with the usual twinkle in his eye, that he had been forced to buy another set ! The same library was enriched by many presentations — always scarce or unique volumes not previously held, and which he strongly felt should remain in the UK, be looked after, and made available to research workers. A typical example concerns the rare supplements to Roesel von ROSENHOF (1792-93, 1830). Most of the remainder of his library is now with the Hope Entomological Collection, University Museum, Oxford.

Of the 80 books, papers, reviews, bibliographic and other notes that Lionel HIGGINS authored or co-authored, the most important are the following : 1941 — An illustrated catalogue of the Palaearctic *Melitaea* (*Trans RESL* 91: 175-365) ; 1950 — A descriptive catalogue of the Palaearctic *Euphydryas* (*Trans RESL* 101: 435-489) ; 1955 — A descriptive catalogue of the genus *Melicta* and its species, with supplementary notes on the genera *Melitaea* and *Euphydryas* (*Trans RESL* 106: 1-131) ; 1960 — A revision of the melitaeine genus *Chlosyne* and allied species (*Trans RESL* 112: 381-467) ; 1970 (with Norman RILEY) — *A field guide to the butterflies of Britain and Europe*, 380 pp., 60 pls (Collins — also three further editions, and translations into about ten other languages) ; 1975 — *The classification of European butterflies*, 320 pp. (Collins) ; 1981 — A revision of *Phyciodes* and related genera, with a review of the classification of the Melitaeinae (*Bulletin Br. Mus. nat. Hist. (Ent.)* 43: 77-243) ; 1983 (with B. HARGREAVES) — *The butterflies of Britain and Europe*, 256 pp. (Collins). Scattered amongst the shorter items are a number of important papers on the dating and collation of particular entomological works, usually based directly on invaluable copies in his own library. A full bibliography will be published with an account of the butterfly taxa described by HIGGINS (currently being prepared by M. CAMPBELL SMITH, BMNH).

Perhaps one of the more remarkable things about Lionel HIGGINS's published entomological work is that, by the time he was 60, when most professionals

would begin to rest on their laurels, he had completed considerably less than half his total output. During this period his long association with the almost equally durable Norman RILEY (*Antenna* 3: 130-134, 1979) — himself then long retired — began to bear fruit. It was to be another nine years before their outstanding and commercially very successful field guide appeared.

However, mere numbers of pages, dates and other dry statistics do little justice to the quality and significance of Lionel HIGGINS's butterfly work. His collection, used in conjunction with that of the British Museum (Natural History) and of which, through his generous bequest, it is now a part, formed the basis for his taxonomic research. His outstanding library helped to ensure the authenticity of his work, and to solve many nomenclatural and bibliographic problems. His five major works on the Melitaeini form the basic corpus of systematic knowledge on this major group of nymphalids. It is likely, nonetheless, that he will be remembered primarily as an inspiration to generations of entomologists interested in the Palearctic butterflies — he was always ready *and able* to help with any enquiry, however trifling or difficult. His correspondence, with people all over the world, was voluminous.

The *Field Guide*, and his invaluable *Classification* (1975), reflect a fraction of this wealth of practical knowledge about his chosen subject. These two works were, respectively, directly responsible for HIGGINS's receipt of the Zoological Society of London's *Stamford Raffles Award* in 1972, and the Linnean Society's *H. H. Bloomer Award* in 1982 — in recognition of his "outstanding contribution to zoology", and "important contribution to biological knowledge". Following election to the *RESL* as far back as 1922, he served on Council twice (1936-38 ; 1958-61). He was an Honorary Associate of the British Museum (Natural History), an Honorary Member of the British Entomological & Natural History Society, an Honorary Member of the Lepidopterists' Society, and was elected an Honorary Member of the *Societas Europaea Lepidopterologica* in 1981. During the SEL congress at Cambridge in 1982, his name and work held such high esteem that delegates literally queued to shake his hand. At first it seemed to embarrass him, but the characteristic eye-twinkle soon gave him away ! Secretly he loved it, although somewhat overawed by the adulation. As much as anything else, those present found this spontaneous demonstration to be a good way of thanking him for his everwilling help with mutual interests and problems. An equally appreciative but more reflective group of people packed St Lawrence's Church, Chobham, on October 25th, to attend a Memorial Service for Lionel the Doctor, the entomologist, the father, the man, the friend.

However, it should not be construed from all this that Lionel HIGGINS (the entomologist) was entirely without methodological or philosophical critics. Quite a few lepidopterists felt that, in particular, he often relied too heavily

on genitalic characters, and frequently over-split genera. However, Lionel always made his reasons for making particular decisions abundantly clear – and nobody can really ask more of a scientist than that. Moreover, his mind was never closed to new possibilities. In 1983, during one of his by then increasingly brief visits to the BMNH, he asked to meet and talk with a young PhD student just about to complete his thesis. The student had done some work on chromosomes and cladistics in relation to butterflies – “I must learn about these new techniques” said Lionel, “He can probably teach me something”. Not bad for 92 !

Book reviews – Buchbesprechungen – Analyses

HEATH, J. & EMMET, A. M. (eds.) : The moths and butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. 2 (Cossidae – Heliodinidae). 460 pp., 15 pls., Harley Books, Colchester.

Die von J. HEATH & A. M. EMMET herausgegebene Serie „The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland“ stellt den großangelegten Versuch dar, die Lepidopteren eines geographisch gut definierbaren Raumes einer gleichförmigen modernen Bearbeitung zu unterziehen und einen Großteil der verfügbaren Information über die einzelnen Arten zusammenfassend darzustellen. Die systematische Betrachtungsweise wird ergänzt durch die Darstellung einzelner übergeordneter biologisch-ökologischer Themenkreise (z. B. Morphologie, Parasitismus, Krankheiten, Schädlinge, Naturschutz, Wandererscheinungen,versible Duftorgane, etc.). Der vorliegende Band 2 darf mit Abstand als der bisher gelungenste dieser Serie bezeichnet werden. Das allgemeine Kapitel dieses Bandes enthält eine umfassende Darstellung zum Thema Aposematismus („Warnfarbigkeit“) aus der wohl berufensten Feder zu diesem Thema, der von Lady Myriam ROTHCHILD. Deren zahlreichen Beiträge zur chemischen Ökologie der Insekten, insbesondere der Lepidopteren, haben erheblich dazu beigetragen, dieses Gebiet aufzugreifen und zu erforschen. So verwundert es nicht, hier eine gelungene Darstellung aktueller Fragen der chemischen Ökologie der Lepidopteren zu finden. – Den zweiten Höhepunkt dieses Bandes stellt die Bearbeitung der Zygaenidae durch W. G. TREMEWAN, den britischen Spezialisten dieser Gruppe, dar. Man darf mit Fug und Recht behaupten, daß dieser Beitrag auf Jahre hinaus die Einführung in die Biologie der Zygaeniden darstellen wird, die nahezu alle Aspekte dieser Tiere umfaßt. Dies ist umso wichtiger, als die Evolutionsökologie der Zygaeniden von zunehmendem Interesse ist und laufend neue Aspekte aus der Biologie der Zygaeniden bekannt werden. Im übrigen sei darauf hingewiesen, daß in diese allgemeine Behandlung der Zygaenidae umfangreiche neue Forschungsergebnisse des Autors (z. B. zur Chaetotaxie der Larven und über die Parasiten der Zygaenidae) eingeflossen sind. Die beigegebenen Farbtafeln der Imagines durch M.-D. CRAPON DE CAPRONA und der Larven durch C. F. THREADGALL sind von herausragender Qualität und übertreffen die bisher in dieser Serie veröffentlichten Tafeln bei weitem. Auf die Besprechung der übrigen in diesem Band behandelten Familien, überwiegend sogenannte „Kleinschmetterlinge“, hier einzugehen, ist leider nicht möglich. Auch sie macht einen gediegenen Eindruck.

Abschließend noch eine Bemerkung : die Tatsache, daß ein derartiges Werk nicht bereits seit langem auch für die kontinental-europäischen Lepidopteren in Angriff genommen wurde, ist symptomatisch für die Lage der systematisch-taxonomischen Entomologie und die der Lepidopterologie in Mitteleuropa im besonderen. Dieses Gebiet – noch vor 80 Jahren eine Hochburg der systematischen Forschung – hat aufgrund fehlgesteuerter Wissenschaftspolitik und falschen Wissenschaftsverständnisses einen Zustand erreicht, der für die Zukunft Schlimmstes befürchten läßt. Es ist bezeichnend, daß sogar die meisten neueren Feldführer von ausländischen Kollegen verfaßt und dann ins Deutsche übertragen werden müssen. Die Entwicklung einer fehlgesteuerten Naturschutzpolitik (Artenschutz-Gesetzgebung !) wird dieser Entwicklung durch das Ausbleiben eines engagierten Nachwuchses weiteren Vorschub leisten. So können wir Kontinental-Europäer das Fortschreiten der monographischen Bearbeitung der Lepidopteren der Britischen Inseln und Irlands nur neidvoll begrüßen !

Clas NAUMANN

ZOBODAT - www.zobodat.at

Zoologisch-Botanische Datenbank/Zoological-Botanical Database

Digitale Literatur/Digital Literature

Zeitschrift/Journal: [Nota lepidopterologica](#)

Jahr/Year: 1986

Band/Volume: [9](#)

Autor(en)/Author(s): Gilbert Pamela, Tremewan Walter Gerald [Gerry],
Vane-Wright Richard I.

Artikel/Article: [Obituary Lionel George Higgins, 1891-1985 148-152](#)