

Sir Walter Gilbey, 1st Baronet

(2 May 1831 – 12 November 1914) was an English wine-merchant and philanthropist.

He was born at Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire to parents Henry and Elizabeth Gilbey. His father, the owner (and frequently the driver) of the daily coach between Bishop's Stortford and London, was put out of business when the railway arrived in Bishops Stortford in 1842 and died when Walter was eleven years old. Young Gilbey was shortly afterwards obtained a clerkship in a firm of parliamentary agents in London.



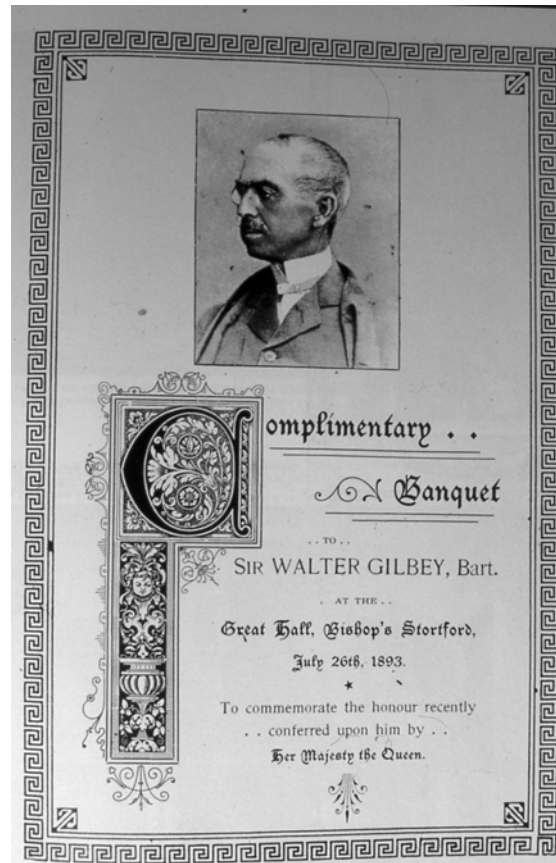
On the outbreak of the Crimean War, Walter Gilbey and his younger brother, Alfred, volunteered for civilian service at the front, and were employed at a convalescent hospital on the Dardanelles. Returning to London on the declaration of peace, Walter and Alfred Gilbey, on the advice of their eldest brother Henry Gilbey who was a wholesale wine-merchant, they started in the retail wine and spirits trade.

Within three years the brothers had 20,000 customers on their books. The creation of the off-licence system in 1860, followed by the large reduction in the duty on French wines effected by the commercial treaty between England and France in 1861, revolutionized their trade and laid the foundation of their fortunes.

In 1867 the brothers secured the old Pantheon theatre and concert hall in Oxford Street for their headquarters. In 1875 became the proprietors of two large whisky-distilleries in Scotland. In 1893 the business was converted, for family reasons, into a private limited liability company, of which Walter Gilbey, who in the same year was created a baronet, was chairman.

In 1895 they began to market their own gin – 'Gilbey's Gin' which soon became a household name.

In 1898 Sir Walter Gilbey bought the Stort Navigation in an effort to keep it open for the



benefit of Bishops Stortford.