

# WEARE GIFFARD: - THE NAME

Peter Coad

*“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose  
by any other name would smell as sweet”.*

Shakespeare.

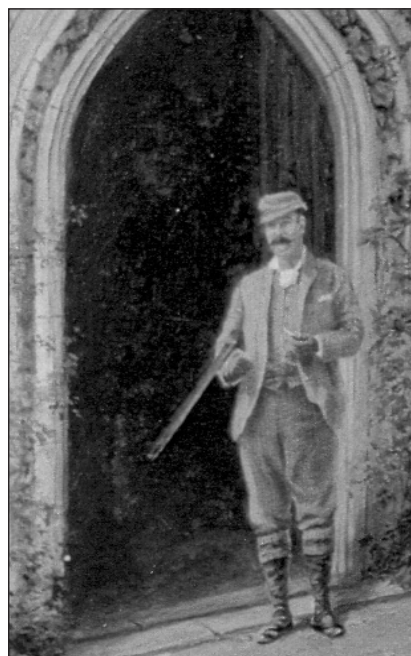
At the time of the Domesday survey of 1086, the manor of Wera was held in demesne (land devoted to a Lord’s profit) by Roald Adobed, an archaic form of ‘Sir Rauld’. ‘Were’ is a spelling of 1219, Weregiffarde in 1328 and Ware 1675. The Giffard family is first recorded in connection with the village in 1130 although its transfer to that family could have been as early as 1086. (Ed. *Although there is some evidence this may have been as late as 1104*). Were Gyffard is a spelling used in the Subsidy Rolls of 1524. (See appendix) The spelling ‘weir’ is not uncommon, perhaps linked with the weir at Beam Mansion or more likely with the tradition of salmon fishing at Weare Giffard mentioned in the Domesday Book. Over the years much controversy has been generated about these varied spellings. The matter was thought to have been resolved at the 2nd December 1899 meeting of the Weare Giffard Parish Council. The following is a verbatim account of the meeting.

Extract from:

The Western Morning News of 8th December 1899.

*“A meeting of the parishioners of Weare Giffard has been held to consider a proposition on the part of His Honour Judge Cecil Hugh W. Beresford of Weare Hall, that the original spelling of the name, now incorrectly ‘Weare Giffard’, be restored. The Chairman, Mr Richard Gomer presided. His Honour explained*

*that it was not a matter of sentiment or opinion but one of fact, capable of the clearest proof, that the form in which the name of the parish was now usually, though not universally spelled, was absolutely incorrect and wholly unsupported by history and antiquarian research. He would consider separately the two halves of the name of the parish.*



*Judge Beresford outside Weare Hall*

*In or about 1086 the great Domesday Book was compiled, one of the compilers being one Walter Giffard, and in that book the name was spelt ‘Weare’ (sic). The Manor of Weare Giffard passed from the Giffard family by marriage to that of the Trewins (c. 1306) and they adopted the name of Weare from their dwelling. ‘Weare’ which was also their family motto found on an old seal, meaning ‘We are; (Latin ‘Saemus’). The name is also spelled ‘Weare Giffard’ in all old family deeds and*

*'Weare Giffard' in all old family deeds and documents in the possession of Lord Fortescue.*

*As to the second half, viz. 'Giffard', Weare Giffard was one of the numerous possessions of the Giffard family. In every early document, every early deed and every early notice of these, the Devon Giffards spell the name 'Giffard'. Sir Walter Giffard who died in 1276 and whose effigy is in the church, spelled his name 'Giffard'. So did his brother Sir Roger Giffard of Clovelly.*

*Proof of this may be seen on the monuments of the Giffard family in Chittlehampton church dating back to Henry VIII. Moreover, the name is always spelled 'Giffard' by Prince, Pole, Risdon, Westcote and all other county historians.*

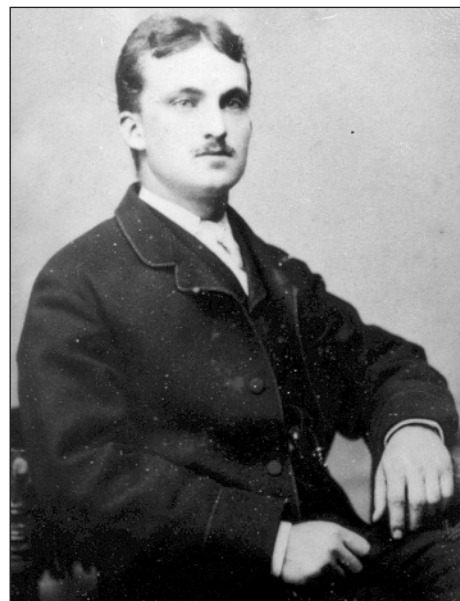
*He begged to move the resolution that the associations with which the church, the old hall and the village were so intimately connected, be kept up by restoring the original correct spelling, that is to say, 'Weare Giffard'.*

*Mr Bright said he had great pleasure in seconding this motion, and after some discussion, in which Mr. Fry and others took part, the motion was unanimously carried."*

*On the 12th December 1899 the Western Morning News observed, "There is no reason in the world why Judge Beresford and the parishioners of Weare Giffard should not succeed in causing the name of the parish to be spelled as just given. On His Honour's showing it is the correct form, and the correct form should be restored. If the parishioners adopt the ancient form the local press will assist them, and in a few years the alteration will have become crystallised."*

*Parish records reveal that there was considerable correspondence between*

*Devon County Council and the Postmaster General on the matter. At a Parish Council meeting on 31st October 1900, the Chairman read a letter from the Clerk to Devon County Council sanctioning the alteration. However, in November 1900, the Parish Clerk wrote to the Guardian of the Torrington Union and the Rural District Council of Torrington, informing them of the change of spelling which had already been rectified in Bideford and at the post office in Weare Giffard. A reply was received in March 1901 advising the Parish Council that the official spelling had been adopted. In December 1906 the Parish Clerk wrote to the Local Government Board asking whether the alteration had ever been legalised. The response in January 1907 evaded giving a direct answer to the question. Yet eighty years on and the name was recorded as "Weare Giffard" at one end of the parish and "Weare Gifford" at the other. The failure to get confirmation that the name change had been legalised in 1907 was not helpful!*



*Richard Gomer - Chairman of Weare Giffard Parish Council*

The original decision of 1899 that 'Weare Giffard' should be the accepted spelling is indisputable. Sadly the name remains at the mercy of those who consider such matters important and those who treat the issue either with indifference or ignorance.



*Flooding at Chopes Bridge about 1950 with spelling of Giffard still showing*



*"NAME RESOLVED! Locally designed and made, award winning village sign"*