



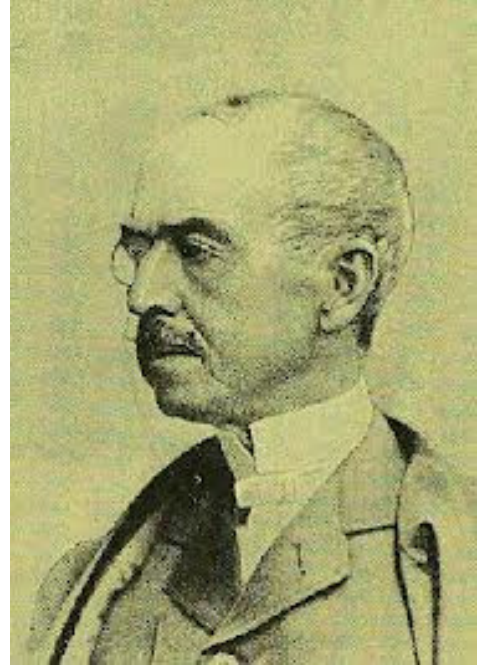
The Hundred Parishes

Introduction to a famous local person . . .

WALTER GILBEY (1831 - 1914)

Sir Walter Gilbey was a noted businessman, agriculturalist, horse breeder and philanthropist who retained strong links with this area throughout his life. He was born in Bishop's Stortford and although he retained a large house in Regent's Park in London, he spent as much time as he could in North West Essex, living initially in Hargrave House in Stansted Mountfitchet, now a nursing home. In 1876 he and his wife Ellen settled at Elsenham Hall.

In 1857 he and his brother Alfred founded W and A Gilbey, a wine and spirits company that was to become the largest in the world. Some may remember the name of one of their most famous products, Gilbey's Gin. However, Walter Gilbey always proclaimed that his first passions were the rural world and horses, and he became as well-known as an agriculturalist and horse-breeder as he was as a businessman. He served as President of both the Royal Agricultural Society and The Shire Horse Society, and it was for his services to these that he was awarded his baronetcy in 1893. That same year he also founded the famous Elsenham Jam company using the produce from his own orchards in the village. He also found time to serve as a JP and he was Deputy Lieutenant of Essex.



Walter Gilbey did much to remodel Elsenham Hall into a commodious and well-appointed country gentleman's seat. He created a large gallery for his paintings (many by George Stubbs, a noted painter of horses, and George Morland, a painter of landscapes and rural scenes) and a billiard room, together with a smoking room and library. He also created a delightful garden with thousands of rose bushes brought back from Bordeaux where his company owned a vineyard.

He was revered as a kind and thoughtful employer and philanthropist. Visitors to the area can still see the well in the centre of Elsenham village and King's Cottages almshouses in South Road in Bishops Stortford, both built in memory of his wife. His donations of the land for the Bishop's Stortford Golf Course and the former hospital in Rye Street are further examples of his generosity.

Further information:

www.stortfordhistory.co.uk/guide2/sir-walter-gilbey/