

GILBERT WHITE

# HISTORY OF SELBORNE



**Gilbert White**

# **History of Selborne**

Published by

**MUSAICUM**

Books

- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook Formatting -

[musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info](mailto:musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info)

2021 OK Publishing

EAN 4064066380533

# Table of Contents

[Volume 1](#)

[Volume 2](#)

# **VOLUME 1**

[Table of Contents](#)

# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.

LETTERS ADDRESSED TO THOMAS PENNANT, ESQ.

LETTER I.

LETTER II.

LETTER III.

LETTER IV.

LETTER V.

LETTER VI.

LETTER VII.

LETTER VIII.

LETTER IX.

LETTER X.

LETTER XI.

LETTER XII.

LETTER XIII.

LETTER XIV.

LETTER XV.

LETTER XVI.

LETTER XVII.

LETTER XVIII.

LETTER XIX.

LETTER XX.

LETTER XXI.

LETTER XXII.

LETTER XXIII.

LETTER XXIV.

TO THOMAS PENNANT, ESQUIRE.

LETTER XXV.

LETTER XXVI.

LETTER XXVII.

LETTER XXVIII.

LETTER XXIX.

LETTER XXX.

LETTER XXXI.

LETTER XXXII.

LETTER XXXIII.

LETTER XXXIV.

LETTER XXXV.

LETTER XXXVI.

LETTER XXXVII.

LETTER XXXVIII.

LETTER XXXIX.

LETTER XL.

LETTER XLI.

LETTER XLII.

LETTER XLIII.

LETTER XLIV.

LETTERS TO THE HON. DAINES BARRINGTON.

LETTER I.

LETTER II.

LETTER III.

LETTER IV.

LETTER V.

LETTER VI.

LETTER VII.

LETTER VIII

LETTER IX.

LETTER X.

LETTER XI.

LETTER XII.

LETTER XIII.

LETTER XIV.

# INTRODUCTION.

## [Table of Contents](#)

Gilbert White was born in the village of Selborne on the 18th of July, in the year 1720. His father was a gentleman of good means, with a house at Selborne and some acres of land. Gilbert had his school training at Basingstoke, from Thomas Warton, the father of the poet of that name, who was born at Basingstoke in 1728, six years younger than his brother Joseph, who had been born at Dunsford, in Surrey. Thomas Warton, their father, was the youngest of three sons of a rector of Breamore, in the New Forest, and the only son of the three who was not deaf and dumb. This Thomas, the elder, was an able man, who obtained a fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, became vicar of Basingstoke, in Hampshire, and was there headmaster of the school to which young Gilbert White was sent. He was referred to in Amhurst's "Terræ Filius" as "a reverend poetical gentleman;" he knew Pope, and had credit enough for his verse to hold the office of Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1718 to 1728. His genius for writing middling verse passed on to his more famous sons, Joseph and Thomas, and they both became in due time Oxford Professors of Poetry.

Gilbert White passed on from school to Oxford, where he entered Oriel College in 1739. He became a Fellow of Oriel, graduated M.A. in 1746, at the age of six-and-twenty, and six years afterwards he served as one of the Senior Proctors of the University. His love of nature grew with him from boyhood, and was associated with his earliest years of home. His heart abided with his native village. When he had taken holy orders he could have obtained college livings, but he cared only to go back to his native village, and the



house in which he was born, paying a yearly visit to Oxford, and in that house, after a happy life that extended a few years over the threescore and ten, he died on the 26th of June, 1793.

Gilbert White never married, but lived in peaceful performance of light clerical duties and enjoyment of those observations of nature which his book records. His brothers, who shared his love of nature, aided instead of thwarting him in his studies of the natural history of Selborne, and as their lives were less secluded and they did not remain unmarried, they provided him with a family of young people to care about, for he lived to register the births of sixty-three nephews and nieces.

It was one of his brothers, who was a member of the Royal Society, by whom Gilbert White was persuaded, towards the close of his life, to gather his notes into a book. It was first published in a quarto volume in the year of the outbreak of the French Revolution with the fall of the Bastille. He was more concerned with the course of events in a martin's nest than with the crash of empires, and no man ever made more evident the latent power of enjoyment that is left dead by those who live uneventful lives surrounded by a world of life and change and growth which they want eyes to see. Gilbert White was in his seventieth year when his book appeared, four years before his death. It was compiled from letters addressed to Thomas Pennant and the Hon. Daines Barrington.

Thomas Pennant was a naturalist six years younger than Gilbert White. He was born at Downing, in Flintshire, in 1726, and died in 1798, like White, in the house in which he had been born. His love of Natural History made him a traveller at home and abroad. He counted Buffon among his friends. He had written many books before the date of the publication of White's "Selborne." Pennant's "British Zoology," his "History of Quadrupeds" and "Arctic Zoology,"

had a high reputation. He wrote also a Tour in Wales and a History of London.

Daines Barrington, fourth son of the first Viscount Barrington, was a year younger than Pennant, and died in 1800. He became Secretary to Greenwich Hospital, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and President of the Royal Society. His "Miscellanies," published in 4to in 1781, deal with questions of Natural History, and of Antiquities, including a paper first published in 1775 asserting the possibility of approaching the North Pole. His most valued book was one of "Observations on the more Ancient Statutes."

H.M.

# LETTERS ADDRESSED TO THOMAS PENNANT, ESQ.

[Table of Contents](#)

## LETTER I.

[Table of Contents](#)

The parish of Selborne lies in the extreme eastern corner of the county of Hampshire, bordering on the county of Sussex, and not far from the county of Surrey; is about fifty miles south-west of London, in latitude fifty-one, and near mid-way between the towns of Alton and Petersfield. Being very large and extensive, it abuts on twelve parishes, two of which are in Sussex, viz., Trotton and Rogate. If you begin from the south and proceed westward, the adjacent parishes are Emsbot, Newton Valence, Faringdon, Hartley Mauduit, Great Ward le Ham, Kingsley, Hadleigh, Bramshot, Trotton, Rogate, Lyffe, and Greatham. The soils of this district are almost as various and diversified as the views and aspects. The high part of the south-west consists of a vast hill of chalk, rising three hundred feet above the village, and is divided into a sheep-down, the high wood and a long hanging wood, called The Hanger. The covert of this eminence is altogether *beech*, the most lovely of all forest trees, whether we consider its smooth rind or bark, its glossy foliage, or graceful pendulous boughs. The down, or sheep-walk, is a pleasing, park-like spot, of about one mile by half that space, jutting out on the verge of the hill-country, where it begins to break down into the plains, and commanding a very engaging view, being an assemblage of

hill, dale, wood-lands, heath, and water. The prospect is bounded to the south-east and east by the vast range of mountains called the Sussex Downs, by Guild-down near Guildford, and by the Downs round Dorking, and Ryegate in Surrey, to the north-east, which altogether, with the country beyond Alton and Farnham, form a noble and extensive outline.

At the foot of this hill, one stage or step from the uplands, lies the village, which consists of one single straggling street, three-quarters of a mile in length, in a sheltered vale, and running parallel with the Hanger. The houses are divided from the hill by a vein of stiff clay (good wheat land), yet stand on a rock of white stone, little in appearance removed from chalk; but seems so far from being calcareous, that it endures extreme heat. Yet that the freestone still preserves somewhat that is analogous to chalk, is plain from the beeches, which descend as low as those rocks extend, and no farther, and thrive as well on them, where the ground is steep, as on the chalks.

The cart-way of the village divides, in a remarkable manner, two very incongruous soils. To the south-west is a rank clay, that requires the labour of years to render it mellow; while the gardens to the north-east, and small enclosures behind, consist of a warm, forward, crumbling mould, called black malm, which seems highly saturated with vegetable and animal manure; and these may perhaps have been the original site of the town; while the woods and coverts might extend down to the opposite bank.

At each end of the village, which runs from south-east to north-west, arises a small rivulet: that at the north-west end frequently fails; but the other is a fine perennial spring, little influenced by drought or wet seasons, called Well-head. This breaks out of some high grounds joining to Nore Hill, a noble chalk promontory, remarkable for sending forth two streams into two different seas. The one to the south becomes a

branch of the Arun, running to Arundel, and so sailing into the British Channel: the other to the north. The Selborne stream makes one branch of the Wey; and, meeting the Black-down stream at Hadleigh, and the Alton and Farnham stream at Tilford-bridge, swells into a considerable river, navigable at Godalming; from whence it passes to Guildford, and so into the Thames at Weybridge; and thus at the Nore into the German Ocean.

Our wells, at an average, run to about sixty-three foot, and when sunk to that depth seldom fail; but produce a fine limpid water, soft to the taste, and much commended by those who drink the pure element, but which does not lather well with soap.

To the north-west, north and east of the village, is a range of fair enclosures, consisting of what is called a white malm, a sort of rotten or rubble stone, which, when turned up to the frost and rain, moulders to pieces, and becomes manure to itself.

Still on to the north-east, and a step lower, is a kind of white land, neither chalk nor clay, neither fit for pasture nor for the plough, yet kindly for hops, which root deep in the freestone, and have their poles and wood for charcoal growing just at hand. The white soil produces the brightest hops.

As the parish still inclines down towards Wolmer Forest, at the juncture of the clays and sand the soil becomes a wet, sandy loam, remarkable for timber, and infamous for roads. The oaks of Temple and Black-moor stand high in the estimation of purveyors, and have furnished much naval timber; while the trees on the freestone grow large, but are what workmen call shaky, and so brittle as often to fall to pieces in sawing. Beyond the sandy loam the soil becomes a hungry, lean sand, till it mingles with the forest; and will produce little without the assistance of lime and turnips.

## LETTER II.

### [Table of Contents](#)

In the court of Norton farmhouse, a manor farm to the north-west of the village, on the white malms, stood within these twenty years a broad-leaved elm, or wych hazel, *ulmus folio latissimo scabro* of Ray, which, though it had lost a considerable leading bough in the great storm in the year 1703, equal to a moderate tree, yet, when felled, contained eight loads of timber; and, being too bulky for a carriage, was sawn off at seven feet above the butt, where it measured near eight feet in the diameter. This elm I mention to show to what a bulk planted elms may attain; as this tree must certainly have been such from its situation.

In the centre of the village, and near the church, is a square piece of ground surrounded by houses, and vulgarly called "The Plestor." In the midst of this spot stood, in old times, a vast oak, with a short squat body, and huge horizontal arms extending almost to the extremity of the area. This venerable tree, surrounded with stone steps, and seats above them, was the delight of old and young, and a place of much resort in summer evenings; where the former sat in grave debate, while the latter frolicked and danced before them. Long might it have stood, had not the amazing tempest in 1703 overturned it at once, to the infinite regret of the inhabitants, and the vicar, who bestowed several pounds in setting it in its place again: but all his care could not avail; the tree sprouted for a time, then withered and died. This oak I mention to show to what a bulk planted oaks also may arrive: and planted this tree must certainly have been, as will appear from what will be said farther concerning this area, when we enter on the antiquities of Selborne.

On the Blackmoor estate there is a small wood called Losel's, of a few acres, that was lately furnished with a set of oaks of a peculiar growth and great value; they were tall and taper-like firs, but standing near together had very small heads, only a little brush without any large limbs. About twenty years ago the bridge at the Toy, near Hampton Court, being much decayed, some trees were wanted for the repairs that were fifty feet long without bough, and would measure twelve inches diameter at the little end. Twenty such trees did a purveyor find in this little wood, with this advantage, that many of them answered the description at sixty feet. These trees were sold for twenty pounds apiece.

In the centre of this grove there stood an oak, which, though shapely and tall on the whole, bulged out into a large excrescence about the middle of the stem. On this a pair of ravens had fixed their residence for such a series of years, that the oak was distinguished by the title of the Raven Tree. Many were the attempts of the neighbouring youths to get at this eyry: the difficulty whetted their inclinations, and each was ambitious of surmounting the arduous task. But when they arrived at the swelling, it jutted out so in their way, and was so far beyond their grasp, that the most daring lads were awed, and acknowledged the undertaking to be too hazardous: so the ravens built on, nest upon nest, in perfect security, till the fatal day arrived in which the wood was to be levelled. It was in the month of February, when these birds usually sit. The saw was applied to the butt, the wedges were inserted into the opening, the woods echoed to the heavy blow of the beetle or mall or mallet, the tree nodded to its fall; but still the dam sat on. At last, when it gave way, the bird was flung from her nest, and, though her parental affection deserved a better fate, was whipped down by the twigs which brought her dead to the ground.

## LETTER III.

### [Table of Contents](#)

The fossil-shells of this district, and sorts of stone, such as have fallen within my observation, must not be passed over in silence. And first I must mention, as a great curiosity, a specimen that was ploughed up in the chalky fields, near the side of the Down, and given to me for the singularity of its appearance, which, to an incurious eye, seems like a petrified fish of about four inches long, the cardo passing for a head and mouth. It is in reality a bivalve of the Linnæan Genus of *Mytilus*, and the species of *Crista Galli*; called by Lister, *Rastellum*; by Rumphius, *Ostreum plicatum minus*; by D'Argenville, *Auris Porci*, s. *Crista Galli*; and by those who make collections, Cock's Comb. Though I applied to several such in London, I never could meet with an entire specimen; nor could I ever find in books any engraving from a perfect one. In the superb museum at Leicester House, permission was given me to examine for this article; and, though I was disappointed as to the fossil, I was highly gratified with the sight of several of the shells themselves in high preservation. This bivalve is only known to inhabit the Indian Ocean, where it fixes itself to a zoophyte, known by the name *Gorgonia*. The curious foldings of the suture the one into the other, the alternate flutings or grooves, and the curved form of my specimen, are much easier expressed by the pencil than by words.

*Cornua Ammonis* are very common about this village. As we were cutting an inclining path up the Hanger, the labourers found them frequently on that steep, just under the soil, in the chalk, and of a considerable size. In the lane above Wall-head, in the way to Emshot, they abound in the bank in a darkish sort of marl, and are usually very small



and soft; but in Clay's Pond, a little farther on, at the end of the pit, where the soil is dug out for manure, I have occasionally observed them of large dimensions, perhaps fourteen or sixteen inches in diameter. But as these did not consist of firm stone, but were formed of a kind of terra lapidosa, or hardened clay, as soon as they were exposed to the rains and frost they mouldered away. These seemed as if they were a very recent production. In the chalk-pit, at the north-west end of the Hanger, large nautili are sometimes observed.

In the very thickest strata of our freestone, and at considerable depths, well-diggers often find large scallops or pectines, having both shells deeply striated, and ridged and furrowed alternately. They are highly impregnated with, if not wholly composed of, the stone of the quarry.

## LETTER IV.

### [Table of Contents](#)

As in a former letter the freestone of this place has been only mentioned incidentally, I shall here become more particular.

This stone is in great request for hearth-stones, and the beds of ovens; and in lining of lime-kilns it turns to good account, for the workmen use sandy loam instead of mortar, the sand of which fluxes, and runs by the intense heat, and so cases over the whole face of the kiln with a strong vitrified coat-like glass, that it is well preserved from injuries of weather, and endures thirty or forty years. When chiseled smooth, it makes elegant fronts for houses, equal in colour and grain to Bath stone; and superior in one respect, that, when seasoned, it does not scale. Decent chimney-pieces are worked from it of much closer and finer grain than Portland, and rooms are floored with it, but it proves rather too soft for this purpose. It is a freestone cutting in all directions, yet has something of a grain parallel with the horizon, and therefore should not be surbedded, but laid in the same position that it grows in the quarry. On the ground abroad this firestone will not succeed for pavements, because, probably some degrees of saltness prevailing within it, the rain tears the slabs to pieces. Though this stone is too hard to be acted on by vinegar, yet both the white part, and even the blue rag, ferments strongly in mineral acids. Though the white stone will not bear wet, yet in every quarry at intervals there are thin strata of blue rag, which resist rain and frost, and are excellent for pitching of stables, paths, and courts, and for building of dry walls against banks, a valuable species of fencing much in use in this village, and for mending of roads. This rag is rugged

and stubborn, and will not hew to a smooth face, but is very durable; yet, as these strata are shallow and lie deep, large quantities cannot be procured but at considerable expense. Among the blue rags turn up some blocks tinged with a stain of yellow or rust colour, which seem to be nearly as lasting as the blue; and every now and then balls of a friable substance, like rust of iron, called rust balls.

In Wolmer Forest I see but one sort of stone, called by the workmen sand, or forest-stone. This is generally of the colour of rusty iron, and might probably be worked as iron ore, is very hard and heavy, and of a firm, compact texture, and composed of a small roundish crystalline grit, cemented together by a brown, terrene, ferruginous matter; will not cut without difficulty, nor easily strike fire with steel. Being often found in broad flat pieces, it makes good pavement for paths about houses, never becoming slippery in frost or rain, is excellent for dry walls, and is sometimes used in buildings. In many parts of that waste it lies scattered on the surface of the ground, but is dug on Weaver's Down, a vast hill on the eastern verge of that forest, where the pits are shallow and the stratum thin. This stone is imperishable.

From a notion of rendering their work the more elegant, and giving it a finish, masons chip this stone into small fragments about the size of the head of a large nail, and then stick the pieces into the wet mortar along the joints of their freestone walls. This embellishment carries an odd appearance, and has occasioned strangers sometimes to ask us pleasantly, "whether we fastened our walls together with tenpenny nails."

## LETTER V.

### [Table of Contents](#)

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; so that they look more like water-courses than roads; and are bedded with naked rag for furlongs together. In many places they are reduced sixteen or eighteen feet beneath the level of the fields; and after floods, and in frosts, exhibit very grotesque and wild appearances, from the tangled roots that are twisted among the strata, and from the torrents rushing down their broken sides; and especially when those cascades are frozen into icicles, hanging in all the fanciful shapes of frost-work. These rugged, gloomy scenes affright the ladies when they peep down into them from the paths above, and make timid horsemen shudder while they ride along them; but delight the naturalist with their various botany, and particularly with their curious filices with which they abound.

The manor of Selborne, was it strictly looked after, with all its kindly aspects, and all its sloping coverts, would swarm with game; even now hares, partridges, and pheasants abound; and in old days woodcocks were as plentiful. There are few quails, because they more affect open fields than enclosures; after harvest some few landrails are seen.

The parish of Selborne, by taking in so much of the forest, is a vast district. Those who tread the bounds are employed part of three days in the business, and are of

opinion that the outline, in all its curves and indentings, does not comprise less than thirty miles.

The village stands in a sheltered spot, secured by the Hanger from the strong westerly winds. The air is soft, but rather moist from the effluvia of so many trees; yet perfectly healthy and free from agues.

The quantity of rain that falls on it is very considerable, as may be supposed in so woody and mountainous a district. As my experience of measuring the water is but of short date, I am not qualified to give the mean quantity. I only know that

	Inch.	Hund.
From May 1, 1779, to the end of the year, there fell	28	37!
Jan. 1, 1780, to Jan. 1, 1781	27	32
Jan. 1, 1781, to Jan. 1, 1782	30	71
Jan. 1, 1782, to Jan. 1, 1783	50	26!
Jan. 1, 1783, to Jan. 1, 1784	33	71
Jan. 1, 1784, to Jan. 1, 1785	33	80
Jan. 1, 1785, to Jan. 1, 1786	31	55
Jan. 1, 1786, to Jan. 1, 1787	39	57

The village of Selborne, and large hamlet of Oakhanger, with the single farms, and many scattered houses along the verge of the forest, contain upwards of six hundred and seventy inhabitants.

We abound with poor, many of whom are sober and industrious, and live comfortably in good stone or brick cottages, which are glazed, and have chambers above stairs; mud buildings we have none. Besides the employment from husbandry, the men work in hop-gardens, of which we have many, and fell and bark timber. In the

spring and summer the women weed the corn, and enjoy a second harvest in September by hop-picking. Formerly, in the dead months they availed themselves greatly by spinning wool, for making of barragons, a genteel corded stuff, much in vogue at that time for summer wear, and chiefly manufactured at Alton, a neighbouring town, by some of the people called Quakers; but from circumstances this trade is at an end. The inhabitants enjoy a good share of health and longevity; and the parish swarms with children.

## LETTER VI.

### [Table of Contents](#)

Should I omit to describe with some exactness the forest of Wolmer, of which three-fifths perhaps lie in this parish, my account of Selborne would be very imperfect, as it is a district abounding with many curious productions, both animal and vegetable, and has often afforded me much entertainment both as a sportsman and as a naturalist.

The royal forest of Wolmer is a tract of land of about seven miles in length, by two and a half in breadth, running nearly from north to south, and is abutted on, to begin to the south, and so to proceed eastward, by the parishes of Greatham, Lysse, Rogate, and Trotton, in the county of Sussex; by Bramshot, Hadleigh, and Kingsley. This royalty consists entirely of sand covered with heath and fern, but is somewhat diversified with hills and dales, without having one standing tree in the whole extent. In the bottoms, where the waters stagnate, are many bogs, which formerly abounded with subterraneous trees, though Dr. Plot says positively, that "there never were any fallen trees hidden in the mosses of the southern counties." But he was mistaken: for I myself have seen cottages on the verge of this wild district, whose timbers consisted of a black hard wood, looking like oak, which the owners assured me they procured from the bogs by probing the soil with spits, or some such instruments: but the peat is so much cut out, and the moors have been so well examined, that none has been found of late. Besides the oak, I have also been shown pieces of fossil wood of a paler colour, and softer nature, which the inhabitants called fir: but, upon a nice examination, and trial by fire, I could discover nothing

resinous in them, and therefore rather suppose that they were parts of a willow or alder, or some such aquatic tree.

This lonely domain is a very agreeable haunt for many sorts of wild fowls, which not only frequent it in the winter, but breed there in the summer: such as lapwings, snipes, wild ducks, and, as I have discovered within these few years, teals. Partridges in vast plenty are bred in good seasons on the verge of this forest, into which they love to make excursions; and in particular, in the dry summers of 1740 and 1741, and some years after, they swarmed to such a degree that parties of unreasonable sportsmen killed twenty and sometimes thirty brace in a day.

But there was a nobler species of game in this forest, now extinct, which I have heard old people say abounded much before shooting flying became so common, and that was the heath-cock, black-game, or grouse. When I was a little boy I recollect one coming now and then to my father's table. The last pack remembered was killed about thirty-five years ago; and within these ten years one solitary greyhen was sprung by some beagles in beating for a hare. The sportsmen cried out, "A hen pheasant!" but a gentleman present, who had often seen grouse in the north of England, assured me that it was a greyhen.

Nor does the loss of our black game prove the only gap in the Fauna Selborniensis; for another beautiful link in the chain of beings is wanting. I mean the red deer, which toward the beginning of this century amounted to about five hundred head, and made a stately appearance. There is an old keeper, now alive, named Adams, whose great grandfather (mentioned in a perambulation taken in 1635), grandfather, father, and self, enjoyed the head keepership of Wolmer Forest in succession for more than a hundred years. This person assures me, that his father has often told him that 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 herd 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! But he farther adds that, by means of the Waltham blacks, or, to use his own expression, as soon as they began blacking, they were reduced to about fifty head, and so continued decreasing till the time of the late Duke of Cumberland. It is now more than thirty years ago that His Highness sent down a huntsman, and six yeoman-prickers, in scarlet jackets laced with gold, attended by the staghounds, ordering them to take every deer in this forest alive, and to convey them in carts to Windsor. In the course of the summer they caught every stag, some of which showed extraordinary diversion; but in the following winter, when the hinds were also carried off, such fine chases were exhibited as served the country people for matter of talk and wonder for years afterwards. I saw myself one of the yeoman-prickers single out a stag from the herd, and must confess that it was the most curious feat of activity I ever beheld, superior to anything in Mr. Astley's riding-school. The exertions made by the horse and deer much exceeded all my expectations, though the former greatly excelled the latter in speed. When the devoted deer was separated from his companions, they gave him, by their watches, law, as they called it, for twenty minutes; when, sounding their horns, the stop-dogs were permitted to pursue, and a most gallant scene ensued.

## LETTER VII.

### [Table of Contents](#)

Though large herds of deer do much harm to the neighbourhood, yet the injury to the morals of the people is of more moment than the loss of their crops. The temptation is irresistible; for most men are sportsmen by constitution: and there is such an inherent spirit for hunting in human nature, as scarce any inhibitions can restrain. Hence, towards the beginning of this century all this country was wild about deer-stealing. Unless he was a hunter, as they affected to call themselves, no young person was allowed to be possessed of manhood or gallantry. The Waltham blacks at length committed such enormities, that Government was forced to interfere with that severe and sanguinary act called the "Black Act," which now comprehends more felonies than any law that ever was framed before. And, therefore, a late Bishop of Winchester, when urged to restock Waltham Chase, refused, from a motive worthy of a prelate, replying "that it had done mischief enough already."

Our old race of deer-stealers is hardly extinct yet: it was but a little while ago that, over their ale, they used to recount the exploits of their youth; such as watching the pregnant hind to her lair, and, when the calf was dropped, paring its feet with a penknife to the quick to prevent its escape, till it was large and fat enough to be killed; the shooting at one of their neighbours with a bullet in a turnip-field by moonshine, mistaking him for a deer; and the losing a dog in the following extraordinary manner: Some fellows, suspecting that a calf new-fallen was deposited in a certain spot of thick fern, went, with a lurcher, to surprise it; when the parent-hind rushed out of the brake, and, taking a vast

spring with all her feet close together, pitched upon the neck of the dog, and broke it short in two.

Another temptation to idleness and sporting was a number of rabbits, which possessed all the hillocks and dry places: but these being inconvenient to the huntsmen, on account of their burrows, when they came to take away the deer, they permitted the country people to destroy them all.

Such forests and wastes, when their allurements to irregularities are removed, are of considerable service to neighbourhoods that verge upon them, by furnishing them with peat and turf for their firing; with fuel for the burning their lime; and with ashes for their grasses; and by maintaining their geese and their stock of young cattle at little or no expense.

The manor farm of the parish of Greatham has an admitted claim, I see (by an old record taken from the Tower of London) of turning all live stock on the forest, at proper seasons, "bidentibus exceptis." The reason, I presume, why sheep are excluded, is because, being such close grazers, they would pick out all the finest grasses, and hinder the deer from thriving.

Though (by statute 4 and 5 W. and Mary, c. 23) "to burn on any waste, between Candlemas and Midsummer, any grig, ling, heath and furze, goss or fern, is punishable with whipping and confinement in the house of correction;" yet, in this forest, about March or April, according to the dryness of the season, such vast heath-fires are lighted up, that they often get to a masterless head, and, catching the hedges, have sometimes been communicated to the underwoods, woods, and coppices, where great damage has ensued. The plea for these burnings is that, when the old coat of heath, etc., is consumed, young will sprout up, and afford much tender browse for cattle; but, where there is large old furze, the fire, following the roots, consumes the very ground; so that for hundreds of acres nothing is to be seen but smother

and desolation, the whole circuit round looking like the cinders of a volcano; and, the soil being quite exhausted, no traces of vegetation are to be found for years. These conflagrations, as they take place usually with a north-east or east wind, much annoy this village with their smoke, and often alarm the country; and, once in particular, I remember that a gentleman, who lives beyond Andover, coming to my house, when he got on the downs between that town and Winchester, at twenty-five miles' distance, was surprised much with smoke and a hot smell of fire, and concluded that Alresford was in flames; but, when he came to that town, he then had apprehensions for the next village, and so on to the end of his journey.

On two of the most conspicuous eminences of this forest stand two arbours or bowers, made of the boughs of oak; the one called Waldon Lodge, the other Brimstone Lodge: these the keepers renew annually on the feast of St. Barnabas, taking the old materials for a perquisite. The farm called Blackmoor, in this parish, is obliged to find the posts and brush-wood for the former; while the farms at Greatham, in rotation, furnish for the latter, and are all enjoined to cut and deliver the materials at the spot. This custom I mention, because I look upon it to be of very remote antiquity.

## LETTER VIII.

### [Table of Contents](#)

On the verge of the forest, as it is now circumscribed, are three considerable lakes, two in Oakhanger, of which I have nothing particular to say; and one called Bin's, or Bean's Pond, which is worthy the attention of a naturalist or a sportsman. For, being crowded at the upper end with willows, and with the *carex cespitosa*, it affords such a safe and pleasing shelter to wild ducks, teals, snipes, etc., that they breed there. In the winter this covert is also frequented by foxes, and sometimes by pheasants; and the bogs produce many curious plants. (For which consult Letter XLI. to Mr. Barrington.)

By a perambulation of Wolmer Forest and the Holt, made in 1635, and the eleventh year of Charles I. (which now lies before me), it appears that the limits of the former are much circumscribed. For, to say nothing of the farther side, with which I am not so well acquainted, the bounds on this side, in old times, came into Binswood, and extended to the ditch of Ward le Ham Park, in which stands the curious mount called King John's Hill, and Lodge Hill; and to the verge of Hartley Mauduit, called Mauduit Hatch; comprehending also Short Heath, Oakhanger, and Oakwoods—a large district, now private property, though once belonging to the royal domain.

It is remarkable that the term *purlieu* is never once mentioned in this long roll of parchment. It contains, besides the perambulation, a rough estimate of the value of the timbers, which were considerable, growing at that time in the district of the Holt, and enumerates the officers, superior and inferior, of those joint forests, for the time

being, and their ostensible fees and perquisites. In those days, as at present, there were hardly any trees in Wolmer Forest.

Within the present limits of the forest are three considerable lakes, Hogmer, Cranmer, and Wolmer, all of which are stocked with carp, tench, eels, and perch: but the fish do not thrive well, because the water is hungry, and the bottoms are a naked sand.

A circumstance respecting these ponds, though by no means peculiar to them, I cannot pass over in silence; and that is, that instinct by which in summer all the kine, whether oxen, cows, calves, or heifers, retire constantly to the water during the hotter hours; where, being more exempt from flies, and inhaling the coolness of that element, some belly deep, and some only to mid-leg, they ruminate and solace themselves from about ten in the morning till four in the afternoon, and then return to their feeding. During this great proportion of the day they drop much dung, in which insects nestle, and so supply food for the fish, which would be poorly subsisted but from this contingency. Thus Nature, who is a great economist, converts the recreation of one animal to the support of another! Thomson, who was a nice observer of natural occurrences, did not let this pleasing circumstance escape him. He says, in his "Summer,"

"A various group the herds and flocks compose;  
... on the grassy bank  
Some ruminating lie; while others stand  
Half in the flood, and, often bending, sip  
The circling surface."

Wolmer Pond, so called, I suppose, for eminence sake, is a vast lake for this part of the world, containing, in its whole circumference, 2,646 yards, or very near a mile and a half.