



COLONEL J. W. GIFFORD, F.R.S.

## Colonel James William Gifford<sup>1</sup>

(Plate XVI)

By the death of Colonel Gifford, at his residence, 'Oaklands', Chard, on 27 October 1930, the Society has lost probably its chief microscopist and one who was keen in all branches of natural history. At the same time he was interested in local archæology and particularly in the history of his native place—Chard. He was a man of high attainments in the world of science, and was also an accomplished linguist and excellent musician.

Colonel J. W. Gifford was the son of Mr. James Benjamin Gifford, of Passlands, Chard, and was born on 29 February 1856. At the time of his death, the Colonel was chairman of the board of directors of Messrs. Gifford, Fox & Co. In 1883, he married Emma, daughter of Mr. Ernest Rossiter, solicitor, of Taunton.

Col. Gifford joined the old Volunteer Force in 1882, commanded the 5th Somersets, and was appointed honorary Colonel of the battalion. He was chairman of the trustees of Chard School, and in his later days helped to administer the very generous help given to that school by Mr. William Wyndham.

Science had for the Colonel a great fascination, and he worked hard and with all the keenness of an enthusiast in many branches of scientific research. His laboratory at 'Oaklands' was equipped with instruments of the most advanced type, and he was fond of demonstrating to those interested in his work. He possessed several telescopes, the largest of these being housed in its own observatory in the grounds.

He became a Fellow of the Microscopical Society, following his achievement in resolving a diatom, *Pleurosigma quadratum*, as no one had done it before. His further success in introducing improvements to telescope lenses won for him election as Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.

<sup>1</sup> Much of the information recorded above, it is only fair to say, has been taken from the obituary notice of Col. Gifford given in the *Chard and Ilminster News*, 1 Nov. 1930.



Optics was his special study, and the spectroscope his chief instrument. He read several papers on the determination of Refractive Indices before the Royal Society. As a valuable contribution to defensive and offensive work on the battlefields during the Great War, Colonel Gifford had made at his own expense and from his own calculations many hundreds of telescopes for the troops during the war, and they were admittedly the best sent out.

The Colonel was one of the first two men to take and show an X-ray photograph in this country, both exhibiting their photographs in London on the same day in 1896. He frequently did X-ray work for the Chard doctors up to within a few days of his death. He gave a quantity of radium to the Middlesex Hospital at a time when no one else had done so to any hospital.

Col. Gifford's relations with the Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society were of the happiest, and he was always heartily welcomed at its meetings. He became a member in 1884, and became much interested in the Natural History Sections formed in the twentieth century. In 1920 he was elected a vice-president of the Ornithological Section, and after having joined the committee of the Microscopical Section in 1922, he became its president in 1925, and so remained until the time of his death. On more than one occasion he invited Sections of the Society to see his instruments at 'Oaklands'. The Chard Reservoir, adjoining 'Oaklands' and owned by the Colonel, was always an attraction to the Ornithological and Botanical Sections.

On the occasion of the annual gathering of the Society at Chard in 1927, Colonel Gifford was elected President, and, although a sick man, delivered his address on *Old Chard* at the annual meeting (*Proc.* lxxiii, 1-10). During the meeting the members were entertained to tea at 'Oaklands'. Later he became a vice-president of the Society, and he contributed liberally to the Extension and Repairs Fund at Taunton Castle (*Proc.* lxxv, p. xxv).

In his official position the Colonel was a regular attendant at the Council Meetings of the Society, except when kept away by ill-health, and his last visit to Taunton Castle was on 3 September. Needless to say his genial presence has been greatly missed by his fellow councillors. It was through his kindness that the coloured plan of Glastonbury Abbey finds a place in this volume.

H. ST. GEORGE GRAY.