

Call for Papers

Gilbert White and his Contexts

3–5 June 2025

Selborne, Hampshire, UK

Keynote Speakers: Stephen Moss
Anne Secord
Jenny Uglow



Gilbert White (1720–93) has long been celebrated both as a keen-eyed naturalist and as a fine nature writer. *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789) garnered a cult following in the years after its publication in 1789, has never gone out of print, and is often considered as the guiding spirit of English nature writing. White's insights into the phenology of his Hampshire parish and his speculations about the migration of birds continue to interest and inspire naturalists and he has even been claimed as the first ecologist. His Selborne home, now a popular museum, receives thousands of visitors every year.

Given the popularity of his work, scientific, critical, and historical research into White's work and legacy has been less extensive than it has been for many other scientists and authors of his period. In recent decades, Ted Dadswell, Paul Foster, and Richard Mabey have done much to elucidate his biography and scientific practice while Louis Coulson, Francesca Greenoak, and Anne Secord have produced fine modern editions of his sermons, journal, and *Natural History of Selborne* respectively. But much recent scholarly investigation into White's life and work has remained scattered across journals in diverse disciplines or tucked away in books on broader themes and there has been no collaborative, interdisciplinary assessment of White's life, works, and contexts.

The aim of this conference is to bring together academics, archivists, independent scholars, naturalists, and heritage providers working in both the sciences and the humanities to reassess White's life and work in the light of new findings and methodologies, to encourage and develop new networks and collaborations between White scholars, and to explore opportunities for collaborative research and publication. To that end, we invite proposals for 20-minute papers that explore any aspect of Gilbert White's life, writing, and science, as well as his personal and intellectual contexts. We plan to take forward a selection of the papers to be published in an appropriate format as well as to develop a 'Gilbert White Network' of interested researchers.

Topics may include but are not limited to:

- White's writing, including *The Natural History of Selborne*, *Antiquities of Selborne*, *The Garden Kalendar*, sermons, contributions to the *Philosophical Transactions*, his journal, and his correspondence.
- White's personal life and professional career
- White's scientific findings and scientific practice
- White's family, friends, and correspondents, including Daines Barrington, John Mulso, Thomas Pennant, and others.
- The literary and scientific influences on White's writing and research
- White's religion and role in the Church of England
- White's influence and legacy in locodescriptive and nature writing
- White's influence and legacy in natural history and ecology
- White's legacy in the visual arts
- White in museums and archives

Please submit abstracts of up to 300 words for a 20-minute paper to the conference website by midnight on **Monday 3 February 2025**. We also welcome proposals for preformed panels of three speakers or roundtable discussions of up to five speakers.

- Conference Website: <https://www.gilbertwhite.org.uk>

The conference will be held at The Gilbert White House and Gardens in Selborne, Hampshire. As well as papers and discussion, there will be guided walks around White's home, gardens, church, and the surrounding countryside. There will be a wine reception and a conference dinner and transport will be available from nearby hotels in Alton.

We aim to make the programme available and to open registration by 1 April 2025.

The conference is organised by Brycchan Carey, Professor of English in the Department of Humanities at Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Stephanie Holt, UK Biodiversity Training Manager in the Centre for UK Nature at the Natural History Museum, London.

Website and contact information:

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