

THE GIFFARD EFFIGIES IN LECKHAMPTON CHURCH

The Giffard effigies in St Peter's are said by Alan Brooks in *Pevsner's Guide* to be 'among the best preserved and most delightful in the county'. Their details have been described in articles by Professor John Middleton and Albert Hartshorne in the *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society* (in 1880 and 1902) and also by Ida Roper in her *Monumental Effigies of Gloucestershire* (1930). These authorities remark that the figures were at one time decorated with paint, all trace of which has since disappeared. Hartshorne goes on to say that the knight was 'honoured in a coloured plate ... in Hefner's beautiful *Trachten*'.

The book referred to, whose full title is *Trachten des Christlichen Mittelalters (Medieval Christian Costumes)* by Jakob Heinrich von Hefner-Alteneck, was published in three volumes in several editions from 1840 onwards and is extremely rare. However, I have been able to download digitised versions. One edition contains a monochrome line drawing of the subject, but the other must be the 'beautifully illustrated' version, as described above.¹ (All the illustrations and some photographs are shown, for comparison's sake, at the end of this article.)

The artist was named by Hefner as one Robert Pearsall of Willsbridge (near Bristol). He was a gentleman of leisure, a musician who helped found the Bristol Madrigal Society (now the Bristol Chamber Choir), and he was also an antiquarian with an artistic talent. In 1825 he left the family home at Willsbridge and went to live abroad, first in Germany and finally in Switzerland, where he bought and restored a ruined castle, Wartensee on the shores of Lake Constance. During this time he must have met and discussed the subject of mediaeval costume with Jakob Hefner. He made several return visits to this country between 1836 and 1850, and on one of these occasions he would have been able to visit Leckhampton and make a drawing of the effigies (as well as one of Sir Guy Bryan in Tewkesbury Abbey). It is tempting to think that he might have stayed overnight with Canon Trye at Leckhampton Court.

Some details in the drawing are lightly indicated, for example on the knight's shield and tunic. The accompanying text describes the knight's costume in great detail, in particular the tunic and shield, which were embellished with ten red roundels on a silver background (in heraldic terms *argent, ten roundels gules*). These characteristics are seen more clearly in the full-colour illustration (drawn by Hefner himself, with acknowledgment to Pearsall) and they are also evident in a very similar drawing from a French book published in 1847 – *Le Costume du Moyen Age* by André Volgin, which appears to have been inspired by Hefner's work. A framed copy of this illustration is kept in the church, on a window ledge near the effigies.

It is generally believed that the effigy of the knight portrayed one Sir John Giffard, who died in 1327 and who had inherited the manor of Leckhampton after the Contrariant Sir John Giffard, of Brimpsfield, had been hanged as a traitor in 1322. In both editions of the book it is a puzzling fact that Hefner identifies the knight as Sir Thomas Gifford, and the caption beneath the drawing reads 'Ritter Th. Gifford von Leckhampton um 1360'. He adds that the style of carving 'undoubtedly'

¹See <https://archive.org/details/trachtenkunstwer03hefn/page/n175/mode/2up> (Plate 211) and <https://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/title/BV004284182> (Plate 24)

dates from the second half of the 14th Century. The only Thomas Giffard living at that time would have been Sir Thomas of Twyford (Berkshire) (c.1344 – 1394), but the coat of arms illustrated was not appropriate for that line, and the heraldry may be a ‘red herring’, as we do not know what sources were used by Hefner or Pearsall. After all this time, without documentary evidence, all one can say is that the figures portray members of the Giffard family, who held the lordship of the manor in the early part of the 14th Century, at the time when the church was built.

Hefner stresses that the figures were among the few to have been decorated with paint right at the outset (*ursprünglich*) and whose colours were still intact. However, an illustration of the effigies in *Views and Antiquities of the County of Gloucestershire* Samuel Lysons, published in 1792, shows no hint of decoration on the knight’s shield. Nor is it understood when and how any colour disappeared subsequently. One possibility is that the paint suffered from the elements when the church roof was removed for several months during alterations carried out in 1865-66. If it was a Victorian elaboration, there is no mention of it in Churchwardens’ Accounts, which include such trivial details as payment of 8 pence in 1837 ‘for painting a cow on the vestry’!

In a nice touch Robert Pearsall gave the lady back her hands, which had evidently been broken off even by the early 19th century. Observant readers will also notice that the knight is shown on his lady’s left-hand side; today they are the other way round. This switch was made for some unaccountable reason when the effigies were moved into the lady chapel after the 1866 alterations. They have been moved three times altogether, most recently in 1921 when that chapel was reordered, and today they lie in the south-west corner of the church.

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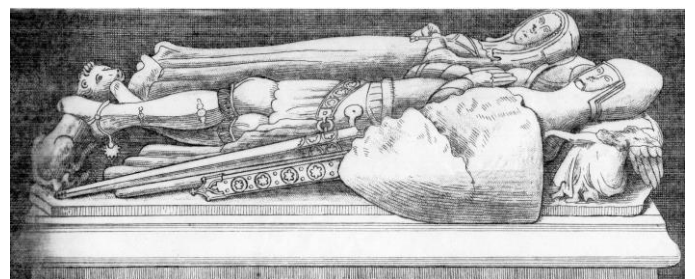
Illustration from Jakob von Hefner's *Trachten des Christlichen Mittelalters* (c.1840) – Plate 24
 Drawn by Robert Pearsall



Illustration from a later edition of Hefner's *Trachten* (c.1854) – Plate 211



Le Chevalier Giffard from *Le Costume du Moyen Age* by André Volgin (1847)



Engraving from *Views and Antiquities of the County of Gloucestershire* by Samuel Lysons (1791)



Engraving from an article by Albert Hartshorne in *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society* No 4 (1879-80). The Artist's initials are dated 1863, i.e. before Middleton's alterations.



The effigies in their present position. From *The Monumental Effigies of Gloucestershire and Bristol* by Ida M Roper (1931).



Photograph of the effigies taken in about 1915, next to the south wall of the lady chapel, where they had been moved to in 1866. The figures had already been transposed.