



## Gilbert White 300



On the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2019 we launched the plans for Gilbert White's 300<sup>th</sup> birthday year in 2020, at the Natural History Museum in London. Gilbert White & The Oates Collections are working with organisations across the UK from the National Museum in London such as the Natural History Museum, British Library and V & A, to nature organisations such as the RSPB, Woodland Trust and Wildlife Trusts, which will culminate in a big celebration here in Selborne on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020, Gilbert's 300<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The Museum will also be celebrating with two temporary exhibitions the first a look at Gilbert White's international legacy running from January till June 2020, followed by an exhibition running from July celebrating Gilbert's life through objects. The museum will be reinterpreting the Gilbert White spaces in the house, retelling his story. We will be using Gilbert's observations of 1766 as a guide to conduct a year of natural observation in our grounds, which should provide an interesting account of how things have changed in the 250 years since Gilbert was here. We will also be comparing our findings to a similar study in London, where we expect to find how the urban pollution affects their ecosystem compared to rural Selborne. We will be hosting a series of Nature Talks throughout the year as well as three high profile London talks on Gilbert White.

We are hoping that the name of Gilbert White will be feature more widely next year in media and in exhibitions around the country. We feel it is especially important in this climate crisis to promote the work of Gilbert White, an individual who 230 years ago wrote a book with the hope of connecting its readers to nature. White was one of the first to understand that losing species whether animal or plant would have a disastrous effect on humankind as well as nature. Gilbert White inspired generations to be in sync with the natural world, and it is no coincidence that as the world started to forget Gilbert White so we as a society have become less connected with the outside world. Gilbert's tercentenary comes at the perfect time as we begin to wake up to what is being lost, and aim to live as Gilbert White did, inspired by the natural world.

## Gilbert White



Gilbert White was born on the 18th July 1720 in the vicarage in Selborne, where his grandfather (also Gilbert White) was vicar. He lived in The Wakes (now Gilbert White & The Oates Collections) we believe from roughly 1727.

A keen gardener White wished to recreate the grand gardens of the rich on a Curate's budget. He started his Garden Kalendar, a garden diary in which he recorded his daily activity, over time these diaries reflect White's growing interest in botany and naturalism, as he records observations made over decades, including migration patterns anomalies in the weather and the flora and fauna of his local surroundings. White corresponded with other Naturalists who he met likely through his brothers Benjamin a bookseller and Thomas. Two of these naturalists became very important in White's career Daines Barrington (a lawyer/naturalist) and Thomas Pennant (travel writer/naturalist). White wrote letters to these friends for many decades and discusses many key subjects, migration, species identification, phenology, ornithology and what we now would call ecology.

Towards the end of White's life he compiled his observations into a book, which would be published by Benjamin White on Fleet Street. *The Natural History of Selborne* took 14 years to complete and is made up of Gilbert's letters to Barrington and Pennant. It was published in 1789 and has never been out of print since, making it the fourth most published book in the English Language only preceded by The Bible, The Works of Shakespeare and The Pilgrims Progress. Gilbert White died on the 26th June 1793 just one month before his 73 birthday. At this time his book was a quiet success and



White died peacefully at home. He requested a humble burial and is buried in the church yard in Selborne.

However within decades of his death his name was internationally known. During the 19th Century the reading public realised that *The Natural History of Selborne* was something very special, that White's method of observing nature minutely and building a picture of the village as a working ecosystem became renowned. Copies of *The Natural History of Selborne* were sold internationally and 'White's *Selborne*' was the book to read if you had an interest in the natural world well into the twentieth century, with fans including the Brontë's, Virginia Woolfe, Edward Thomas and Charles Darwin. White successfully identified the Harvest Mouse as a species, he observed that the Chiff Chaff, Willow Warbler and Wood Warbler were different species due to their songs, he was the first to appreciate the importance of the earth worm, and the first in Hampshire to record appearances of butterflies amongst many other discoveries we take for granted today.

## Partners

Natural History Museum, British Library, The Linnaean Society , National Trust, RSPB, South Downs National Park Authority, The Gardens Trust, Victoria & Albert Museum , Winchester Cathedral, Alton natural History Society, Woodland Trust, Alton Town Council, Basingstoke & Deane Council, Alton Natural History Society, British Chelonia Group, British Ecological Society, British Trust for Ornithology, Butterfly Conservation, Chawton House Library, Curtis Museum and Allen Gallery, East Hampshire District Council, Freshwater Habitats Trust, Friends of the South Downs, Hampshire Bat Group, Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, Hampshire Conservation Volunteers, Hampshire County Council Countryside, Hampshire Cultural Trust, Hampshire Fungal Trust, Hampshire Gardens Trust, Hampshire Ornithological Society, Hampshire Swifts, Visit Hampshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Meon Valley Beekeeping Society, National Biodiversity Network, National Science Collections Association, Oriel College, Oxford, Pallant House Gallery, Petersfield Museum, Plantlife, Portsmouth City Council, Selborne Landscape Partnership, Selborne Society, Society for the History of Natural History, South East Museums Development Programme, Southampton Natural History Society, Sparsholt College, St Mary's Church, Selborne, Thomas Pennant Society, Visit Winchester, Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust, Winchester College, Woolmer Forest Heritage Society.



## Activities

### **Gilbert White 300 birthday**

The Museum will be celebrating with a large event on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The day will include stalls, entertainment and the unveiling of a statue of Gilbert White by a celebrity. This will be the main press event of the year. Details to be Confirmed.

### **Chelsea Garden designed by Sparsholt College**

Sparsholt College are designing a garden based on Gilbert White's garden at the Chelsea Flower Show in May 2018. Details to be confirmed.

### **Temporary Exhibitions**

*Gilbert White Around the World*: Opening January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020. Although Gilbert White's name is linked firmly to the village of Selborne, his legacy is international. An exhibition of international editions of *The Natural History of Selborne* and the global impact of Gilbert White's work three hundred year since his birth. (closes June 28<sup>th</sup>)

*Gilbert White 300 Exhibition*: Opens July 2020. A collection of items connected to Gilbert White brought together to celebrate his life. Details to be confirmed.

### **Selborne Talk programme**

A series of talks on Gilbert White and the natural world today given throughout the year.

### **London Talk programme**

Three high profile speakers will give talks at three prestigious venues in London. Details to be Confirmed.

### **Flora Selbornienis**

We will be recording the natural world in Selborne every day in 2020, following Gilbert's record of 1766.

## Key Dates

3<sup>rd</sup> January 2020: Gilbert White Around the World Exhibition Opens

6<sup>th</sup> July 2020: Gilbert White 300 Exhibition Opens (TBC)

18<sup>th</sup> July 2020: Gilbert White's Birthday.



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