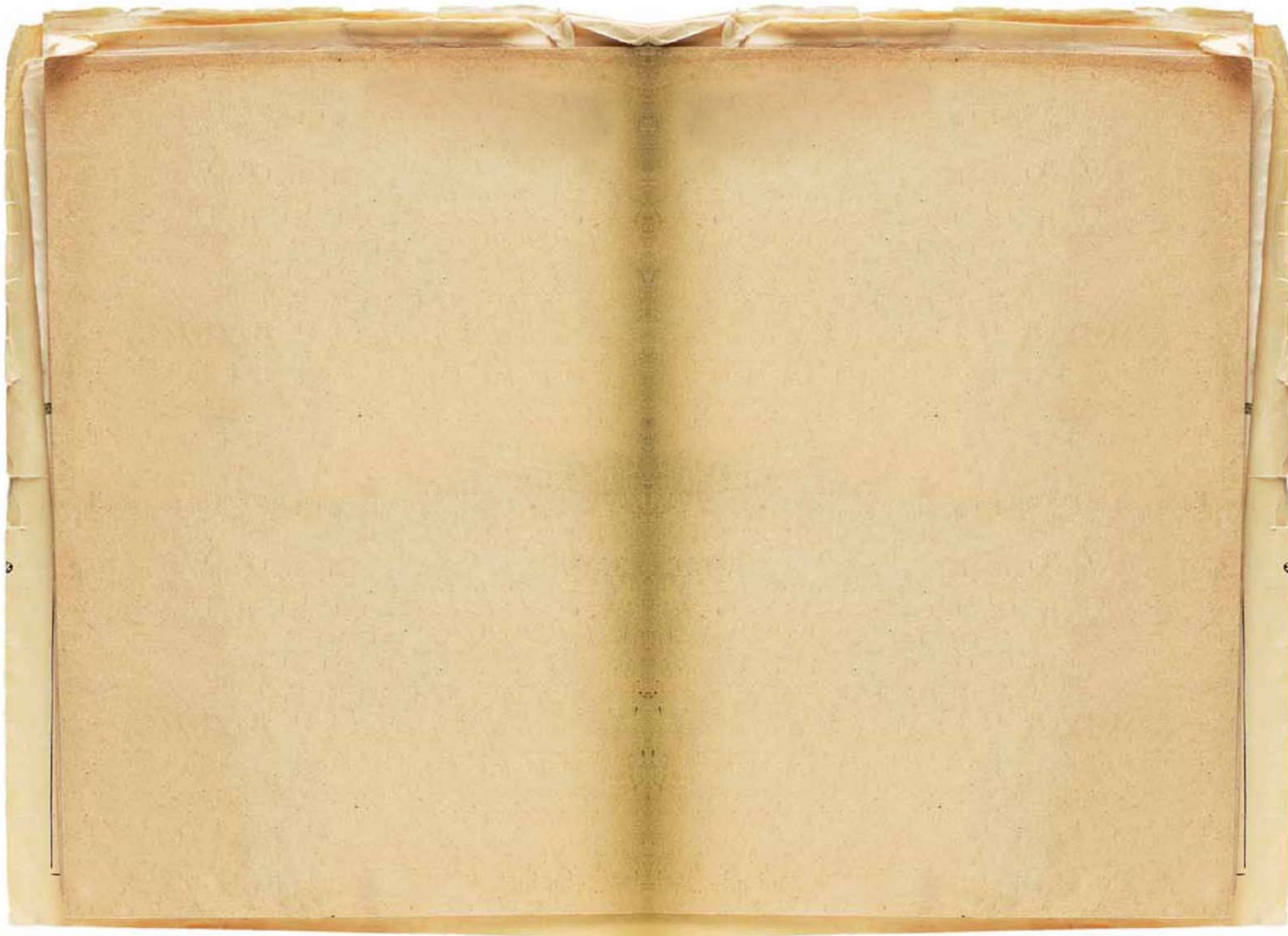


GILBERT WHITE'S
KITCHEN



GILBERT WHITE'S KITCHEN

What did Gilbert White eat?

Contents

Meat	2
Luxuries	4
Fish	5
Storage of food	7
Eggs	7
Butter and Cheese	8
Drink	9
The Garden	12
Pests	14
The Call of Nature	15

Extracts from Gilbert's diaries - The Garden Kalendar (1751-1767) and the Naturalist's Journal (1768 - 1793) and from letters to his niece, Molly, daughter of his brother Thomas. Gilbert clearly enjoyed his food, and entries in his diaries, letters and his book frequently turn to the subject.

Meat

There was lots of meat available for Gilbert's table - for a price (which Gilbert carefully noted in his diaries) and it would have been cooked on a spit over an open hearth. The butcher's shop and slaughter house were opposite Gilbert's study and he planted lime trees to conceal the sights and smells.



3 October 1777 Some of the store wethers (lamb) on this down now prove fat, & weigh 15 pounds a quarter. This incident never befalls but in long dry seasons, & then the mutton has a delicate flavour.

30 June 1782 Neither veal nor lamb is so fat this summer as usual.

29 October 1781 From the scantiness of the grass I have given for sometime 9d. pr. pd. for butter; a price not known before.

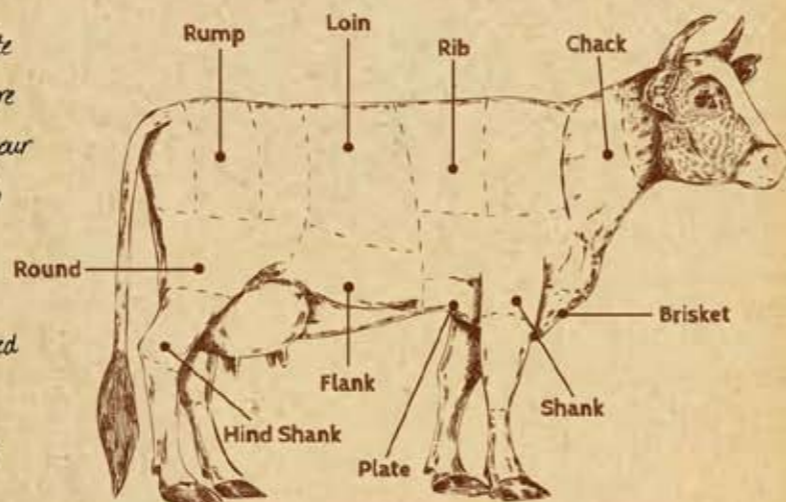


12 April 1783 Grass-lamb six pence pr pound veal 5d fresh butter 9 1/2 d. Mutton per pound 5d, Veal 5d, Lamb 6d, Beef 4d. At Selborne.

5 February 1789 As one of farmer Spencer's cows was gamboling, & frisking about last summer on the edge of the Lythe, she fell, and rolled over to the bottom. Yet so far was she from receiving any injury by this dangerous tumble, that she fattened very kindly, & being killed this spring proved fine beef. 26 February 1789 Our butcher begins to kill grass-lamb.

On 17th April 1779 Gilbert wrote to his niece, Molly. My thanks are due for your kind letter, and for your father's care in procuring me two fine hams.

At other times Bacon was smoked locally. 11th March 1765 Hung the fitch of bacon in Mr Eddy's Chimney.



The Call of Nature

Gilbert's Necessary House was in his garden, but tactfully concealed.

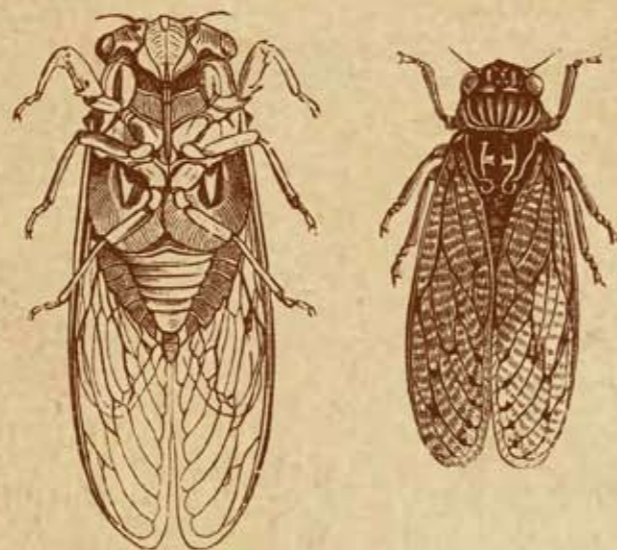
29th March 1765 I planted five fannd Elms to screen Will Carpenter's necessary House; and five large Laurels in a curve to screen my own, which I propose to move to the Corner next Parsons Yard; & three elms in the corner of Parsons Yard to conceal my own from the street.



Pests

It was complicated keeping food free from pests.

There is a small long shining fly in these parts very troublesome to the housewife, by getting into the chimnies, and laying its eggs in the bacon while it is drying these eggs produce maggots called jumpers, which, harbouring in the gammens and best parts of the hogs, eat down to the bone, and make great waste. ... It is to be seen in the summer in farm-kitchens on the bacon-racks and about the mantle-pieces, and on the ceilings. (NHS, Letter 34 to Pennant)



20 August 1789 We were this day much annoyed in the brown parlor by multitudes of flying ants, which come forth, as usual, from under the stairs.

Sunday 17 June 1792 When the servants are gone to bed, the kitchen-herth swarms with minute crickets not so big as fleas. The Blattae are almost subdued by the persevering assiduity of Mrs J. W. (Barbara White, Gilbert's sister-in-law and widow of his brother John, who came to live in The Wakes in 1781), who waged war with them for many months, & destroyed thousands at first she killed some hundreds every night.

Tuesday 14 August Mrs J. White, after a long & severe campaign carried on against the Blattae molendinariae (cockroaches) which have of late invaded my house, & of which she has destroyed many thousands, finds that at intervals a fresh detachment of old ones arrives: & particularly during this hot season for the windows being left open in the events, the males come flying in at the casements from the neighbouring houses which swarm with them. How the females, that seem to have no perfect wings that they can use, can contrive to get from house to house, does not so readily appear. These, like many insects, when they find their present abodes over stocked, have powers of migrating to fresh quarters. Since the Blattae have been so much kept under, the Crickets have greatly increased in number.

Meat bought from butchers was supplemented with game - particularly birds. When I was a little boy I recollect [a black grouse] coming now and then to my father's table. (Natural History of Selborne, Letter 6 to Pennant)

Vast quantities [of wheatears] are caught ... on the south downs near Lewes, where they are esteemed a delicacy. (Natural History of Selborne, Letter 13 to Pennant 22 January 1768)

We shot a cock and a hen [ring ouzel]; they were plump and in high condition. ... I dressed one of these birds, and found it juicy and well-flavoured. (Natural History of Selborne, Letter 24 to Pennant 29 May 1769)

1 October 1777 This day Mr Richardson of Bramshot shot a wood-cock it was large and plump & female it lay in a Moorish piece of ground. This bird was sent to London, where the porter carried it along the streets he was offered a guinea for it.



4 January 1789 As one of my neighbours was traversing Woolmer-forest from Bramshot across the moors, he found a large uncommon bird fluttering on the heath, but not wounded, which he brought home alive. On examination it proved to be ... the great speckled Diver, or Loon. ... A person attempted to eat the body but found it very strong & rancid, as is the flesh of all birds living on fish.

3 October 1789 A man brought me a land-rail or daker-hen [corncrake], a bird so rare in this district, that we seldom see more than one or two in a season, & those only in autumn. ... When we came to draw it, we found the entrails so soft and tender, that in appearance they might have been dressed like the ropes of an wood-cock. ... The bird mentioned above weighed seven ounces and a half, was fat & tender, & in flavour like the flesh of a wood-cock. The liver was very large, & delicate.

13 December 1789 One of my neighbours, shot a ring-dove on an evening as it was returning from feed, & going to roost. When his wife had picked & drawn it, she found its craw stuffed with the most, nice & tender tops of turnips. These she washed & boiled, & so sate down to a choice & delicate plate of greens, culled & provided in this extraordinary manner.



Luxuries

Luxuries could be found in the countryside:

20 February 1773 Truffles continue to be found. This truffle grows underground in woods, especially beechwoods. Resembling a hard, irregular ball, it can be between 1 to 4 inches across, its flesh white turning to buff with a network of white veins, and is regarded as the best-tasting of the British truffles. On four occasions GIN mentions the truffle hunter's dogs: the usual method of finding truffles is for a dog to sniff them out.



11 October 1789 A truffle-hunter called on us, having in his pocket several large truffles found in this neighbourhood. He says these roots are not to be found in deep woods, but in narrow hedge-rows, & the skirts of coppices. Some truffles, he informed us, lie two feet within the earth; & some quite on the surface: the latter, he added, have little or no smell, & are not so easily discovered by the dogs as those that lie deeper. Half a crown a pound was the price, which he asked for this commodity.

4 November 1790 Stewed some truffles: the flavour of their juice very fine, but the roots hard, & gritty. They were boiled in water, then sliced & stewed in gravy.

While other good things came from London:

On 17th January 1784 Gilbert wrote to his niece Molly, daughter of his brother Thomas, who lived in Lambeth: If any parcel should be coming down, pray send me half a pound of break-fast green-tea at 10s. and half pound of best tea at 14s.



Wed 4 September 1786 Gathered in the Royal russets, & knobbed russets: the former are fine shewy apples. Medlars, Pears, Cranberries - harvested by local women, Berberies, Cherries, Blackberries, Wild strawberries - all harvested from the countryside.

Wall nuts: 25 July 1785 My Nep. Edmd. White sends me some fine wall-nuts for pickling.
10 December 1782 Mr Taylor brought me a pine-apple, which was, for the season, large, & well-flavoured.



Vegetables

Carrots, Cauliflowers, Marrow-fat peas, Summer cabbage, small beans, White and Scarlet kidney beans, Parsnips, Broccoli, Turnips, Asparagus, Potatoes



Chardons (Jerusalem artichokes) 11 July 1791 are usually blanched, & stewed like celeri: but my Brother boils the heads of his, which are very sweet, & in flavour like artichokes: the chief objection is, that they are very small, & afford little substance in their bottoms.

Savoy cabbages 18 Oct 1788 Planted an hundred cabbages to stand the winter. Endives, Radishes, Lettuces, Planted two rows of brown Dutch lettuces under the fruit-wall to stand the winter. Artichokes, Celeri, Purple broccoli, Spinaq Peas, Rhubarb, Mushrooms

19 August 1786 Mushrooms come in Mr White's avenue at Newton. By 25 August Mushrooms are brought in great plenty

Vines and grapes.

6 Sept 1774 Grapes begin to turn: but the bunches are small and mean.

10 October 1770 Grapes begin to be eatable.

14 October 1771 Grapes large & black, but not high-flavoured yet.

8 September 1772 Gathered first grapes: large & good.

4 November 1774 Grapes now delicate, & in good plenty: they had never ripened, had not Octr proved a lovely month.

8 November 1780 The crop of grapes is prodigious: perhaps the greatest I ever had.

4 November 1781 Tho' my grapes ripen in the most disadvantageous years: yet from the concurring circumstances of a hot summer, & a failure of wasps, I think my crop was never so delicate before, nor ever supplied my table so long.

10 October 1782 We make tarts, & puddings with the crude unripened grapes.



The Garden

Gilbert's garden was the source of an enormous amount of produce, and he managed to grow crops which lasted all through the winter, and others that were stored. In his letter to Thomas Pennant in January 1778 he wrote: "As to the produce of a garden, every middle-aged person of observation may perceive within his own memory, both in town and country, how vastly the consumption of vegetables is increased. Green-stalls in cities now support multitudes in a comfortable state, while gardeners get fortunes. Every decent labourer also has his garden, which is half his support as well as his delight; and common farmers provide plenty of beans, peas and greens, for their hinds to eat with their bacon; and those few who do not are despised for their sordid parsimony, and looked upon as regardless of the welfare of their dependents. Potatoes have prevailed in this little district, by means of premiums, within these twenty years only; and are much esteemed here now by the poor, who would have scarce ventured to taste them in the last reign."

The following are just some of the vegetables and fruits that Gilbert grew, commented on in his diaries:



Fruit

Melons (grown with Cucumbers - white and green.) 6 November 1757 Cut-up a Cantaleupe that had been cut green, & laid in the Buffet to ripen. It had a very good flavour, & was better than many a common melon ripened in the Height of the Season. 10 September 1758 The Cantaleupes threaten to come all together. Cut two brace, & half to day. 12 September 1758 Held a Cantaleupe-feast at the Hermitage cut-up a brace & an half of fruit among 14 people.



Apricots, Nectarines, Peaches, Raspberries, Gooseberries, Straw-berries, Currants white, red and black, Makes black curran-jelly, & Rasp jam 20 July 1784
8 June 1791 My nieces make Rasp jam. Goose-berries not finely flavoured.
Nectarines, Plums, Apricots, 21st August 1784 Boiled some apricots with sugar to preserve them



Cherries: 4 July 1785 Gathered several pounds of cherries to preserve. they are very fine. Apples: Tuesday 3 Sept 1786 Gathered in the apples called dearlings, which keep well & are valuable kitchen apples. My only tree of the sort stands in the meadow, & produced ten bushels of fruit. Apples this year have sold at 8s per bushel: so had the price continued the produce would be worth four pounds.

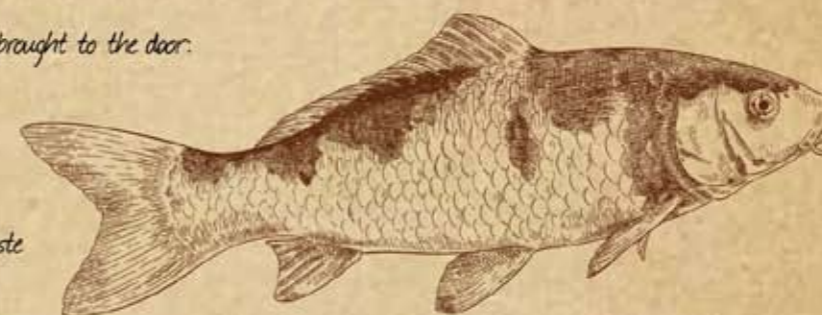
Fish

Fish was also available locally and Gilbert often had salt fish sent down from London.

26 December 1771 A pike was taken lately in [Woolmer] pond measuring 3 feet & 3 inch in length; & 21 inch in circumference: in its belly were 3 considerable carps. When fit for the table it weighed 24 pounds.

3 December 1788 Good mackerel brought to the door.

18 May 1793 A man brought me a large trout weighing three pounds, which he found in the waste current at the tail of Bins pond.



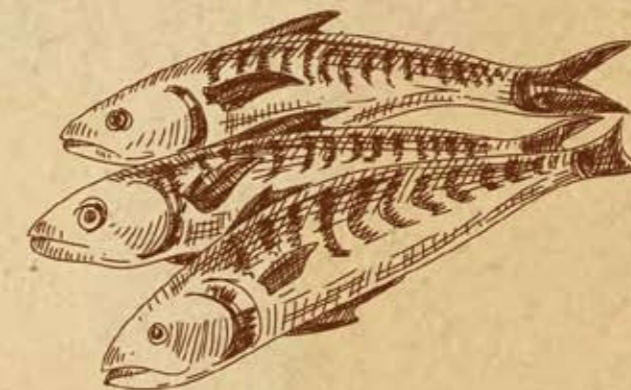
10 October 1784 A person took a trout in the stream at Dorton, weighing 2 pounds, & a half; a size to which they seldom arrive with us, because our brook is so perpetually harassed by poachers.



Gilbert was very fond of salt fish and there are frequent references to his asking to have some sent down from London.

14 December 1782 Gilbert wrote to his niece, Molly. I must trouble you again to desire your father to send us, when he has an opportunity to buy it, half an hundred of good salt fish. ... When the fish is sent, pray acquaint me by letter of the price.

7 February 1783 As the spring begins to advance, and as we propose now being with you about the first week in March, we can hardly wish for half an hundred of salt fish so late... We must therefore desire your father to send a note to his fish-monger to stop his hand.

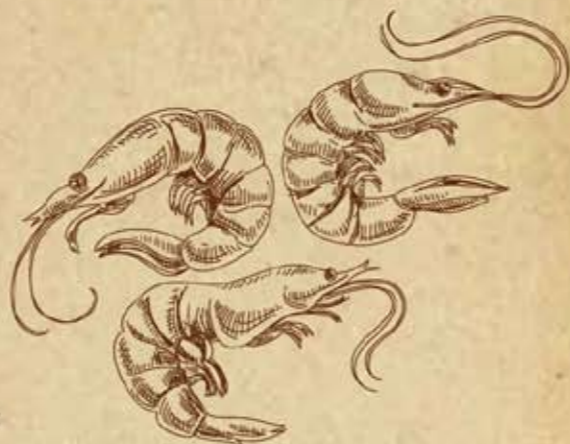




9 March 1785 We thank you for the tea, which we think very good and also for the salt-fish, which proves more white, and delicate than usual. Instead of in a parcel, the cod came down in a barrel, which being leaky let the brine out on the kitchen-floor. I therefore told Thomas (Thomas Hoar, Gilbert's loyal and long term servant) he should carry it into the cellar. Thomas without much thought took the barrel by the hoops, down fell the barrel, out flew the head in short the stairs from top to bottom became one broken wet scene of barrel-staves, and codfish! Please send me the price of the fish, and remind your father to charge it to me.

When Gilbert stayed with his brothers Benjamin and Thomas in London fish was usually plentiful, in season:

Monday 22nd November 1774 'When I came to town I found that herrings were out of season: but sprats, which Ray says are undoubtedly young herrings, abounded in such quantities, that in these hard times they were a great help to the poor. Cods and haddocks in plenty smelts beginning to come in.'



2 May 1769 Prawns plenty

4 May 1769 Crayfish in high season. Smelts in season

6 November 1771 Whittings in high season: herrings going out

26 April 1769 Herrings abound, & are the usual forerunners of mackerals.

27 April 1769 Dutch plaice abound. Turbots.



John Carpenter uses chestnut wood for cooperage i.e. buckets, jets etc. because it doesn't shrink.

Tuesday 7 Feb 1775 Brothr Harry's strong beer, which was brewed last Easter Monday with the Horeum Nudum, is now tapped & incomparably good it is some what deeper-coloured than beer usually is in the country, not from the malt's being high dried: but perhaps from the natural colour of the grain. The barrel was by no means new, but old & seasoned. When, it seems, makes also high- coloured beer.

25th March 1767 Brewed an half Hogsh of strong-beer with six bushels of Rich Knight's malt, & three pounds of hops: well water.

For brewing he needed good, clean and fresh water - and his well was the deepest in the village.

13 December 1784 Peter Wells well is 36 deep, my own 63

14 December Peter Wells well runs over, when this is the case the springs are very high. This overflowing lasted only two or three days

12 October 1785 My well begins to rise. It has been so low all this autumn as not to afford water sufficient for the occasions of the family. Had it not been for the frequent rains, we should have been at a loss, when we wanted to wash or brew.

22nd October 1785 My well is risen six or seven Yards (this after vast showers on Wednesday 12th October, the end of a period of 2 weeks heavy rain).

Tuesday 13 September 1791 My well is very low, & the water foul!



Saturday 1st October 1791 It was with difficulty that we procured water enough for a brewing from my well

Perhaps inevitably, this attention to alcohol had an unfortunate result:

24 January 1786 Yesterday Mrs Eddy and Co. and nephew John dined with me. whether I drank too freely among my friends, I cannot say but in the evening and part of the night my feet roged and I felt violent pains, so that I expected the god at once.

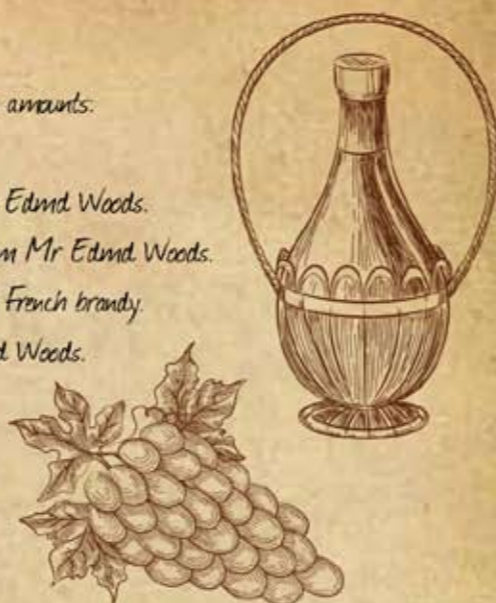
But Gilbert was clear that the alternative had its dangers too:

20th June 1778 My favourite old Galloway, who is touched in his wind, was allowed to taste no water for 21 days, by which means his infirmity grew much less troublesome...After refraining a while he shewed little propensity for drink. A good lesson this to people, who by perpetual quizzing create a perpetual thirst.



Gilbert fortified his wine with brandy - which he bought in prodigious amounts.

- 12 June 1784 Received 5 gallons & a quart of French brandy from Mr Edmd Woods.
- 8 January 1785 Received 5 gallons, & seven pints of French brandy from Mr Edmd Woods.
- 8 October 1785 Received from Mr Edmd Woods 5 gallons & 1 pint of French brandy.
- 8 July 1786 Received five gallons, & a pint of brandy from Mr Edmd Woods.
- 2 August 1788 Five gallons, & one pint of brandy from London.
- 17 April 1789 Five gallons of french brandy from London.
- 11 February 1790 Three gallons of best french brandy from London.
- 29 January 1791 Three gallons of brandy from London.
- 26 November 1791 3 gallons of brandy from London.
- 14 September 1792 From London three gallons of French brandy, two gallons of Jamaica rum.



Port usually came from the docks in Southampton:



13 February 1764 Bottled-out half an Hogsh of Mrs Atherley port wine. It had not, I think quite so good a smell & flavour as usual: & seemd always to shew a disposition to mottle [froth] in the glass.

- 16 June 1784 Received a Hogsh[ead] of port-wine, imported at Southampton.
- 26 June 1784 Bottled-out the hogshhead of port-wine: my two thirds ran to 16 dozen & four of my bottles, some of which are Bristol bottles, & therefore large.

- 29 June 1784 Drew-out from the port-wine hogsh for my share, eleven bottles more of wine: so that my proportion was 17 dozen, & 3 bottles.
 - 11 August 1791 Half hogshhead of portwine from Southampton.
 - 24 September 1791 Bottled-off half-hogsh. of port wine. The port ran eleven doz. & 7 bottles.
- Gilbert used the barrel the port come in to make a hide in his garden - the Wine Pipe.

Gilbert and his brothers all brewed beer, and Gilbert built his own Brewhouse in 1785:

- March 11 1765 Tund the strong-beer, having stirred-in the Yeast two or three times a day while it stood in the tun-tub.
- March 24 1772 Brewed half an hogshhead of strong beer with 6 bushels of Rich Knight's malt and three pounds & an half of Berrimans hops. All rain water. Put one bush of brown malt to the second mashing. Beer works well.

Storage of food

There were frequently problems with the storage of food:



5 August 1780 My pendent pantry, made of deal & fine fly-wire, & suspended in the great walnut tree, proves an incomparable preservative for meat against flesh-flies. The flesh by hanging in a brisk current of air becomes dry on the surface, & keeps 'til it is tender without tainting.

4 June 1785 As the great wall-nut tree has no foliage this year, we have hung the meat-safe on Miss Whites Sycomore ... where it will be much in the air, & be well sheltered from the sun by leaves.

14 September 1784 The heats are so great, & the nights so sultry, that we spoil joints of meat, in spite of all the care that can be taken

But in winter the problem was food freezing:



10 December 1784 Bread, cheese, meat, potatoes, apples all frozen were not secured in cellars under ground.

11 December 1784 My apples, pears, & potatoes secured in the cellar, & kitchen-closet; my meat in the cellar.

Eggs

Eggs were clearly a staple for recipes and lots of puddings and custards were eaten. Gilbert kept bantams but sometimes more exotic fare was available.

28 April 1787 Set Gunnory the Bantam hen, on nine of her own eggs

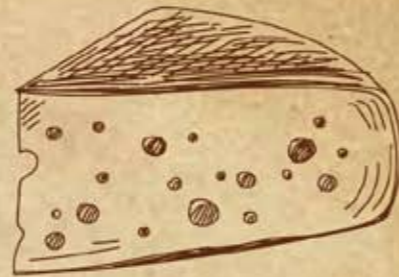
Sunday 23 September 1792 My Bantam chickens, which have been kept in the scullery every night till now for fear of rats, that carried away the first brood from the brew-house, went up last week to the beam over the stable

1 October 1784 - the Swan-eggs are a great crop



Butter and Cheese

4 June 1791 My brother's cow, when there is no extraordinary call for cream, produces three pounds of butter each week. The footman churns the butter overnight, & puts it in water; in the morning one of my nieces beats it, & makes it up, & prints it.



16 December 1779 Gilbert wrote to Molly: It will be by no means proper to send you three or four cheeses from hence, because the cargo at our shop turns out very poor, and mean, without any good flavour, and full of eyes; so that I hardly can pick out a tolerable one for our own table.



Drink

Gilbert made his own wine, which he fortified with brandy imported from France, and he also bought port regularly. He brewed his own beer in his Brewhouse (1785), for which he needed a plentiful supply of good, clean water from his well.



On 9 February 1782 he wrote to Molly: The other day I fetched up a bottle of brandy (for you know I deal much in brandy) when lo the contents, though all the rest had been bright, was of a deep purple! Why so, niece?



12th March 1766 Made half a hogsh of raisin-wine with one hund of Malagas, & half a Hund of Smyrnas (types of grape). Put to the raisins ten buckets & a half of water. The raisins were new, & fine: the former cost 24s the latter 17s.

23rd March 1767 Turned the raisin-wine which filled the half hogsh: there was one gallon over. The wine, after drawn from ye raisins, stood two days in a tub to settle, but which means a large quantity of graut was kept back. Put to the wine ten bottles & one pint of elder syrop.

Menr. the syrop by being made with only one pound of sugar to a bottle of juice, fermented, & broke one bottle, & blowed-out some dorks. Put one pd of sugar to the wine to make amends for the bottle of syrop which was lost. The wine is very sweet now.



Disaster!

13th May 1783 Not long since I bottled out some very fine raisin-wine. The next morning before I was up Thomas came and told me that he thought that the wine had fermented and broke some of the bottles; for a stream of wine ran from under the vault-door. To this I replied like a philosopher, that it was impossible that the fermentation could be come to such a degree in so short a time. Thomas came up again, and told me that the stream smelt also of brandy or rum. This account confirmed my suspicions. So I got up and went into the cellar when, woe is me, the shelf was fallen down and - caetera desunt.