

LIKENESSES OF THE REVEREND GILBERT WHITE

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ABSTRACT

This paper summarises verbal descriptions of the Selborne naturalist, the Reverend Gilbert White (1720-1793) by his contemporaries and discusses the background to each of the illustrations which have been suggested as possible likenesses of White. These include the figures in the drawings of S H Grimm prepared for the first edition of The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne, various artists' impressions commissioned for publishers, a portrait in the collections of Knebworth House, Hertfordshire, and another alleged portrait from the Caledonian Road Market in 1912. The only proven authentic likenesses of Gilbert White are two small pen and ink sketches drawn inside his copy of Alexander Pope's translation of Homer's Iliad now in the British Library.

INTRODUCTION

The Reverend Gilbert White is well known as the author of a classic work, *The Natural History of Selborne*, first published in 1789. This book, based on original observations in a Hampshire parish during the eighteenth century, has been through over a hundred different editions and many more reprints – at the present time six British publishers have it on their lists. *The Natural History of Selborne* is a book of many parts, for White was an exceptionally gifted naturalist and a pioneer in studying bird behaviour. As well as being a landmark in science, it is also a book of immense charm and literary style and has therefore earned a place as a classic in English literature. With the appearance of cheap pocket editions in the mid-nineteenth century (listed in Martin 1970), *The Natural History of Selborne* had a large Victorian following many years after its author's death. It was not surprising, therefore, that writers and biographers sought further information on the life and personality

of this remarkable curate, who had achieved so much within the bounds of his own parish, in a secluded part of the Hampshire countryside. White's book is read by naturalists throughout the world and many visitors from overseas come to see the small parish of Selborne where it all began.

DESCRIPTIONS OF WHITE

In the nineteenth century compilers of new editions of *The Natural History of Selborne* went to seek out elderly residents who may have been able to remember the Selborne naturalist. These verbal accounts of Gilbert White were summarised by E A Martin (1970). They consist of several word pictures of Gilbert White, highlighting aspects of his personality and appearance. When Martin's book was first published in 1897 there was no suggestion or knowledge of any portrait or sketch of White the naturalist, apart from interpretations of figures in the engravings of Grimm's drawing published in the first edition (see below).

There are relatively few recollections of him from members of his own family, in spite of the vast numbers of nephews and nieces which Gilbert White refers to in his journals. A short biographical note written by his nephew, John White the publisher, first appeared in the 1802 edition of *The Natural History of Selborne* – this is repeated in *The Illustrated Natural History of Selborne* (1984).

Other nephews who left recollections of White were the Reverend Edmund White (1758-1838), vicar of the adjacent parish of Newton Valence, another son of Gilbert White's publisher brother Benjamin, and secondly, the Reverend Francis White (1781-1864), youngest son of Gilbert's brother,

Henry of Fyfield in Hampshire. The first, Edmund White, evidently left a written account of his impressions of Gilbert White, passages which were quoted in a memoir at the beginning of Professor Thomas Bell's edition of *The Natural History & Antiquities of Selborne* published in 1877. Edmund refers to White's kindness, cheerfulness, humour and engaging conversation that was listened to with delight by people of all ages and walks of life. His nephew particularly emphasised White's concern and understanding for the poor of the parish. Professor Bell, who was working on his edition of *The Natural History & Antiquities of Selborne*, soon after he bought Gilbert White's home, 'The Wakes' in 1844, was able to meet the Reverend Francis White who remembered his uncle Gilbert well, although he was only twelve years of age when White died. It was Francis who provided information on White's physical appearance – only 5 feet 3 inches in stature, of a spare form and remarkably upright carriage.

Recollections of White by older villagers in the nineteenth century were often included in the introductions to different editions of *The Natural History of Selborne*. That of 1833, with notes by Capt Thomas Brown, includes a second-hand account by an old lady who had nursed several of the White family and said of White: 'he was a still quiet body' and that 'there wasn't a bit of harm in him, I'll assure ye, sir: there wasn't indeed'. Other recollections by villagers included the way Gilbert White would walk along the lanes 'tap-tapping with his cane' and stopping now and again to brush the dust off his shoes (Martin 1970; *Nature Notes* 4 151). In preparing the notes for his edition of *The Natural History of Selborne* (1880) Frank Buckland went to Selborne and also met Professor Bell, who was then residing at The Wakes and researching into Gilbert White. Buckland tried to gather local stories of White to use in his introduction. Henry Wells told him that 'White was thought very little of till he was dead and gone, and then he was thought a great deal of'. Buckland also interviewed Mrs Small, who was a girl when White died, but she could remember little of

him except that 'he was a quiet old gentleman with very old-fashioned sayings' and 'White used to give a number of poor people a goose every Christmas. He was very kind in giving presents to the poor' and she also referred to White's tortoise kept in the garden, something which would have interested a child very much.

White's charitable attitude to the poor comes up again in recollections of Thomas Bell's gardener, William Binnie, as related by the late James Cobb who was eight when White died. Buckland writes, 'When Cobb saw White coming he used to run and put stones into the ruts and fill them up. White used to give him a penny and say 'Good boy, good boy'. . . . Mr Binnie said that Hale, who died in 1855, aged seventy-eight, described White to him as 'a little, thin, prim upright man'. Hale must have been sixteen years old when White died.' Robert Mudie, in the 1858 edition, referred to elderly Selborne residents who spoke of White as 'an excellent and amiable man' confirming again Francis White's impression of his kindness and familiarity with fellow villagers. Mrs Small, referred to above in the notes by Frank Buckland and living to nearly 100, was the last Selborne resident to remember Gilbert White – she died on 2 April 1880.

The naturalist and writer, W H Hudson, wrote in his book *Hampshire Days* (1983; first published 1903) of his aged landlady whose mother had remembered Gilbert White well. She was about 12 when he died and used to relate many interesting things about him, but these memories could not be recalled by Hudson's elderly landlady however hard she tried.

An anecdote concerning White's neat habits was a story related in Thomas Bell's memoir (1877) of the time when Gilbert White was Junior Proctor at Oxford and one night he found a student outside asleep and intoxicated, but as his outer garments were neatly folded up beside him, White decided that the student was not wholly degraded a character and he escaped with a warning.

The Earl of Stamford, in his speech at the Gilbert White centenary celebrations at

Selborne in 1893, told a story illustrating the great esteem with which villagers regarded White. He was dining at a farmhouse when the housewife sprinkled his dish with sugar (a luxury commodity in those days) and when White restrained her he was told, 'Nothing can be too good for you, Sir' (*Nature Notes* 4 151-2).

Although Gilbert White never worked the perpetual curacy of Moreton Pinckney in Northamptonshire bestowed on him by Oriel College in 1757, he made regular journeys to the parish. Thomas Bell (1877) reported an account of the Reverend Thomas Mozley holding the living of Moreton Pinckney from 1852-1856, who recollected his conversation with an elderly person, Mr Stockley, who had been a church warden there and remembered White coming to receive his rents and dues. 'He described him as a quiet, pleasant gentleman.'

Verbal descriptions of Gilbert White give the impression of a small, slim person, with a cheerful and likeable personality, a concern for all members of the community, having a facility with words and an aptitude for conversation and being of neat, regular habits. He had an inner confidence but maintained a low profile in life while quietly pursuing his ecclesiastical duties as curate and studying natural history in his spare time.

PICTURES SUGGESTED TO BE LIKENESSES OF WHITE

In the White family there was a general tradition that Gilbert White never sat for his portrait although likenesses existed of all his brothers with the exception of Francis, who died in his early twenties. Rashleigh Holt-White, White's biographer, was firm in his opinion that no likeness of White existed (Holt-White 1901). In the 1853 edition of *The Natural History of Selborne*, with notes by Sir William Jardine, there is a footnote taken from an article by Algernon Holt-White which says, 'Oriel College, of which Gilbert White was for more than fifty years a fellow, some years since offered to have a portrait painted of him for

their hall. An enquiry was then made of all the members of his family, but no portrait of any description could be found. I have heard my father [Thomas Holt-White, junior] say that Gilbert White was much pressed by his brother Thomas (my grandfather) to have his portrait painted, and that he talked of it, but it was never done.'

The Grimm Drawings

Some of the drawings done by S H Grimm in 1776 for use in the first edition of White's book had figures in them, and this led to speculation on whether any of them could be likenesses of Gilbert White. The view of the Plestor shows a slim middle-aged man with a spaniel dog (reproduced in *The Antiquities of Selborne* published by Gresham in 1982). From White's letter to Robert Marsham written in 1792 and reproduced in Bell's edition of *The Natural History of Selborne* we are informed that White kept spaniels, so could the figure have been intended to represent Gilbert White and his dog, another villager or put in afterwards from the imagination of the artist to give life to the scene? Bowdler Sharpe (1902) accepted the identity of the figure on the Plestor as White.

The frontispiece of the first edition by Grimm (now published on the end boards of the Webb and Bower illustrated edition of 1984) shows four figures on a hill top looking towards Selborne Hanger. As one of these is shown in clerical dress, it has been suggested that this figure may have been intended to portray Gilbert White.

Professor Bell (1877) identifies the figures as the Reverend Yalden (of Newton Valence), Mr Etty (brother of the Vicar of Selborne), Mrs. Yalden and Thomas White (Gilbert White's brother), but he did not give any reason for these suggestions. A relative of White, the Earl of Stamford, however had a different interpretation (Stamford 1893a) and his evidence was based on information given to him by Dr J T White, who 'distinctly remembers his father (Gilbert's nephew) [John, the publisher] having told him that in the frontispiece of the quarto edition of the *Selborne* the figure coming

up the hill was intended for Gilbert, and though not exactly a portrait, was in general outline very like him'. The original watercolour of the frontispiece is now in the University of Harvard, USA. Another illustration by Grimm, that of The Wakes drawn from the Great Mead, and recently published in the facsimile of Gilbert White's *Garden Calendar* (White 1975) shows a slimly built man walking along White's brick path and this could have been intended as a likeness of Gilbert White.

Dr Bowdler Sharpe (1902) discussed the two interpretations of the figures in the frontispiece of the first edition of White's book and shortly afterwards Rashleigh Holt-White took up the subject in which he disagreed with Bowdler Sharpe in accepting J T White's interpretation and preferred to accept that in Bell, which he thought came on the authority of either the Rev Francis White or the Rev Edmund White, (Holt-White 1902) and he, likewise, dismissed the possibility of the figure on the Plestor being White, asserting firmly that there was no known likeness of Gilbert White. The figure walking the brick path in the garden was not discussed.

In the absence of any documentary evidence from Grimm, the artist, or relevant remarks in the White family's personal correspondence during Gilbert White's lifetime, the possibility of these Grimm figures being interpreted as likenesses of Gilbert White must remain conjectural.

Artists' Impressions

Dr Bowdler Sharpe discussed the various interpretations of the figures in the Grimm illustrations (Bowdler Sharpe (1902) and he also went on to explain some artist impressions of White that were commissioned from Edmund J Sullivan, to illustrate his two volume edition of *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* published in 1900. There are 14, possibly 15, sketches illustrating aspects of White's book, which include an artist's impression of White, and at least one of these 'The right time by the sun' has been used as a

postcard. Bowdler Sharpe explains 'although I had furnished to the artist all the details which were known respecting Gilbert White's personal appearance, and had asked that his sketches should be submitted to me, the whole of the pictures were finished during my absence abroad, and promptly photogravured, so that I had no choice in the matter of their publication. As specimens of the 'black and white' drawing for which Mr Sullivan is famous these pictures have been greatly admired, but that they in no way represent Gilbert White can be seen at once by a comparison of the dress of the Georgian clergyman depicted in the original edition of Selborne'.

Another artist's impression of White done in the late nineteenth century was painted for Mr Christopher (husband of Georgiana White) based on the clergyman in the engraving from Grimm's drawing used as a frontispiece for *The Natural History of Selborne* discussed earlier. This picture was seen sometime after the Centenary of 1893 when someone wrote to the press starting a rumour that a portrait of Gilbert White existed (Holt-White 1913).

Another more recent example of imaginative art work was a full length picture of Gilbert White at a writing table which used the alleged portrait from the Caledonian Road Market as its basis that is discussed in full later in this paper. This artist's impression was published in *The Amateur Naturalist* (Durrell & Durrell 1982). Other impressions of White, drawn in pencil by the author Anthony Rye were used to illustrate *Gilbert White and his Selborne* (1970).

Knebworth House Portrait

A portrait at Knebworth House, Hertfordshire, in the possession of the Earl of Lytton was also claimed to be a likeness of Gilbert White, the naturalist. Rashleigh Holt-White (1913) did not accept it as authentic and wrote, 'For those who are interested in such things, I may mention that another 'portrait' is, or a few years ago was, to be seen at Knebworth in Herts.'

Members of the Selborne Society duly visited Knebworth House in June 1913 and saw the portrait. The report of the excursion (*The Selborne Magazine* 24 160) gives no further information, but a photograph of it was published and the caption to this gave the information that the name 'Gilbert White' was written on the back (*The Selborne Magazine* 24 142-145).

A photograph of the Lytton portrait was published again in the edition of *The Natural History of Selborne* published by Thornton Butterworth Ltd in 1929.

Since the evidence for this relies on the inscription on the back and the name could refer to one other than the naturalist, there has been little support for the acceptance of the Knebworth House portrait. It was not possible to trace this portrait today at Knebworth House.

The Caledonian Road Market Alleged Portrait

In 1912 an 18th century portrait in oils of a clergyman bearing the label 'Gilbert White' was sold in the Caledonian Road Market in London during August for a very small sum. It was later bought by an art dealer, John Glen, who was responsible for publicising the portrait and claiming that it was the Selborne naturalist, the Reverend Gilbert White. News first came out in the national press - *The Guardian* on 1 March 1913 and *The Daily Mail* on 3 March 1913, the latter illustrated with a photograph showing detail of the face, the same day as a meeting of the Selborne Society.

The publicity brought an immediate response from Gilbert White devotees, and in particular from the London-based Selborne Society, which took a special interest in White and matters related to Selborne. Selborne Society's Vice-president, Mr Whitaker, replied with a letter to *The Guardian* on 5 March expressing his delight at the discovery of the portrait. The dealer, Mr John Glen, was contacted and he agreed to exhibit the portrait at the Annual General Meeting of the Society in April 1913 - Glen also contributed a letter outlining his claim for the portrait being Gil-

bert White. This was duly published (*The Selborne Magazine* 24 63-67) together with a photograph of the portrait. In a later issue of the magazine Rashleigh Holt-White affirms his convictions that there was never any portrait of Gilbert White and that he accepted neither the earlier portrait discovered at Knebworth House nor the new discovery from the Caledonian Road Market (Holt-White 1913). Correspondence from members followed on the subject. Colonel S C Halliday (related to Gilbert White's youngest brother, Henry) could 'see no reason whatever for doubting the authenticity of the portrait. The statement made by some present and late members of the family that his portrait was never taken is merely based on the fact that they themselves had never heard of it.' Major C Vipian in 1913 suggested that the portrait may have been painted by one of the travelling artists and that Gilbert White may not have liked it and the artist took it away (*The Selborne Magazine* 24 104).

Members of the Society were divided on the authenticity of the Caledonian Road Market portrait and the Society itself neither officially accepted nor refuted it. The Vice-president, Mr J Whitaker, corresponded with the dealer, John Glen, and Cdr R H S Rodger has kindly made available copies of the correspondence between Glen and Whitaker. The Vice-president was evidently not at the Annual General Meeting when the portrait was exhibited for John Glen reports back to Whitaker in a letter of 22 April 1913, 'The meeting last night was a very tame affair; the chairman invited me to tell the meeting what I knew about the portrait which I did. He remarked that the Society neither accepted nor rejected it, but would wait for Mr Glen to complete the history of the picture, which I thought a rather fatuous remark, because if there was a definite history it would not have drifted to the Cattle Market and afterwards into my hands.

'The few members present inspected it with a mild curiosity, one saying that it was not his idea of what Gilbert White was like! I am now sending it to the restorer for relining and restoration; after which it will be engraved.'

The Society evidently did not give Glen the support he had hoped for.

However, Glen still had an engraving made of the portrait, he lent it for display at a gallery in London to accompany an exhibition of water-colour drawings of Selborne by Mr Seaby and a further letter from Glen appeared in the July issue of *The Selborne Magazine* 24 126-127. Glen had established that the picture was entered for a sale at Christies in 1887, but was withdrawn before the auction. He had written to the name and address of the then owner but his letter was returned 'unknown' and in this, together with some abortive advertising, he had been unable to discover the history of the picture. No further lead came when he enquired of the dealer from whom he had bought the portrait. In a postscript to the letter he attacked Rashleigh Holt-White's arguments for there being 'no portrait'. Glen's case for the authenticity of the portrait was based on:

- a) an 18th century date from the type of canvas and stainer,
- b) the old label saying 'The Rev. Gilbert White MA, Naturalist and Author 1720-1793' shown in the photograph published *The Selborne Magazine*; the tablet was dated to the late 18th century and the lettering to early 19th century,
- c) no known motive for a fraudulent label when the picture went so cheaply at a cattle market,
- d) the country picture book held by the subject being appropriate to Gilbert White,
- e) the resemblance between the portrait and that of his brother Thomas,
- f) correspondence of known characteristics, but these were only vaguely known from verbal descriptions.

Although the Vice-president, Mr Whitaker, accepted Glen's interpretation of the portrait and continued to correspond with him, the Selborne Society lost interest in it when its history was found to be unobtainable. The engravings which Glen had made and was selling in 1913 went well and the 250 copies of

the limited edition made their way to many different outlets. These came to be used in later years as illustrations of Gilbert White in books, magazines and newspapers for many years to come.

The minute books of the Selborne Society for 1914 recorded the Secretary exhibiting an engraving of the alleged portrait of Gilbert White at a meeting. This had been presented to them by John Glen. Although the story of this portrait was fully reported in *The Selborne Magazine*, the Committee seemed not to have involved themselves in the alleged portrait.

John Glen, unable to establish his claim on the portrait, kept it in his own possession and some 22 years later, in 1936, he offered it to the National Portrait Gallery in London. The correspondence relating to this was studied by the author in London. In March 1936 the Director of the National Portrait Gallery wrote to Glen to ask him when the canvas was relined and on the carbon copy of the letter is a pencil note to say 'called to say he had no record'. By this time Glen's memory must have been failing for in a letter published in *The Selborne Magazine* he recorded having the picture relined in 1913. The National Portrait Gallery failed to be convinced of the authenticity of the portrait and it was returned to Glen as unproven.

No more is heard of the Caledonian Road Market portrait for a number of years and Glen must have been coming towards the end of his life. However, the prints from his limited edition continued to be copied whenever an illustration was required of Gilbert White. One of these was used in the magazine *Country Life* in July 1970 to accompany D Macer Wright's article 'Naturalist in a philistine world'. This brought a letter to the Editor of the magazine (published in January 1971) from Mr J Liackman of South Africa who had bought the original portrait in oil as an unidentified 18th century portrait and he was intrigued to find that it had once been claimed as a likeness of the Selborne naturalist, Gilbert White. After reading the letter in *Country Life*, Cdr R H S Rodger, then a Trustee of The Oates Memorial Museum and The Gilbert



Fig 1. The two small pen and ink sketches are the only authentic likenesses of The Reverend Gilbert White, the Selborne naturalist. They were discovered in 1914 in White's own copy of Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad* which was presented to him on his graduation at Oxford. This set of volumes is now in the British Library and the photographs are published with their permission.

White Museum at Selborne, made contact with Mr Liackman. He was told that the portrait had been bought in London as '18th Century English School' and that the old tablet with the name of Gilbert White (which was Glen's main evidence for his claim) had been taken away. The portrait now hangs in Mr Liackman's home in Johannesburg, South Africa. A copy of Mr Liackman's letter to Cdr R H S Rodger dated 26 April 1971 is in the Gilbert White Museum, together with a copy of the original letter sent by Cdr Roger.

The Glen print of the Caledonian Market

portrait was also used as the basis for an oil reproduction commissioned by Robert Washington Oates who provided the purchase money for The Wakes from his own Trust fund. The artist was Arthur Royce Bradbury of Parkstone, Dorset (listed in the *Dictionary of British Artists* working 1900–1950): Robert Washington Oates also lived in that part of Dorset. In the 1950s the Glen print was widely used by publishers as the standard illustration of Gilbert White, in spite of the existing doubts over its authenticity among those seriously interested in the life of Gilbert White.

Bradbury's reproduction portrait was on display at The Gilbert White Museum at The Wakes in its early years, but was later put into store following complaints from visitors on its doubtful authenticity.

THE GENUINE LIKENESS OF GILBERT WHITE

In 1914, a year after the publicity surrounding the alleged portrait from the Caledonian Road Market, two small pen and ink sketches were discovered drawn inside a set of books which had belonged to Gilbert White. These six volumes were Alexander Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad*, which bore Gilbert White's name inside volume I in his own distinctive hand and the inscription:

Gil: White
Oriol College
Oxon.

Given to me by Mr.
Alexander Pope on my
taking the Degree of
B.A.
June 30th: 1743
6 volumes.

The sketches are in volumes III and V, which are in now faded brown ink (Fig 1). The largest, in volume III (65 × 105mm), shows a three quarter face with the inscription written in White's hand:

Portrait of G:W:
penned by T:C:

'T:C:' is almost certainly the T Chapman who appears in the chess score written inside volume II for results of 20 chess games between four people played on 26 March, 1746. It is interesting to note that White had the best score, winning four out of his five games. Thomas Chapman of Trinity College, Oxford, was Senior Proctor when White served as Junior Proctor.

The other sketch in volume V showing a

profile of White wearing a mortar board (with the inscription of just 'G.W.') is much smaller (28 × 30mm).

These volumes came up for sale at an auction in Alton, just 4 miles from Selborne, tied up with string and sold for a trifling sum. They were bought by a Winchester bookseller, who later realised their importance, and they are now in The British Library in London (Add mss 38875-80). Unlike the previous alleged portrait, these won immediate acceptance as being genuine likenesses of White, even by Rashleigh Holt-White, who had firmly dismissed all the other claims. He publicised the discovery in *The Field* for 6 June, 1914, which was reprinted a month later in *The Selborne Magazine* 25 126-131, together with full illustrations of the sketches and inscriptions mentioned above. These sketches are the only likenesses of the naturalist Gilbert White that have been accepted as authentic by the National Portrait Gallery and listed in the *Dictionary of British Portraiture*.

It is interesting that these sketches were unknown by the White family. In his will, Gilbert White left his books to be equally divided between two nephews, John White, surgeon of the city of Salisbury and Charles Henry White, clerk of the Parish of Fyfield in Hampshire. Possession by either of these nephews could explain the volumes remaining in Alton, for Charles Henry White was Rector at Shalden, north of Alton from 1797 until his death in 1859. Likewise John White was a surgeon in Alton in the early 19th century and his mother is buried there. It is probable that the nephew who owned these volumes never read them and did not discover the treasures they contained.

DISCUSSION

The only officially accepted likenesses of the naturalist, the Reverend Gilbert White, are the two little pen and ink sketches inside volumes of his own copy of Pope's translation of Homer's *Iliad* that is now in the British Library. Only these should be used by picture

researchers and publishers to illustrate articles and books on Gilbert White.

The figures of people in the drawings by S H Grimm, discussed earlier in this paper as being possible likenesses of White, must remain conjecture due to the lack of any documentary evidence to support the claim. Conflicting opinions of two of White's nephews on the identity of the figures in the frontispiece of the first edition of *The Natural History of Selborne* do not help to solve the problem. Likewise there is insufficient evidence to lend support to the claims of the portrait at Knebworth House or the discovery from the Caledonian Road Market that has been much used in books and magazines this century.

From verbal descriptions of Gilbert White, including White's nephew Francis White who knew the naturalist in his later years, we conclude that White was a short person of slim build. The genuine sketches of him show a pointed, straight nose, a receding forehead, a narrow chin and lower jaw. Although the Knebworth House portrait also had a straight nose and receding forehead, there is no history by which this picture can be authenticated, nor is there any known reason why a portrait of Gilbert White should be at Knebworth House in Hertfordshire, which was not a part of the country he visited.

Apart from the straight nose, the portrait from the Caledonian Road Market has many points of difference when compared with the sketches in the *Iliad*. The forehead of the alleged portrait is erect rather than receding and the whole face shorter and more stocky than in the genuine sketch. There was no evidence from White's nephews that he put on weight in later life. One can admit a similarity between the Caledonian Road Market portrait and that of Gilbert's brother Thomas (published in Rashleigh Holt-White's biography *The Life and Letters of Gilbert White of Selborne* Vol I, opposite p 298) and the original (now on loan from Mrs Pauline Laws) is on display at The Gilbert White Museum, Selborne. Both show a squarish face, erect forehead and stocky body, but brothers, particularly of a large family, do not necessarily look alike.

Walter S Scott, in his book *White of Selborne*, thought that the alleged portrait was of Gilbert White but one which he did not like and which the artist took away. He also went on to point out that the portrait painter Metz stayed at brother Henry's home at Fyfield in Hampshire, when he painted Molly White (Thomas's daughter).

This line of investigation was further developed by Clive Burton in his book *Diaries of an 18th Century Parson* (1979), which is on the life of the Reverend Henry White. Burton pointed out that Metz stayed at Fyfield during the summers of 1780, 1781 and 1782 when he painted portraits of the family. That of Henry's daughter Ann White (who married a Halliday) is the only one known to exist today. Examination of the manuscript of Gilbert White's *Naturalist's Journal* in The British Library showed that Gilbert White was at Fyfield from 28 August – 8 September 1780 and during that time Henry White recorded in his journal that on 28 August 1780 Gilbert White and niece Molly White arrived from Selborne, while 2 days later on 30 August Molly had her portrait painted by Mr Metz. The original manuscript of Henry White's diary for 1780 appears to have been lost, but extracts were copied out and published by the Reverend R H Clutterbuck in 1893, so some of the information has been preserved. Gilbert White's *Naturalist's Journal* for 1781 makes no reference to any Fyfield visit that year and in his visit of 1782 (23 October – 1 November) he comments 'my brother's children and plantations strangely grown in two years', which confirms his absence from Fyfield in 1781. At Fyfield in 1782 Gilbert White makes no reference to the presence of Metz and neither does Henry White in his diaries for that year (which were both examined at The British Library) although the arrival of other visitors during White's stay were duly recorded. From this we conclude that Gilbert White was only known to meet Mr Metz on one occasion at Fyfield in 1780, when he was occupied in painting portraits of the young ladies of the family, including the daughter of the more affluent and prosperous Thomas White.

Various reasons have been put forward for the absence of an official portrait of the naturalist Gilbert White when most other members of the family were painted and these portraits are listed and illustrated by Rashleigh Holt-White (1901). One theory put forward was that since he had suffered from small pox in the autumn of 1747 his face may have been pock-marked and this might have inhibited him in sitting for a portrait. However, small pox was not uncommon in the 18th century and it is likely that artists would have toned down facial blemishes, particularly if they wished to sell their portraits.

Another possible reason for the lack of a portrait was that Gilbert, unlike his brothers, never married and would have had less of an urge to have a portrait to hand down to following generations. Other contributory factors would be that he was a modest man, but perhaps more likely he did not view a portrait as a priority for use of his funds or time. Unlike his brothers, who either followed a prosperous trade (like Thomas and Benjamin) or took an official college living (like Henry), White remained a low-paid curate for the whole of his life, eking out the curacy with his Oriel College Fellowship and some private income. Although comfortably provided for his own modest requirements without dependents, and allowing for a reasonable expenditure on his library, and for entertaining, Gilbert White did not have the financial surplus which brother Thomas did, and a

portrait was likely to be a lower priority compared with an addition to his library. Thomas Holt-White junior reported that his father pressed Gilbert to have his portrait painted and that it was talked of but never done. Maybe Gilbert White was simply too busy working on a more important memorial – his classic book *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* and perhaps brother Thomas did not offer to subsidise the production of a portrait. We do not know the answer and the only likenesses for which proof exists are those simple little pen and ink sketches inside his copy of the *Iliad*, which are more consistent with his personality and his simple tombstone just bearing initials than an officially painted portrait in oils.

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