

PRESS RELEASE – URGENT

GILBERT WHITE'S HOUSE & GARDENS AND THE OATES COLLECTION

**GILBERT WHITE OBSERVES AND RECORDS CATAclySMIC ERUPTION OF ICELANDIC VOLCANO IN 1783!!**

It is worth noting that Gilbert White of Selborne, Hampshire, one of the founding fathers of modern scientific recording, inspiration to Darwin, and author of *The Natural History of Selborne*, observed a very similar phenomenon as that afflicting our airspace today.

In his very clear description of the effect of the eruption of Icelandic volcano Skaptar-jökull, appearing in a letter to his contemporary Daines Barrington, he 'noticed this strange occurrence from June 23 to July 20' in 1783. It gave a 'peculiar haze, or smokey fog, that prevailed in every part of Europe, and even beyond its limits'.

Going on to note 'The sun, at noon, looked as blank as a clouded moon, and shed a rust-coloured ferruginous light on the ground, and floors of rooms; but was particularly lurid and blood-coloured at rising and setting. All the time the heat was so intense that butchers' meat could hardly be eaten on the day it was killed; and the flies swarmed so in the lanes and hedges that they rendered the horses half frantic, and riding irksome. The country people began to look with a superstitious awe at the red, luring aspect of the sun; and indeed there was reason for the most enlightened person to be apprehensive...'

White and his contemporaries did not have to contend with grounded flights as is currently the case, caused by ash from the current eruptions of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano, but it clearly illustrates that this is nothing new to man. Museum Manager, Carey Hides, commented: 'White's recordings indicate a very visible effect that lasted for nearly a month. We wonder if this latest event will cause problems for that length of time?'