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**Drawn from Nature:**

**Gilbert White and the Artists**

Central Unit:

Samuel Hieronymous Grimm 1733-1794

North East View of Selborne, from the Short Lythe

1789

Engraving on paper

(Engraved by William Angus 1752-1821)

Fold-out illustration to Gilbert White, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne in the County of Southampton,*

(London: 1789)

On loan from the Earl and Countess of Selborne

The first edition of *The* *Natural History of Selborne* was publishedin 1789. It featured engravings after the Swiss landscapist Samuel Hieronymous Grimm, who had become very well-known since his arrival in England in 1768 and was able to charge the relatively high sum of 2 ½ guineas per week. He stayed in the Hampshire village of Selborne for 28 days to make drawings, which were engraved for the book. This frontispiece shows a topographical view of the village, which reflected the taste of the time for the picturesque.

The oval half-title depicts Gilbert White’s gothic summerhouse on Selborne Hanger, which was known as ‘the Hermitage’. In the 18th century garden hermits or ornamental hermits were encouraged to live in purpose-built follies or ‘hermitages’ on the estates of wealthy land-owners, where they would be encouraged to dress like druids and cared-for and consulted for advice, or viewed for entertainment. The hermit in this image was actually Gilbert White’s younger brother Henry dressed ‘to great advantage’ to look picturesque.

Stephen Elmer 1717-1796

A Hybrid Bird

1789

Coloured engraving on paper

Engraved by J F Miller (life dates unknown)

Illustration to Gilbert White, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne in the County of Southampton,* (London: 1789)

On loan from the Earl and Countess of Selborne

Stephen Elmer was an eighteenth-century painter who was based in Farnham in Surrey, where the museum has a collection of his paintings. He exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts from 1772 until his death. He developed a skill and reputation for depicting still life and dead game. It depicts a hybrid pheasant that White had examined and described in detailis accompanied by the explanation: ‘Mr Elmer of Farnham, the famous game painter, was employed to take an exact copy of this curious bird.’

Edmund Hort New 1871-1931

Selborne Church and The Hangar

1897

Ink on paper

Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne,* Grant Allen (ed.), (John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1897)

On loan from a private collection

Edmund Hort New was a member of the Birmingham Group of artists associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement. He specialised in pen and ink drawings of rural landscapes and old buildings. His line drawing illustrations for *The Natural History of Selborne* focussed on the topography of the village and its buildings, with vignettes of birds, and decorative typography incorporating wild life.

John Nash 1893 -1977

Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*

Ipswich: Limited Editions Club, 1972

In the 1970s a deluxe edition of *The Natural History* with John Nash’s illustrations was lithographed with colour by Cowells for the Limited Editions Club. These are the hand-coloured proofs. Lewis observed: ‘Painters with a purity and simplicity of vision such as Nash… must be wedded to authors of like vision and stature. Of all contemporary English artists John Nash’s work must be the least affected by the influence of other artists. His vision is a pure distillation of the English scene. I feel that the Rev. Gilbert White would have rejoiced in these beautifully unaffected drawings.’

Chris Wormell b.1955

Cockerel

Illustration to *The Natural History of Selborne,* introduced by Ian Niall, (London: Folio Society, 1994)

1994

Wood-engraving on paper

On loan from the artist

Chris Wormell b.1955

Stone Curlew

Illustration to *The Natural History of Selborne,* introduced by Ian Niall, (London: Folio Society, 1994)

1994

Wood-engraving on paper

On loan from the artist

Chris Wormell was self-taught as a wood-engraver. He has won several international awards for his illustrations. This series of wood-engravings were produced for an edition of the *Natural History* by the Folio Society. He focussed on natural history in its habitat.

Chris Wormell b.1955

Printing blocks for Illustrations to *The Natural History of Selborne*

1994

Engraved wood blocks

On loan from the artist

Cases from left of door, clockwise around room:

Charles Stewart 1915-2001

Cover design for *The Antiquities of Selborne in the County of Southampton* by Gilbert White, edited by Sidney Scott

(London: The Falcon Press, 1950)

On loan from a private collection

Charles Stewart was a book illustrator and co-principal of the Byam-Shaw School of Art. He was known for his illustrations of Victorian Gothic and historical novels such as *Uncle Silas.* His work was

much influenced by Dickens’ stories, fashion plates, Bewick’s wood-engraving and the Victorian Gothic architecture of his uncle’s home Shambellie, which had fascinated him as a child. For this book jacket for the companion volume to White’s *Natural History*, he depicts a macabre scene in Selborne churchyard, and a tricorn hat and skull propped against a gravestone.

Rev. Gilbert White (edited by Professor Henry Morley), *The Natural History of Selborne Vol. II*

(London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1887)

On loan from a private collection

There have been over 300 editions of Gilbert White’s *Natural History of Selborne* and the book has never been out of print. It is said to be the fourth most-published book in English, after the Bible, the works of Shakespeare and John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

*The Portrait of a Tortoise*, Extracts from the Journals and Letters of Gilbert White, with an Introduction and Notes by Sylvia Townsend Warner

(London: Chatto and Windus, 1946)

On loan from a private collection

The poet Sylvia Townsend published a biography of Timothy, Gilbert White’s Tortoise. He had been inherited from White’s aunt Rebecca Snookes. Timothy had originally been bought from a sailor in Chichester and had spent almost forty years in Aunt Snookes’s garden at Ringmer in Sussex. White was engrossed by problems of hibernation and wrote regularly about Timothy’s habits. Townsend Warner wittily endowed Timothy with a personality through drawing on these writings.

Lynton Lamb 1907-1977

Cover design for *The Natural History of Selborne*

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)

On loan from a private collection

Lynton Lamb was a British designer known for his book jackets and illustrations. He was Head of Lithography at the Royal College of Art and the Slade School of Art. From 1930 onwards he designed book jackets for the Oxford University Press. This is a reprint of an edition from the 1930s. Lamb also illustrated a related book entitled *Gilbert White and His Village* by Cecil S Emden in 1956.

W.V Rose (life dates unknown)

The Otter

1950

Wood-engraving on paper

H.J. Faulkner (life dates unknown)

The Horse

1950

Wood-engraving on paper

Extracts from The Natural Histories of Selborne by Gilbert White, (Birmingham: City of Birmingham School of Printing, 1950)

On loan from a private collection

This rare publication was produced by staff and students of the Birmingham School of Printing and used excerpts from White’s *Natural History* as inspiration for wood-engravings.

Thomas Bewick 1753 -1828

The Hoopoe, from *A History of British Birds - Volume I, Land Birds*

1797

Wood-engraving on paper

Printed from the original block by Graham Williams of the Florin Press, 2019

The naturalist and wood-engraver Thomas Bewick loved Gilbert White’s *Natural History*. The first volume of Bewick’s book *A History of British Birds* was published in 1797 and was dedicated to Land Birds. It included a list of 19 birds which Bewick declared to be: ‘chiefly selected from Mr. White's *Natural History of Selborne* and… arranged nearly in the order of their appearing’. The list begins with the wryneck (‘Middle of March’), positions the nightingale at the beginning of April, the cuckoo in the middle of April, and ends with the flycatcher in the middle of May.

After Thomas Bewick 1753 -1828

Fallow Deer (in other mount)

Cuckoo

Redbreast

Jackdaw

Crossbill

Rev. Gilbert White, M.A., *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne in the County of Southampton; The Standard Edition by E.T Bennett thoroughly revised, with additional Notes by James Edmund Harting*; Stereotyped edition, illustrated with engravings by Thomas Bewick and others (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co’, 1902)

4th Edition since the 1875 edition

On loan from a private collection

Several of the vignettes Thomas Bewick engraved for his book *British Birds* and his *General History of Quadrupeds* were later copied as headpieces and tailpieces for the 4th edition of *The Natural History,* published in 1875 by Bickers & Son. They declared Bewick to be the illustrator on the title page due to his huge public appeal. However, Bewick’s original wood-engravings had been copied by skilled engravers such as William James Welch, much to the annoyance of Bewick’s daughters. Although they complained to the publishers, several later editions were issued with the same claim.

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

Illustrations to Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne, ed., E.M. Nicholson, with wood engravings by Eric Fitch Daglish*

(London:Thornton Butterworth, 1929)

Daglish lectured on zoology and wrote numerous natural history and countryside books. He became a member of the Society of Wood Engravers in the early 1920s and was taught wood engraving by his close friend and fellow member Paul Nash. These illustrations were entirely engraved with the ‘spitsticker’ (or tint tool). There is no variety to the thickness of the line, just the closeness of the marks. These beautiful fine lines are used to extraordinary effect to convey the blades of grass on the turf surrounding a stone curlew; details of the feathers on a white (or barn) owl; or the individual hairs and whiskers of a snow-bound hare laying sullenly in its seat.

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

Swallow and Martin

1929

Wood-engraving on Japanese handmade paper

On loan from a private collection

‘When I used to rise in the morning last autumn, and see the swallows and martins clustering on the chimneys and thatch of the neighbouring cottages, I could not help being touched with a secret delight, mixed with some degree of mortification: with delight, to observe with how much ardour and punctuality those poor little birds obeyed the strong impulse towards migration, or hiding, imprinted on their minds by their great Creator; and with some degree of mortification, when I reflected that, after all our pains and inquiries, we are yet not quite certain to what regions they do migrate; and are still farther embarrassed to find that some do not actually migrate at all.’ (Letter XXIII, February 28th, 1769)

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

The White (or Barn) Owl

1929

Wood-engraving on Japanese handmade paper

On loan from a private collection

‘We have had, ever since I can remember, a pair of white owls that constantly breed under the eaves of this church…. White owls seem not (but in this I am not positive) to hoot at all; all that clamorous hooting appears to me to come from the wood kinds. The white owl does indeed snore and hiss in a tremendous manner; and those menaces well answer the intention of intimidating; for I have known a whole village up in arms on such occasion, imagining the churchyard to be full of goblins and spectres. White owls often scream horribly as they fly along; from this screaming probably arose the common people’s imaginary species of screech-owl, which they superstitiously think attend the windows of dying people.’ (Letter XV, July 8th, 1773)

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

Stone-Curlew

1929

Wood-engraving on Japanese handmade paper

On loan from a private collection

‘With regard to the *œdicnemus*, or stone-curlew, I intend to write very soon to my friend near Chichester, in whose neighbourhood these birds seem most to abound; and shall urge him to take particular notice when they begin to congregate, and afterwards to watch them most narrowly, whether they do not withdraw themselves during the dead of the winter. When I have obtained information with respect to this circumstance, I shall have finished my history of the stone-curlew, which I hope will prove to your satisfaction, as it will be, I trust, very near the truth.’ (Letter XXI, November 28th, 1768)

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

Hare Snow-bound

1929

Wood-engraving on Japanese handmade paper

On loan from a private collection

Gilbert White described the harsh winter in 1776: ‘On the 14th the writer was obliged to be much abroad; and thinks he never before or since has encountered such rugged Siberian weather. Many of the narrow roads were now filled above the tops of the hedges, though which the show was driven into most romantic and grotesque shapes, so striking to the imagination as not to be seen without wonder and pleasure. The hares also lay sullenly in their seats, and would not move till compelled by hunger, being conscious – poor animals – that the drifts and heaps treacherously betray their footsteps, and prove fatal to numbers of them.’ (Letter LXII, January 1776)

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

Wheatear

1929

Wood-engraving on Japanese handmade paper

On loan from a private collection

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

Sedge-warbler

1929

Wood-engraving on Japanese handmade paper

On loan from a private collection

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

Harvest Mice

1929

Wood-engraving on Japanese handmade paper

On loan from a private collection

Gilbert White was the first naturalist to describe the Harvest Mouse: ‘From the colour, shape, size, and manner of nesting, I made no doubt that the species is non-descript… They never enter into houses; are carried into ricks and barns with the sheaves; abound in harvest; and build their nest amidst the straws of the corn above the ground, and sometimes in thistles. They breed as many as eight at a litter, in a little round nest composed of the blades of grass or wheat.’ (Letter XII, November 4th, 1767)

Eric Fitch Daglish 1892-1966

The Tortoise in the Garden

1929

Wood-engraving on Japanese handmade paper

On loan from a private collection

‘The old Sussex tortoise, that I have mentioned to you so often, is become my property. I dug it out of its winter dormitory in March last, when it was enough awakened to express its resentments by hissing; and, packing it in a box with earth, carried it eighty miles in post-chaises. The rattle and hurry of the journey so perfectly roused it that, when I turned it out on a border, it walked twice down to the bottom of my garden; however, in the evening, the weather being cold, it buried itself in the loose mould, and continues still concealed.’ (Letter L, April 21st, 1780)

Gertrude Hermes 1901 -1983

Tree

1931, printed 1988

Wood-engraving on paper

Edition 193 of 240

On loan from a private collection

In 1931 Gertrude Hermes was commissioned by the Gregynog Press to produce a set of illustrations for a new edition of the Natural History. In preparation, she lodged in Selborne with the village postman in order to absorb the sense of place and spirit of White’s writings. The prints were not published during Hermes’ lifetime: her unhappiness resulting from the break-up of her marriage to Blair Hughes-Stanton meant that the directors of the Gregynog Press decided that, ‘the book be postponed until a more favourable time’. The etchings were published alone in 1988.

Gertrude Hermes 1901-1983

Deer

1931 (printed 1988)

Wood-engraving on paper

Edition 193 of 240

On loan from a private collection

‘Queen Anne, as she was journeying on the Portsmouth road, did not think the forest of Wolmer beneath her royal regard. For she came out of the great road at Lippock, which is just by, and reposing herself on a bank smoothed for that purpose, lying about half-a-mile to the east of Wolmer Pond, and still called Queen’s Bank, saw with great complacency and satisfaction the whole heard of red-deer brought by the keepers along the vale before her, consisting then of about five hundred head. A sight this, worthy the attention of the greatest sovereign!’ (Letter VI, 1789)

Gertrude Hermes 1901-1983

Bat and Spider

1931 (printed 1988)

Wood-engraving on paper

Edition 193 of 240

On loan from a private collection

Gertrude Hermes 1901-1983

Carp

1931 (printed 1988)

Wood-engraving on paper

Edition 193 of 240

On loan from a private collection

‘In the garden of the Black-bear inn in the town of Reading is a stream or canal running under the stables and out into the fields on the other side of the road: in this water are many carps, which lie rolling about in sight, being fed by travellers, who amuse themselves by tossing them bread; but as soon as the weather grows at all severe these fishes are no longer seen, because they retire under the stables, where they remain till the return of spring. Do they lie in a torpid state? If they do not, how are they supported?’ (Letter XL, September 2nd, 1774)

Gertrude Hermes 1901-1983

Heron

1931(printed 1988)

Wood-engraving on paper

Edition 193 of 240

On loan from a private collection

Gilbert was fascinated with how birds flew. He noted ‘herons seem encumbered with too much sail for their light bodies, but these vast hollow wings are necessary in carrying burdens, such as large fishes and the like.’ (Letter XLII, August 7th, 1778)

Gertrude Hermes 1901-1983

Tortoise and Snake

1931(printed 1988)

Wood-engraving on paper

Edition 193 of 240

On loan from a private collection

‘On August 4th 1775, we surprised a large viper, which seemed very heavy and bloated, as it lay in the grass basking int the sun… To a thinking mind nothing is more wonderful than that early instinct which impresses young animals with a notion of the situation of their natural weapons, and of using them properly in their own defence, even before those weapons subsist or are formed.’ (Letter XXXI, April 29th, 1776)

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

Title Page, Volume 1

Wood-engraving on paper in bound book

H.J. Massingham (ed.), *The Writings of Gilbert White of Selborne*

(London: The Nonesuch Press, 1938)

On loan from Jeremy Greenwood and Alan Swerdlow

Ravilious created title-pages for both volumes of *The Writings of Gilbert White of Selborne*, which show views looking out from inside to exterior nature. Volume I depicts a view towards Selborne Church: White had written that church towers ‘are very necessary ingredients in an elegant landscape’. It includes an emblematic depiction of White (and presumably of his friend and correspondent Thomas Pennant) that is reflective of popular Georgian silhouettes. It is composed of several blocks, and compresses eleven birds from Thomas Bewick’s list, plus White’s celebrated tortoise Timothy, into one stylized summary image.

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

Title Page, Volume 2

Wood-engraving on paper in bound book

H.J. Massingham (ed.), *The Writings of Gilbert White of Selborne*

(London: The Nonesuch Press, 1938)

On loan from Jeremy Greenwood and Alan Swerdlow

Volume II of *The Writings of Gilbert White* focusses on the antiquities and history of the village of Selborne. Ravilious’ frontispiece shows a view looking down the nave of Selborne church and through a Gothic arch into an ordered garden with a greenhouse, a subject of special appeal to the artist. At the left is an imaginary silhouette of Gilbert White, suggestive of a stone memorial plaque.

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

Hollow Lane

1938

Wood-engraving on paper in bound book

On loan from the Earl and Countess of Selborne

‘Among the singularities of this place the two rocky hollow lanes, the one to Alton, and the other to the forest, deserve our attention. These roads, running through the malm lands, are, by the traffic of ages, and the fretting of water, worn down through the first stratum of our freestone, and partly through the second… delight the naturalist with their various botany, and particularly with their curious [ferns] with which they abound.’

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

The Tortoise in the Kitchen Garden

1938

Wood-engraving on paper

Signed by the artist

On loan from Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne

Ravilious had loved both Thomas Bewick’s wood-engravings and Gilbert White’s *Natural History* since his student days and he encouraged his own students at Eastbourne College of Art in the 1920s to read it. He wrote to his friend Helen Binyon in January 1936: ‘The ‘*History of Selborne’* is a grand book and I read it every minute I can spare from engraving and other jobs. - ‘There are bustards on the wide downs near Brightelstone’. Isn’t that a beautiful statement?’

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

Hoopoes and Arbour

1938

Wood-engraving on paper

On loan from Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne

‘The most unusual birds I ever observed in these parts were a pair of hoopoes (Upupa), which came several years ago in the summer, and frequented an ornamental piece of ground, which joins to my garden, for some weeks. They used to march about in a stately manner, feeding in the walks, many times a day; and seemed disposed to breed in my outlet; but were frightened and persecuted by idle boys, who would never let them be at rest.’ (Letter XI, September 9th,1767)

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

The Duke of Richmond’s Greenhouse

1938

Headpiece, volume 1.

Wood-engraving on paper

On loan from Towner Art Gallery

‘On Michaelmas-day 1768 I managed to get a sight of the female moose belonging to the Duke of Richmond, at Goodwood; but was greatly disappointed, when I arrived at the spot, to find that it died, after having appeared in a languishing way for some time, on the morning before. I found it in an old green-house, slung under the belly and chin by ropes, and in a standing posture; but, though it had been dead for so short a time, it was in so putrid a state that the stench was hardly supportable.’ (Letter XXVIII, March, 1770)

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

Feeding the Fowls

1938

Wood-engraving on paper

On loan from Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne

‘A neighbouring gentleman one summer had lost most of his chickens by a sparrow-hawk, that came gliding down between a faggot pile and the end of his house where the coops stood. The owner, inwardly vexed to see his flock thus diminished, hung a setting-net adroitly between the pile and the house, into which the caitiff dashed and was entangled. Resentment suggested the law of retaliation; he therefore clipped the hawk’s wings, cut off his talons, and, fixing a cork on his bill, threw him down among the brood hens. Imagination cannot paint the scene that ensued; the expressions that fear, rage, and revenge inspired were new, or at least such as had been unnoticed before: the exasperated matrons unbraided, they execrated, they insulted, they triumphed. In a word, they never desisted from buffeting their adversary till they had torn him in a hundred pieces.’ (Letter XLIII, September 9th, 1778)

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

A Rust-coloured Feruginous Light

1938

Wood-engraving on paper

On loan from Towner Gallery, Eastbourne

‘The summer of the year 1783 was an amazing and portentous one, and full of horrible phaenomena… The sun, at noon, looked as blank as a clouded moon, and shed a rust-coloured ferruginous light on the ground and on the floors of rooms; but was particularly lurid and blood-coloured at rising and setting.’

Peter Guy 1938 – 2009

When I was a Lad at the Bodley Head

(Upper Denby: The Fleece Press, 2016)

90 copies made in December 2016 with wrappers marbled by Jemma Lewis

Printed from original electrotypes

On loan from a private collection

In 1999 the typographer and book designed Peter Guy (1938-2009) donated five electrotype blocks to the Fleece Press with the following note: ‘When I was a very junior lad at the Bodley Head – almost forty years ago! – I had the chore of throwing out a stack of old books, all of which were total junk; except that among them were these electros of a few of Ravilious’ engravings for *A Natural History of Selborne*. There is no better home for them than the Fleece Press and I only wish there were more. Why these few had been separated from the rest I do not know.’

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

Memorial to Gilbert White

1938

Wood-engraving on paper (printed from electrotype)

On loan from a private collection

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

To mark the visit of the Eric Ravilious Society to the Fleece Press, 2002

Wood-engraving and letterpress on paper (from Electrotype)

On loan from the Fleece Press

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

The White Owl

Memorial to Gilbert White

The White Owl and the Hunters

The Tortoise and the Pheasant

1938

Electrotype block

On loan from Liss Llewellyn Fine Art

These are the original electrotype blocks used to print the 1938 Nonesuch Press edition of *The Writings of Gilbert White.* Electrotyping is a chemical method for forming metal parts that exactly reproduce the original wood-engraving block. It was the standard method for producing plates for letterpress printing from the late 1800s onwards.

Eric Ravilious 1903-1942

The Hunters

1938

Electrotype block

On loan from Liss Llewellyn Fine Art

‘Some young men went down lately to a pond on the verge of Wolmer-forest to hunt flappers, or young wild ducks, many of which they caught, and, among the rest, some very minute yet well-fledged wild-fowls alive, which upon examination I found to be teals. I did not know till then that teals ever bred in the south of England, and was much pleased with the discovery: this I look upon as a great stroke in natural history.’ (Letter XV, July 8th, 1773)

Clare Leighton 1898-1989

Illustrations to *The Natural History of Selborne*

1941

Wood-engravings on paper

On loan from the Estate of Clare Leighton

Clare Leighton was commissioned to produce a series of eleven wood-engravings for a paperback edition of *The Natural History of Selborne* for Penguin Books. However, as it was printed on poor quality war-issue paper during the Second World War the subtlety of the medium was lost in reproduction. Her images included a mixture of landscapes, natural history, and human subjects, such as the boy who hunted bees, and another who climbed trees to obtain eggs from a nest, in addition to more general rural subjects mentioned in passing, such as hop-pickers, and women at work in the fields.

‘We had in this village more than 20 years ago an idiot boy, whom I well remember, who, from a child, showed a strong propensity top bees; they were his food, his amusement, his sole object. And as people of this cast have seldom more than one point in view, so this lad exerted all his faculties on this one pursuit. In the winter he dozed away his time, within his father’s house, by the fire side in a kind of torpid state, seldom departing from the chimney-corner; but in the summer he was all alert, and in quest of his game in the fields, and on sunny banks. Honey-bees, humble-bees, and wasps, were his prey wherever he found them: he had no apprehension from their stings, but would seize them *nudis minibus*, and at once disarm them of their weapons, and suck their bodies for the sake of their honey-bags. Sometimes he would fill his bosom between his shirts and his skin with a number of these captives; and sometimes would confine them in bottles. He was a very *merops apiaster,* or bee-bird, and very injurious to men that kept bees, for he would slide into their bee-gardens, and, sitting down before the stools, would rap with his finger on the hives, and so take the bees as they came out. He has been known to overturn hives for the sake of their honey, of which he was passionately fond.’ (Letter XXVII, Dec 12th, 1775)

Clare Leighton 1898-1989

Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*

ed. James Fisher, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1941)

On loan from a private collection

Agnes Miller-Parker 1895-1980

Nightingale

Swift

Wood-engravings on paper

Printed by Simon Lawrence in 1990 from the original blocks on an Albion Press on dampened paper.

On loan from the Fleece Press

‘Nightingales not only never reach Northumberland and Scotland, but also, as I have always been told, Devonshire and Cornwall. In those two last countries we cannot attribute the failure of them to the want of warmth: the defect in the west is rather a presumptive argument that these birds come over to us from the continent at the narrowest passage, and do not stroll so far westward.’

‘Swifts, as I suspected, invariably lay but *two eggs;* and as they breed but once, their encrease is very small! I got Harrys bricklayer one evening to open the tiles of his brew-house, under which were several nests containing only *two* squab young apiece; and moreover his workmen all told me that, when boys, they had invariably found only two eggs or two birds. If I lived at Fyfield I should be more learned in swifts; for as you sit in the parlor, you see their proceedings at the brewhouse.’

Agnes Miller-Parker 1895-1980

Partridge

Cuckoo

1941

Wood-engravings on paper

Printed by Simon Lawrence in 1990 from the original blocks on an Albion Press on dampened paper.

On loan from the Fleece Press

Agnes Miller Parker was a talented wood-engraver, who studied at the Glasgow School of Art. Her series of wood-engravings of birds to accompany Gilbert White’s writings in *The Saturday Book* are bold and stylised, but also densely worked. She managed to convey a sense of three-dimensional form, whilst adhering to Thomas Bewick’s simplified vignette form for birds. These impressions were printed from the original blocks, which are now in the National Library of Scotland.

‘In July I saw several cuckoos skimming over a large pond; and found, after observation, that they were feeding on the libellulae, or *dragon-flies*; some of which they caught as they settled on the weeds, and some as they were on the wing. Notwithstanding what Linnæus says, I cannot be induced to believe that they are birds of prey.’

Leonard Russell (ed.), The Saturday Book 1941-42 (First Volume)

Hutchinson: 1941

On loan from a private collection

The Saturday Book was an annual miscellany, published from 1941 to 1975, featuring poetry and essays on a range of arts. The first edition was published in the midst of the Second World War and featured eleven wood-engravings of birds by Agnes Miller Parker to accompany extracts from the 1937 Nonesuch Press edition of Gilbert White’s writings, edited by H.J. Massingham. The editor wrote of the contents: ‘If anything it looks backward, and nostalgia for small pre-war pleasures emerges from the pages: for days by the sea, for country drives and birds, beasts and flowers, for listening to new gramophone records from America, for cricket, for resurrecting old stories of crime. Here, then, is a tranquil book without a thunderclap of any kind. I leave it to the attention of the gentle reader.’

Claire Oldham 1906-1996

Illustrations to Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*

ed. James Fisher

(London: The Cresset Press, 1947)

1947

Wood-engravings printed by electrotype on paper

On loan from a private collection

Clare Oldham was the niece of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and a talented wood-engraver who lived north of Petworth. In 1947, the Cresset Press commissioned her to produce a series of wood-engraved illustrations to White’s Natural History. These included strikingly original plates such as the goldcrest perched on a yew branch, a blue titmouse being ‘well entertained with the seeds at the head of a sun-flower’, and an array of hedgehogs, including one curled up into a ball, their spines conveyed with especially pleasing mark-making. Oldham’s engravings feature sweeping arcs as compositional devices, such as a swooping house martin, a fox watching the upward flight of a mallard and tiny harvest mice on ears of wheat above a nest that resembles a tightly-wound ball of string, which, in the words of White, was ‘most artfully platted, and composed of the blades of wheat, perfectly round and about the size of a cricket-ball.’

LETTER XII

November 4th, 1767

One of these nests I procured this autumn, most artfully platted, and composed of the blades of wheat, perfectly round, and about the size of a cricket-ball; with the aperture so ingeniously closed, that there was no discovering to what part it belonged. It was so compact and well-filled, that it would roll across the table without being discomposed, though it contacted eight little mice that were naked and blind… This wonderful procreant cradle, an elegant instance of the efforts of the instinct, was found in a wheat-field suspended in the head of a thistle.

John Nash 1893 -1977

Illustrations to Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*

ed. John Lewis

(London: The Lutterworth Press, 1951)

Electrotypes from drawings

On loan from a private collection

John Nash had been asked by the typographer John Lewis to contribute to a publication on typefaces, which included examples of text taken from notable pieces of English literature. As Lewis recalled, ‘in most cases these passages were decorated with English artists whose work was more often seen in galleries than in books. One of the happiest of these marriages of painter and author was a drawing of John Nash illustrating the letter about the tortoise in Gilbert White’s *Selborne.’* It led the Lutterworth Press to ask Nash if he would undertake an illustrated edition of the book.

John Nash 1893 -1977

Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne*

Ipswich: Limited Editions Club, 1972

In the 1970s a deluxe edition of *The Natural History* with John Nash’s illustrations was lithographed with colour by Cowells for the Limited Editions Club. These are the hand-coloured proofs. Lewis observed: ‘Painters with a purity and simplicity of vision such as Nash… must be wedded to authors of like vision and stature. Of all contemporary English artists John Nash’s work must be the least affected by the influence of other artists. His vision is a pure distillation of the English scene. I feel that the Rev. Gilbert White would have rejoiced in these beautifully unaffected drawings.’

John Nash 1893-1977

The most unusual birds… a pair of Hoopoes

1972

Hand-coloured proof for *The Natural History of Selborne,* (Ipswich: Limited Editions Club, 1972)

Line engraving with watercolour

On loan from the Gilbert White and Oates Collection, Selborne

John Nash 1893-1977

A terror to all… that had chickens

1972

Hand-coloured proof for *The Natural History of Selborne,* (Ipswich: Limited Editions Club, 1972)

Line engraving with watercolour

On loan from the Gilbert White and Oates Collection, Selborne

John Nash 1893-1977

Some ladies… took a fancy to a toad

1972

Hand-coloured proof for *The Natural History of Selborne,* (Ipswich: Limited Editions Club, 1972)

Line engraving with watercolour

On loan from the Gilbert White and Oates Collection, Selborne

Gilbert White recounted how: ‘I have been informed, also, from undoubted authority, that some ladies (ladies, you will say, of peculiar taste) took a fancy to a toad, which they nourished summer after summer, for many years, till he grew to a monstrous size, with the maggots which turn to flesh-flies. They reptile used to come forth every evening from a hole under the garden-steps; and was taken up, after supper, on the table to be fed.’ (Letter XVII, June 8th, 1768)

John Nash 1893-1977

It hobbles towards it benefactress

1972

Hand-coloured proof for *The Natural History of Selborne,* (Ipswich: Limited Editions Club, 1972)

Line engraving with watercolour

On loan from the Gilbert White and Oates Collection, Selborne

John Piper 1903-1992

Selborne – Borden Road

1962

Reproduction of ink drawing on paper

Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne, edited with an Introduction and Notes by W.S. Scott and Drawings by John Piper*, (London: Folio Society, 1962)

In the early 1960s, Piper was commissioned to produce a series of pen and ink drawings to illustrate a new Folio Society edition. Piper had long-admired White’s *Natural History* and gave Myfanwy Evans a copy (with the illustrations after Bewick) as a courtship gift during the 1930s. His images feature do not focus on particular birds and animals or the human interactions with nature, but instead they are landscape views loosely executed in pen, ink and wash. They are all complementary to the text rather than in any way illustrative.

These image shows White’s house ‘The Wakes’ and the ‘Zig-Zag Path’ which was cut by White and his brother John by 1753 to make it easier for them to climb the steep Selborne Hanger.

John Piper 1903-1992

Two Views of Selborne Church

1962

Ink on paper

On loan from a private collection

Piper was known for his depictions of Britain’s Romantic heritage, particularly churches and historic architecture. His view of beehives in the foliage in front of Selborne church is the most specific of the images. White was concerned with the behaviour of bees and whether they are affected by noise, declaring: ‘it does not appear from experiment that bees are in any way capable of being affected by sounds: for I have often tried my own with a large speaking-trumpet held close to their hives, and with such an exertion of voice as would have hailed a ship at the distance of a mile, and still these insects have pursued their various employments undisturbed, and without showing the least sensibility or resentment.’

Chris Wormell b.1955

Illustrations to *The Natural History of Selborne,* introduced by Ian Niall

(London: Folio Society, 1994)

1994

Wood-engraving on paper

On loan from the artist

Chris Wormell was self-taught as a wood-engraver. He has won several international awards for his illustrations. This series of wood-engravings were produced for an edition of the *Natural History* by the Folio Society. He focussed on natural history in its habitat.

Chris Wormell b.1955

Printing blocks for Illustrations to *The Natural History of Selborne*

1994

Engraved wood blocks

On loan from the artist