

GILBERT WHITE BEGINS WORK ON THE ANTIQUITIES OF SELBORNE

Two Letters – White to John Loveday and Loveday to White

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ABSTRACT

Although White lived in a secluded village this did not prevent his travelling regularly to Oxford and elsewhere on academic or personal matters. During one such journey in 1777 to study charters at Magdalen College concerning Selborne Priory, he visited John Loveday of Caversham (Reading). Correspondence between White and Loveday subsequent to this visit, now published for the first time, assists in an understanding of the 'Advertisement' to Selborne and suggests White received from Loveday guidance about the study of antiquities that paralleled that received from William Sheffield in 1770 about identifying natural history specimens.

INTRODUCTION

Gilbert White gloried throughout his life in the pastoral simplicities of Selborne. Whilst this rural retirement meant that he had to suffer the banter of urban friends – the way to the village was 'inscrutable', there was 'no Time of ye Year for getting at [him] *without a Guide*', and he was 'more difficult to find than ye Bower of Woodstock' (Holt-White 1907, 247, 319) – White himself experienced no such difficulties; in fact his comings and goings, usually on horseback, earned the nickname 'the Huzzar Parson'. On many occasions his journeyings beyond the parish were to visit relatives: to Ringmer in East Sussex, the home of Aunt Snooke, from whom in 1780 he was to inherit Timothy, the tortoise; to Fyfield, almost in Wiltshire, where brother Henry was clergyman and schoolmaster; and to London, where brother Thomas ran a thriving general stores and brother Benjamin had established a notable bookselling business specializing in natural history.

His most regular journey, however, was not to any of these, but north from Selborne to the spires and colleges of Oxford, more particularly to Oriel, where, after taking his first degree in 1743, he had been elected to a fellowship the following year. The responsibilities attaching to a fellowship (primarily attendance at elections to College offices) meant that for almost 50 years – for White was to die in 1793 as Senior Fellow of Oriel – he was in Oxford at least once a year, and frequently more often than that. Various routes for the journey were possible. The most direct, a distance of nearly 60 miles, was through Basingstoke and Newbury; but to judge from the journals he kept, his preference was to avoid Newbury and the dangerous journey across the downs, and instead, to aim as soon as he could for the Thames valley and follow the river through Pangbourne, Goring and Wallingford. Indeed, on one notable occasion in 1765, at the time he was beginning the botanical studies that played such an important part in his enquiries into the natural calendar, he entered in his *Garden Kalendar* for 16 October (the second day of a journey from Selborne to Oxford) a list of water plants 'Discovered on the banks of the Thames as I walked from Streatly to Wallingford'.

THE INCLUSION OF 'ANTIQUITIES' IN SELBORNE

College duties and botanical pursuits (during the visit cited above he also made notes on some herbarium specimens and on plants at the Physic Garden) were not always at the

centre of White's interest. In the late 1770s it is known that he was at Oxford engaged in enquiries of a totally different kind, namely reading the available documentation at Magdalen College concerning the history of Selborne Priory.

What had happened was this: the idea of writing a comprehensive account of Selborne that embraced natural history as well as a history of parish antiquities had evolved over several years. Certainly, the final shape of *Selborne* had been established by September 1778, the date White wrote to his nephew, Samuel Barker, commenting that the material he had available about the antiquities of Selborne would 'furnish a large appendix' to his account of his 'native place' (Bell 1877, 2 137). As may be seen, at the end of the last letter in the natural history portion of the volume (Letter 66 to Barrington), White offers the reader his *envoi* since the letters on the antiquities, together with their own appendix, are to serve as 'a large appendix' to the main purpose – the portrayal of the natural history of the parish, to which the history of its antiquities is to be decidedly subsidiary.

It is well known that the germ of this main purpose had been first proposed at the beginning of the decade by Daines Barrington, who had suggested that White prepare 'an account of the animals in [his] neighbourhood' (BL 31852, letter of 12 April 1770 to Barrington). However, this idea of a fauna underwent considerable development, and by April 1774 White was telling his brother (this was John, at Blackburn, who did so much to stimulate White's work – see Foster 1988, Chap 11) that to 'a natural history of [his] district . . . might be added some circumstances of the country, its most curious plants, its few antiquities' (Bell 1877, 2 28).

Quite why White decided to add comment on the antiquities of Selborne to his observations about natural history is not immediately apparent. Some modern editions of *Selborne* actually omit the letters on the antiquities, and, even when they are included (as in the edition published by Gresham Books, 1982) the editor normally declines the opportunity to

reprint the volume's 'Advertisement' – which gives us White's *apologia*.

In the quarto first edition this *apologia*, less than three pages long, is dated from Selborne on 1st January 1788, and comprises just four paragraphs. The first of these begins somewhat surprisingly. After all, the volume is entitled *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne . . .*, but the Advertisement announces not an apology for consigning matter on the antiquities to 'a large appendix' but an insistence on the importance of the inclusion in a '*parochial history . . . of natural productions and occurrences as well as antiquities*'. And yet (and this is the point that needs to be seized), immediately following this, instead of elaborating reasons for the primacy of what is offered as the main text, White extends in the second paragraph conventional acknowledgements (to the President and Fellows of Magdalen) for access to the archival material that enabled the letters on the antiquities to be prepared and to a principal assistant in that endeavour, a gentleman 'whose labours and attention could only be equalled by the very kind manner in which they were bestowed'.

At this juncture it might fairly be expected that the Advertisement would either be concluded or move to new matter. But neither expectation is satisfied, for in the next paragraph, the third, there is the following declaration:

Of the authenticity of the documents above-mentioned [the archival material at Magdalen concerning Selborne and its priory] there can be no doubt, since they consist of the identical deeds and records that were removed to the College from the Priory at the time of its dissolution; and, being carefully copied on the spot, may be depended on as genuine; and, never having been made public before, may gratify the curiosity of the antiquary, as well as establish the credit of the history.

That such averations were necessary – at a time when local history was as likely to be based on hearsay and folk memory as on

securely verifiable evidence – is not in question. But that must not obscure for us the difference in approach White adopts towards his main text. Natural history observations, in a period when such data were often collected by means of advertisements in the press (by Thomas Pennant, for example – see Foster 1988, App F), also stand in need of authoritative confirmation: yet on this the Advertisement is silent.

In defence, White might have said that natural history data, by their very variability, are not open to verification in the same way that documents and their contents are; that since the aim, in the natural history letters, was to induce 'readers to pay a more ready attention to the wonders of the Creation, too frequently overlooked as common occurrences' (*Selborne*, Advertisement, para 4) this could be accomplished by curious observers for themselves in their own localities. However, if verification is so important – which it was (and is) – such answers are partial only: throughout the natural history letters White is at pains to demonstrate his commitment to accurate identifications of flora and fauna, to trustworthy opinion, and to sound judgement. The means he adopts in this demonstration lay chiefly in the care he exercised over maintaining a scrupulous accuracy in his own records and in the assessments he made as to the reliability of his informants. It is these means that illuminate the approach conveyed towards acknowledgements in the Advertisement to *Selborne*. In both the areas of study that the volume deals with White was writing history, and yet, as historiographer, the roles that he was able to adopt in relation to the two areas were not the same. In the natural history letters, not only had White himself composed the letters but the very sources from which he obtained his information were records of his own making (*Kalendar* and *Journal*, for example). Yet, in the letters concerning the antiquities this kind of assured coherence was absent, and in its stead White discovered that he had to be both dependent on and suppliant for the knowledge and beneficence of others.

THE PROSPECT OF PUBLICATION DELAYED

To accommodate to this discovery, that he could not be wholly independent in his researches, cannot have been entirely easy. By 1776, for instance, he had planned so far as to commission an artist, Samuel Grimm, to take views of Selborne – to illustrate the near-finished natural history. But now, in order to complete his work, he had to employ 'the keeper of Domes-day Book to transcribe all relating to Selborne' at the cost of 4d per line; and further, application had to be made 'for a transcript of all relating to the Priory [at Selborne] in Magd[alen] Coll. archives' (Bell 1877, 2 120).

White appears to have taken the decision to make these commissions when he was in London in February 1776. It was at the time when his brother, Thomas, still intended to prepare a history of Hampshire. But whatever caused Thomas to falter (the inheritance of the Holt monies, and illness, must have played a part here – see Bell 1877, 2 47 & 57), White persisted – albeit slowly. Grimm came to Selborne in the summer of 1776 for almost a month (Bell 1877, 2 53 & 55), and White's friends expected publication to follow almost immediately, John Mulso (a lifelong and close friend) writing in June the next year, 1777:

As I do not see any Advertisement in the Papers, I conclude by ye Time of Year that You have deferred your Publication 'till next Winter. I wish you had not . . . The Humour for such Performances will be over, & make Something agst the Merit of even your Book. I feel impatient to see it, wth the Decorations of Mr Grim[m]. (Holt-White 1907, 269)

In characteristic fashion, White had little capacity to be rushed forward; in any case he was engaged in more mundane matters as well as beset by difficulties with his research. True, in the winter of 1776–77 he had continued planning and, when in London in February 1777, he gave instructions concerning the reduction of one of Grimm's views into a vignette

of the hermitage, commissioned an engraver, and contemplated adding to his letters the famous account on gossamer (Bell 1877, 2 49 – who misdates this important letter of 27 Feb to 1776: the correct year is 1777). Yet, propitious as these may seem (especially to the historian more than two centuries later), the reality was different. Three events suffice to indicate why. Over and above the routines of quotidian living, clerical duty, and the pursuit of new discoveries about nature, White had been otherwise engaged: in autumn 1776 in the further education of a nephew, who came to Selborne to learn how to ride and to be taught manners and letters (Bell 1877, 2 58, 129); in spring the following year he was seriously ill in London (Holt-White 1907, 269); and in the summer of that same year (1777) work began on the walls of his new parlour, a grand addition to his house at Selborne (*Journal*, 6 June 1777). In themselves, each of these occurrences may not have been responsible for hindering authorial progress, but if they are taken together they indicate fairly that White's priorities were elsewhere.

Given this context, the eventual (albeit delayed) result of the enquiries directed in February 1776 to Oxford about the antiquities of the parish must have been reassuring. Several stages of response appear to be no longer extant, but one letter that is available is dated 14 June 1777 (Bell 1877, 2 132–3). It is in the hand of Dr Richard Chandler and it reports findings in the archives at Magdalen, more particularly that there had been a preceptory at Selborne on the site of what, in White's time, was known as 'Temple'. That Chandler, already an accomplished traveller and author of several works on classical antiquities in Asia Minor and Greece, was to pursue White's enquiries at Oxford rested mainly on his 1757 demyship at Magdalen; this, in 1770, had been followed by a fellowship and office (in 1772) as university proctor. Moreover, he shared with White not only proctorial office (which White had held in 1752) but also a Hampshire birth (baptised at Alverstoke 11 May 1737) – and he was to accept in 1779 the consolidated living of East Worldham and West Tisted, parishes near enough to

Selborne to be counted as neighbours. These were, then, sufficient interests in common to promote the collaborative pursuit of Selborne's antiquities.

However, modest as these antiquities were, the actual work involved began to assume immodest, even laborious proportions. On receipt of Chandler's letter, White had been so excited that he forwarded the letter itself to his brother, Thomas, with the note that he found Chandler's report 'very satisfactory and very edifying' but that it was much to his regret and to Chandler's 'that the statutes will not permit him [Chandler] to bring with him the Archive papers to Selborne, which contain much knowledge concerning the antiquities of this place – information that has never been pryed into, but has slumbered within the college walls ever since they were founded' (Bell 1877, 2 131, 132).

That the Magdalen authorities prevented Chandler from bringing the archives to Selborne for White's inspection meant that White himself had to go to Oxford. Earlier in this same year (1777) he had already been away from home for nearly 60 nights – mainly in London from mid-February for several weeks, and in Ringmer, East Sussex, to which he rushed in September when his aunt, Mrs Snooke, 'was seized with the palsy' (Bell 1877, 2 61) – but in October he was called to Oxford and was therefore able to combine 'college business' with 'inspecting and transcribing by means of an amanuensis many curious papers from the archives of Magdalen College, relative to the antiquities of Selborne' (Bell 1877, 2 63).

White's *Journal* shows that he left Selborne on 13 October, spent one night at Worting and the next at Whitchurch, and arrived in Oxford on 15 October. He stayed for seven days, during which he continued his 'pursuits as an antiquary', finding – as he intimated in a letter to his brother, John, at Blackburn – Dr Chandler 'wonderfully friendly, and communicative; and my discoveries about this place [Selborne] . . . very great: we examined 366 parchments' (Bell 1877, 2 63). With the academic duties and the antiquarian enquiries complete (at least for the present), White was free to return to Selborne. Leaving Oxford on

23 October, he arrived home two days later. For the night of 24 October he was to be at 'Lassam' (Lasham), but on the 23rd he stopped at Reading, to visit John Loveday: it was a propitious occasion.

JOHN LOVEDAY

John Loveday (1711–89) lived three miles outside Reading at Caversham, and from his diary it is known that this was White's first visit. Most probably the occasion was arranged at Chandler's suggestion: Chandler himself and John Loveday's son had become close friends at Magdalen in the early 1760s, and he was a welcome visitor at Caversham. Moreover, Loveday, who had been an intrepid traveller had made his last tour (on horseback) in 1765, and had now settled into a quiet, but hospitable, life with his wife and four younger children – his eldest son (Chandler's friend, Dr John Loveday) having married about six weeks before White's visit. Besides owning a large library, Loveday was a recognized authority on antiquarian matters and was frequently consulted by other scholars. All his life he specialized in church history and procedure, and on his arrival White must rapidly have discovered, if Chandler had not already apprised him of it, that he was talking to a man who had once spent much of his time sorting and digesting the very archives at Magdalen that were so important to White's own researches into the Selborne antiquities (Markham 1984, 52 & 80–1).

That White profited from the visit, and Loveday was interested and able to further his enquiries, is demonstrated in the two letters now published for the first time: the first is from White to Loveday, the second from Loveday to White.

LETTER I

Dear Sir,

It is full time for me to make due acknowledgements for the great civilities that I met

with at Caversham; & also for your very intelligent communications sent afterwards by the newsman. Might I presume to beg farther that you would at your leisure inform me what a preceptory was; & who the preceptors were; & what was their power, &c:-

It has been taken for granted that Selborne priory was alien, because Dugdale in his list of alien priories suppressed 2: Henry: 5. 1414. has inserted Selborne priory thus:

S:

Sele, Sussex:

Seleburn: Vid: Monast: Anglic:

Shirburn: in English: p: 119
and in ye Original Latin I.1036 ['and ... 1036' is a Loveday annotation to White's letter].

But there are strong reasons to suppose that there was some mistake, & that Seleburn slipped some how inadvertently into the catalogue. For in the first place such a subordination contradicts point blank the express words of the charter. The charter says, 'firmiter inhibentes, ne quis eorum possessiones invadere vi, vel fraude, vel ingenio malo occupare audeat, val etiam retinere' ... & farther on which is still more to my purpose '& ipsa domus religiosa a cujus libet alterius Domus religiosae subjectione libera permaneat & in omnibus absolute [keeping firm control in case anyone should dare to invade by force their possessions, or to seize them either by deceit or by evil intention, or even to keep hold of them ... and let the religious house itself remain free from the control of any other religious order, no matter who ... absolutely and in all circumstances]' - - - Now after this, strong reasons should be given to induce a person to suppose that this priory was alien. Besides the noble manors & endowments of this convent were probably much larger than did ever belong to an alien priory: & moreover the prior had more jurisdiction than probably would befall an alien prior; for by a deed which I have procured from the Charter-house at Westminster it appears that our prior had

furcas, pillory, & thurcet [it is possible this may be a misreading for 'churset' or 'churchscot', a right concerning payment of grain] in this his manor & the word furcas proves he had a power of life & death. Moreover no mention is made of Selborne in Dugdale's list of foreign abbies, & the priories alien subervient to them. Now if Selborne priory was instituted independent, as the words of the charter strongly intimate, how could it ever become dependent? since it is a maxim, I think, in Bp Tanner, that priories alien sometimes have become denizon: but denizon priories were never known to be made alien.

As the founder of Selborne-priory has absolutely enjoined his convent to follow the order, & rules of St. Augustin implicitly; there could not possibly be any new statutes; & therefore the only injunctions he could impose upon his new foundation were, how they should chuse a prior. This curious deed I have transcribed at full length from the archives of Magd: Coll: From hence follows, that if this priory was alien at all, it was also conventual; else it could not have chosen its own priors. But alien priories conventual were not granted to the King, as other alien priories were in a parliament held at Leicester the 2: Hen: 5. See Bp Tanner's preface p. xii. How then could Selborne priory be seized by Hen: 5? And yet that it was dissolved before the time of Hen: 8: & in possession of Magd: Coll: appears by two receipts from a degraded prior of Selborne, who was pensionary to Magd: Coll: about the 5th: of Hen: 7th.

If Browne Willis's list of Priors of Selborne be compleat, the priory must have fallen-in to the Coll: about the end of Edw: 4th: for the last prior enumerated is John Sharper, alias Glastonbury, 1478. But that the beginning of his list is not perfect is absolutely certain; because the priory was founded 1233: yet the list does not commence til 1262. Now no one can suppose that such a society could subsist for such a long interval without any Head or Governor at all.

Since this was written, I have discovered by an extract from the index belonging to the deeds & charters preserved in the archives of

Magd: Coll: that the president of said Coll: Rich: Mayew enabled Rich: Newbrige by letter of attorney to take possession of Selborne priory with its appurtenances 24 Sep: 1484: Rich: 3rd: 2nd. But this letter No: 375: was not in that box of writings which I was permitted to examine.

If Magd: Coll: therefore took possession of Selborne priory in 1484: then the Coll: which was founded in 1459: had been established 25 years before it was endowed with the revenues of said priory: & all that time the priory perhaps remained in fee to the King.

- - - But it is time for me to recollect that I am trespassing too much on your goodness. With humble respects therefore to the Ladies I remain with all due regard

Your most obliged, &
most humble servant,
Gil White.

If Dr Chandler be with you I beg you would tell him that I will write to him soon. Neighbour Etty [Revd Andrew Etty, sometime vicar at Selborne] joins in good wishes.
Selborne:Decr: 15: 1777.

LETTER II

Dear Sr.,

Your letter was highly acceptable to me, as also ye very curious notices concerning ye Tortoise, wch. Dr. Chandler put me in possession of, some time since: by the by, He is to be directed to, at present, 'at No.4. Serle street, near Lincolns Inn'. Perhaps ye book accompanying this will best answer your enquiries concerning the Knights Templars. As ye aforementioned Dr. tells me You go to Oxford twice a year, it will be time enough to return ye book in one of those excursions; when I hope you will make ye experiment whether a warm bed, & hearty welcome will not be much at your service under my roof.

I have no doubt but yt You are right, and consequently Dugdale toto caelo wrong, in regard to Selborne having been an alien priory;

alas! his list of such priories, suppressed in 2 Hen. V, is of no great authority surely. This will appear to You as clear as to me, upon turning to bp Tanner for ye places occurring in ye said list; astonishing inaccuracies will therewith occur; take a taste of them under ye articles of BEAUVALE, Bergavenny, Blyth, Boxgrave, DUNSTER, Ecclesfield, Grosmont or Eskedale, Eye, Folkstone, Horsham, Monmouth, &c. Let it be observed also, yt Tanner adds no sanction to Dugdale's list under ye article we are concerned with. In ye Appendix to your work it is to be hoped You will give us at full length the mode of chusing a prior of Selborne; such papers throw great light upon ye general monastico-ecclesiastical history of our country.

Now it must be for filling up my paper, if I presume to add a word to You upon natural history; it arises from your quotation out of Linnaeus concerning Fishes: there is a paper in No.486. of ye Philosophical Transactions 'Upon the sounds and hearing of fishes.'

Here is room, I find, for a passage from the 'Lingua' of Erasmus, and not wide from ye purpose: '[Lingua] homini brevior est sed latior, ob formandas voces; unde fit ut aves, quae imitantur voces humanas, fere linguam habeant caeteris pro portione latiore. Quin et ipsa linguae forma facit ad vocem promendam; unde pisces, quoniam linguam habent a terrestribus animantibus differentem, omnino muti sunt [The human tongue is shorter but broader, for the purpose of regulating speech; and it happens that birds which imitate human speech have in general a tongue broader in proportion to the rest. Indeed, even the very shape of the tongue is good for the production of speech. Thus, fish, since they have a different tongue from land creatures are completely silent].'

Craving your pardon for these parerga, and desiring yt ye best respects of my family & myself may be accepted by You, Sr., and Mr. Etty,

I remain, with great esteem,
Caversham: Your faithful humble servant,
Jan: 17: 1778. John Loveday.

DISCUSSION

The principal issue prompted by these letters concerns White's approach to establishing the status of Selborne Priory, but before exploring this there are several subsidiary issues that merit comment.

That White delayed for over a month to send his thanks to Loveday for the assistance and hospitality he had received at Caversham is, at first sight, surprising, particularly since writing at all seems to have been hastened by further 'communications sent . . . by the newsman'. However, in addition to attending to daily needs on returning to Selborne, two other matters, each of which is recorded in the *Journal*, intervened; taken together, they offer a useful gloss on White's priorities.

One of these matters centres on the sole extension made to the structure of Wakes (White's home) during his lifetime. This was the building of a new parlour (Meirion-Jones 1983); and throughout November and December 1777 White had oversight of the sashing of the windows, the plastering of the walls and ceiling, and the preparations for the flooring. That details of this kind are included in the *Journal* is quite usual. Nevertheless, as the *Journal* had been designed by Daines Barrington for the observations of a naturalist (and was entitled thus), the near-absence of like entries concerned, say, with discoveries relevant to progress on the 'Antiquities' is instructive. Observations in connection with natural history, however, find a ready place in the *Journal* and it is one of these that lies at the centre of the second matter that occupies White in November the same year. Throughout his life, he was bemused by avian migration, and made important observations on the phenomenon in several species – especially that of the ring ouzel, the migratory status of which he is credited with first recording. His favoured species were swallows, martins and swifts, and on 4 November he entered in the *Journal* a long note part of which reads:

No martins [house martin, *Delichon urbica*] have been observed since Oct: 7th: 'til this

day, when more than 20 were playing about & catching their food over my fields, & along the side of the hanger.

As the note goes on to elaborate, this was not the first occasion he had observed a similar occurrence at the same time of year ('on or about' 4th November), and he drew the erroneous conclusion that such 'circumstances favour the notion of a torpid state in birds'.

Yet, if the priority given to this matter (which involved close observation over many days) is emphasised by its inclusion in a letter written to a nephew, Samuel Barker, barely three days later (Bell 1877, 2 134), it can also be shown to be not merely an example of a delayed expression of courtesies for hospitality, but indicative of an aspect of White's scientific methodology that is applicable to much else – to his treatment of the antiquities in the 'Advertisement', and to his continued appeal as a writer. In essence, this is to do with an interest in particularities rather than in generalities, and a striking example of this propensity for detail had occurred several years previously in connection with a bird specimen from Gibraltar sent to White for identification by his brother John (Foster 1985).

Briefly, the facts are these. The specimen, a crag martin (*Hirundo rupestris*), was unknown to White, but in pursuit of an identification he discovered a verbal description, in Linnaean mode, of a species, the crag martin, that seemed worth pursuing. The description made comparative reference to the sand martin, *Riparia riparia*, so White immediately set about catching specimens in order to put them side-by-side with the item from Gibraltar. He found considerable differences, and concluded the bird sent from Gibraltar was not a crag martin because, *from the birds in the hand*, he was unable to validate all the terms of the verbal description.

Taken together, these two examples of ornithological enquiry convincingly demonstrate White's commitment to ocular proof: and it is *that* that contributes so powerfully to much of the appeal that his writing still possesses. What he describes he had actually seen: and we often can see also since his descriptions are so frequently centred upon particular circum-

stances rather than on generalized theory. And yet, such a general methodological commitment, when he turned to the study of history, created difficulties that he was unable to overcome himself. To pursue observations of nature within one's own parish depended solely upon one's own good health, the existence of the phenomena themselves, opportunity, and like concepts. If the need arose for verification, then one went out to the hanger, down to the forest, or up to Selborne Down in order to have another look. But such modes were less effective if one's subject was antiquities: some ocular evidence existed on the ground so-to-speak, in the fragments of stone or in the names of fields, but the principal materials were locked away in charters and other verbal records, the verification of which demanded skills of a very different order.

In White's letter to Loveday an approach to these skills is evident in the attempted weighing of evidence concerning the status of the priory. But the absence of conclusion, the very way the data is presented, and the erection of positions in excess of the facts all suggest White is puzzled about how best to proceed. This hesitancy is confirmed immediately in Loveday's reply – which operates entirely at a different level from White's presentation of the evidence. The lesson (and that is probably not too strong a word) is reminiscent of the outcome to the identification of the crag martin. White's *métier* was to be absorbed by the local example, the precise detail, the ocular evidence: the language of theory, of general description, of estimating the balance of probability, were alien and of little value to the observer in the field. This, then, is why White found it necessary to construct the 'Advertisement' as he did: pursuit of the natural phenomena of the parish had relied upon his own endeavours, but the like pursuit of antiquities had been heavily dependent upon others. It is this dependence that the author of *Selborne* was willing to acknowledge publicly – and in so doing unconsciously to advance the appeal of his own writing for its homely integrity and modest intent.

If White's understanding of antiquarian research was greatly indebted to meeting Love-

day he would not have found his new friend so enthusiastic in matters of natural history – although, with Loveday's broad desire for knowledge and the experience gained from his several tours (Markham 1984), most subjects were of interest to him. In effect, Loveday had a contribution to make here also. From his letter given above, with its reference to literary materials (Richard Brocklesby's contribution to *Philosophical Transactions*, vol 45, about fish, and citation from Erasmus) one might think that he possessed little practical experience. This is not wholly so, for there is extant documentary evidence concerning tortoises.

Information about White's tortoise, Timothy – which belonged originally to his aunt at Ringmer, but came to Selborne in 1780 on Mrs Snooke's death – has been usefully assembled by Sylvia Townsend Warner (1946; 1981), and White may have known of such a creature at Caversham before his visit since it was presented to Loveday by Richard Chandler on 20 September 1777. Whether Loveday's observations of tortoise behaviour were prompted by White's own enthusiasm and interest is not recorded, but White himself had begun to make notes concerning food and hibernation as early as 1771, and, encouraged by Daines Barrington (Foster 1986, 87), had initiated annual weighings before and after hibernation. At any rate Loveday pursued a similar practice. After the first winter his tortoise appeared above ground on 9 May 1778 and disappeared the following October – by which time he owned a further three. Careful notes were made as to weight and measurement of length, and queries such as 'Do they chew the cud?' and 'Do the ridges on their shells flatten by age?' demonstrate enquiries in accord with White's own. Inevitably, dates of their arousal and somnolence were recorded, gutter-tiles were placed over them in winter, and on one occasion an egg was discovered. Several years later, the smallest was found dead on the road to Reading and by October 1784 all except one had been killed by the hard winter and spring. But this survivor became a favourite beyond the family for on 7 April 1788 George Horne,

President of Magdalen, invited himself and his family to 'storm a piece of roast beef' at Caversham and began his letter:

The season is once more come round when the President of Magdalen, like your old tortoise, puts his head out of the shell and looks southward for a little sun (LF Papers).

Sadly, this was one of the last occasions Loveday was to receive visitors from Oxford – he was to die within less than a year – although in late autumn of 1788 he received a copy of White's *Selborne* and, much to the author's delight, offered that 'If in the perusal any things should occur worthy of remark, such observations [should] be transmitted to Selborne' (Bell 1877, 2 210).

More than a year later, and several months after Loveday died, White commented to a mutual friend:

I should be very glad to see any notes or remarks made by him or his venerable father [Loveday's son, and Loveday himself] on the history of Selborne: could they have been procured before publication, they would have been more valuable, because I might then have availed myself of their corrections. (Bell 1877, 2 214)

Corrections of the kind White had in mind would, of course, be corrections of fact. In the field of natural history he had laboured persistently over many years to be 'as sure of the certainty of [his] facts as a man [could] be of any transaction whatsoever' (BL 31852, letter of 15 Jan 1770 to Daines Barrington). It is an attitude Loveday applauded:

Of all books [he wrote] I abominate those where matter of fact and fiction are indiscriminately interwoven. I am content if they give me all Truth or all Romance. (Markham 1984, 452)

His own kindly contribution to White's 'Antiquities' helped to ensure *Selborne* met such an exacting standard. White, himself, could

scarcely have looked for a more discriminating friend.

CONCLUSION

Although no individual is named personally in the Advertisement to *Selborne*, White shows he was aware of how much he had gained from the assistance of others. This was particularly necessary in the field of antiquarian research which presented for resolution issues in a guise different from those he was familiar with in natural history. John Loveday assisted in discussion of one such issue in 1777–78, and White continued to visit Caversham in subsequent years to discuss matters of common interest (for example, we know from his *Journal* that he was there in April 1778, 1779, 1781, 1783, 1787 and October 1785), which included, at the 1779 visit, White's enquiries amongst the gypsies (LF Papers, and *Selborne* Letter 25 to Barrington). Over and above these social and historical concerns each visit provided an opportunity to discuss and compare the behaviour of the Caversham tortoise(s) with that of Timothy, and to reaffirm the importance in the

kind of enquiries each was devoted to of verification of data and of a commitment to the discrimination of romance from truth. It was affirmation that has served *Selborne* well.

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