

Memorial 1 – GIFFORD

WILLIAM GIFFORD died 1757

HONOR GIFFORD died 1759

GEORGE GIFFORD died ??

HONOR FRYER died 1757

WILLIAM GIFFORD died September 1788

HENRY GIFFORD died 1794 (in Martinique)

SAMUEL GIFFORD died 1797 (in Bermuda)

The first William Gifford on the memorial was a member of the Gifford family of grocers in Exeter. His father, Thomas Gifford, was from Wellington in Somerset. William was apprenticed to Anthony Viccary, another grocer, and became a freeman of Exeter on 13th April 1719. He married Honor Hutchings at Moretonhampstead parish church on 5th February 1723. They had at least five children – Ann, William born 1728, John born 1729 (See his family on Memorial 45), George born 1735, Honor born in 1737 and Samuel born 1740. William who died in 1788 was a doctor of medicine living in St Olave's parish.



The chest tomb before restoration in 2014.

Restoration made possible by a grant from the Leche Trust.

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Ann, their daughter, was married to John Fryer⁶, who had been apprenticed to her father and became a Freeman of Exeter on 30 September 1754². No baptism records have been found for the children of Ann and John Fryer which suggests that they were baptized at a meeting house where the records have not survived. Honor Fryer who was buried here in 1757 was the daughter of Ann and John⁶. They also had a son, William, who became a Freeman of Exeter on 12 June 1790, by succession to his father. William was listed as a gentleman and was of St Edmund's parish².

William, the eldest son of William and Honor Gifford, was described as a doctor of medicine when he became a Freeman of the city 23 March 1761², by succession from his father, after he had died in 1757. When he died in 1788 he was a resident of St Olave's parish, and his Will also described him as a Doctor of Physick (sic)⁷.

Their two sons, Henry and Samuel, are also commemorated on this memorial, but are not buried in the vault because both died abroad.

Henry had been left money in William's will to purchase a commission in the rank of Ensign, which would have made him an officer, either in the navy, or an infantry regiment of the army. He died in Martinique in 1794, aged just 27, perhaps during or after the Battle of Martinique in the French Revolutionary wars. Although few soldiers were killed in the actual fighting, very large numbers died of yellow fever later.

The British captured Martinique, which had been an important French colony, and occupied it for eight years. Trade with the West Indies represented about a fifth of British sea-going trade at that time, and there were concerns that the French revolutionary policy of freeing slaves would undermine the economic basis of the area. Slavery was still legal in British colonies until 1834.

Sadly, Samuel died in Bermuda in 1797 aged only 20. Again, we do not know what his status was. He may have been in the navy, or working there in another capacity, or had gone there for trading purposes.

Britain had a naval base in Bermuda at the time, where the issue of slaves was also relevant, because slaves were employed in the naval dockyard with their masters. However, the slaves were actually paid for the work, and could therefore save up money to eventually buy their release, although in practice many just ran away.

Many non-conformists were very active in campaigning against slavery, so it is interesting that the two Gifford sons were working in areas of the world where the whole economy was still reliant on slavery.

In his Will, William left money, land and property to his two sons, his daughters, Matilda Gifford and Charlotte Gifford and to Martha Whitelock, the mother of all of four of his children though they were never married.

Matilda and Charlotte both married Exeter in 1794, Charlotte on 10th February to Lewis Kelly, at St Leonards Church⁸, and Matilda to John Hucks on 30th October at St Edmunds Church⁸.

Sources

1. The Will of Thomas Gifford 1718 (www.ancestry.co.uk)
2. Extracted Church of England Parish Records Book 1670, Collection – Devon: Exeter – Freeman 1266-1967 (www.ancestry.co.uk)
3. Devon and Exeter Oath Rolls, 1723 (www.foda.org.uk)
4. Devon Marriages 1723 (www.findmypast.co.uk)
5. Non-Conformist & Non-Parochial Register 1567-1970 (www.ancestry.co.uk)
6. The Will of Honour Gifford 1759 (www.ancestry.co.uk)
7. The Will of William Gifford 1788 (www.ancestry.co.uk)
8. England, Select Marriages 1538-1973 (www.ancestry.co.uk)

Sources (researched by Beryl Coe – August 2014)

Coats, A (2009) Bermuda Naval Base: Management, Artisans and their Enslaved Workers 1795 – 1797.
H J K Jenkins - Martinique: The British Occupation 1794 – 1802, in History Today, Volume 31, Issue 11.

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