

Timothy Tortoise

Gilbert White's aunt who lived in Sussex had a pet tortoise named Timothy, which she passed to Gilbert who had always found the tortoise fascinating. Gilbert and Timothy's lives were very happy together and we think Timothy must have enjoyed exploring the gardens and all the fantastic hiding places there are here in Selborne! But it's a tough life being the pet of a naturalist!

On the 1st July 1781 Gilbert White wanted to see if Tortoises could swim and dunked poor Timothy into a tub of water! He wrote in his journal

'We [...] found that he sunk gradually, & walked on the bottom of the tub: he seemed quite out of his element, & was much dismayed. This species seems not at all amphibious.'

Poor old Timothy, we'd be dismayed too!

Gilbert wrote about Timothy a lot in his journal and from that we can see that Timothy enjoyed the little luxuries of life such as sunbathing and getting 'lost' in the vegetable garden, and Gilbert took excellent care of Timothy recording down his weight throughout the year and noting his hibernation pattern. However there was one mystery that was never solved about Timothy... After Gilbert White's death in 1793 it was discovered that Timothy was, in fact, a girl!

At Gilbert White's House we have lots of reminders of Timothy like our statue of him in our gardens, next to the vegetable garden (very apt!)

