

# HISTORY OF EDUCATION AT WEARE GIFFARD

1671 - 1945

PETER COAD

*"Tis education forms the common mind  
Just as the twig is bent, the trees inclined"*

(Moral Essays)

There was no educational establishment in Weare Giffard prior to the late seventeenth century. The education of those who could afford to pay was available either by the employment of a private tutor or attending on a fee paying basis either a public school or a local grammar school. By 1600 there were ten grammar schools in the County of Devon, the nearest being Bideford Grammar School. The seventeenth century was a period when many philanthropists began using their wealth to endow schools for the education of 'the poorer classes'; the eighteenth and nineteenth century saw a remarkable growth in the establishment of such schools. Weare Giffard in particular benefited from the Will of John Lovering, a wealthy merchant who died 1671. The Lovering bequest provided £100 a year for the education of the poor in the parishes for Weare Giffard, Huntshaw, Alverdiscott and Torrington. It is said Great Torrington children attended for more than a century, hence the lane leading from Torrington to Weare Giffard was known as 'School Lane', as it still is today. The location of the school was left to the discretion of the Executors.

The location of the first Lovering endowed school in Weare Giffard is still something of a mystery. In 'The History of Great Torrington in the County of Devon' by J. J. Alexander and W. R. Hooper (Published 1948) it states

unequivocally that the Lovering School was established in Weare Giffard but that Torrington children were allowed to attend. Legend has it that Bonefants, a cottage situated just below the old Methodist Chapel was formerly an 'Old Dame School'. Interestingly its location is very roughly equidistant from Torrington, Alverdiscott and Huntshaw. Research reveals that Margery Bonefants died in the village in 1774 age 114! She may well have lived in Bonefants giving it its name. Even more interesting is that she was 34 years old when the first Lovering School was established and she possibly was the first teacher. Much of this is pure speculation but I am convinced that the Bonifants of today was the first Lovering School.

By the date of the charity report of 1824 the right of sending children to Weare Giffard had, "not been exercised for many years". Both sexes were welcome at the school. As other schools developed in Torrington the majority of children at the school came from the parish of Weare Giffard. A Sunday school was also based at the school-room, as was a public library.

The Tithe Map of 1837 makes no reference to a school but the 1841 Census records one schoolmaster and two schoolmistresses living in the village at diverse private addresses. However, about 1850 a William Bennet Caple, schoolmaster and his



Bonifants, Wear Giffard. c.1700

*Thought to be the first Loversing School*



Mrs. Thirza Mancy  
Headmistress  
1912 - 1939



*Weare Giffard School built in 1860*

home was used as the Lovering School until the purpose built school was opened on Weare Quay in 1860 as a Church of England school. The site was donated by the Earl Lord Fortesque for the education of the 'labouring and poorer classes'.

The Elementary Education Act 1870 provided state education where none existed. The Education Act 1902, the dual system of combining schools with charity foundations, to some extent made the Lovering Bequest superfluous. However the school Log Book shows that from 1912 it provided scholarships

for gifted children mainly to attend Bideford Grammar School for Boys and Edgehill College for Girls.

From 1912 to 1939, Mrs Mancy was the headmistress. As a result of her excellent teaching skills over twenty of her pupils went on to higher education. Sadly the school closed in 1945 and all the pupils were transferred to Great Torrington. The school has been transformed into Weare Giffard Village Hall.

Note: 'Weare Giffard: A History of Education' by Peter Coad was



*Weare Giffard School Photograph 1927*

Left to right

Back row: Harold Edworthy, Frank Day, Frank Wilton, Alfie Tanton, Arthur Edworthy, William Moore, Wallace Mackenzie.

Second row: Margery Gilbert, Iris Day, Evelyn Beer, Phyllis Braunton, Hilda Dymond, Hilda Braunton, Vera Beer, Joan Mancy, Clara Becklake, Margery Beer.

Third row: Marjorie Squire, Winnie Lawrence, Gwen Braunton, Violet Curtis, Betty Busby, Dulcie Edworthy, Vera Braunton, Phyllis Squire.

Front row: Jack Braunton, Aubrey Braunton, George Gorvett, Sonny Braunton, Jimmy Martin, Ernie Becklake.



*Weare Giffard Girl  
Guides at a Church  
Parade in Bideford  
May 7th 1939*

*School Children playing  
at the Quay,  
Weare Giffard  
1933*



*Weare Giffard Cubs 1939?  
Alan Coad, Howard Curtis, John Martin, Aland Pidler, Peter Coad*