

## William Henry Bishop (1855-1937) – Farley Hill benefactor

What has the Victory Hall got to do with Finsbury London Dry Gin and Stone's Ginger Wine? And where does the French painter James Tissot fit in the story? The answer to the first question is **William Henry Bishop**, the man who gave The Victory Hall and associated land to Farley Hill residents in December 1919.

William Henry Bishop was born in 1855 in Marylebone, London into a wealthy family that had been making gin since at least 1740. The family business started with George Bishop, who was an apprentice to a member of the Worshipful Company of Distillers in the City of London in the 1680s. The distillery he founded later became known as the [Finsbury Distillery](#). Finsbury London Dry Gin and [Stone's Ginger Wine](#) were two of the famous names distilled and marketed throughout the country and across the world.

The company's sales of bought and manufactured wine more than doubled from 190,000 gallons in 1816/17 to 400,000 gallons in 1848, but then fell sharply to less than 160,000 gallons in 1869, due to competition from cheaper wines. To diversify, the firm began to blend its own whisky and it adopted the brewers' strategy of buying public houses to minimise competition. You can still buy Finsbury London Dry Gin and Stone's Ginger Wine although they are nothing to do with the family anymore.

The Bishop family's wealth is reflected in their smart addresses shown in censuses from 1861 to 1911. They had houses in Belgrave Square and in Portland Place, a country house in Buckinghamshire and one near Newbury, always with numerous servants.

In 1913 William's father James died at the age of 85 leaving £412,561 16s 7d with probate going to William and his brother Charles. This sum is equivalent to about £40 million today. As William had been in the family business since his twenties and was shown as an employer on the 1901 census it seems likely that he was already a wealthy man.

We think William bought Farley Court around 1917. He gave the hall and land "for the use and benefit of the residents in the hamlet of Farley Hill" in December 1919. William remained a bachelor until 1925 when he married at the age of 70. His wife Muriel Violet Mary Newton, known as Violet, was 53 when they married. She too came from an interesting family.

Her [mother](#) Kathleen, an Irish Catholic, was partly raised in India. When only 16 Kathleen's father arranged a marriage for her with Isaac Newton, a surgeon with the Indian Civil Service. However, on the outward voyage to be married Kathleen encountered Captain Palliser who is likely to be Muriel's [father](#). The marriage took place only to be followed by a divorce. Kathleen was sent home to Conisborough in Yorkshire where Muriel was born in 1871.

So where does the French artist [James Tissot](#) fit into the picture? An exile from Paris, he was living in St John's Wood in London when he met Kathleen. She had moved with Muriel to her sister Polly's house nearby. Kathleen became Tissot's muse, model and partner and he painted numerous pictures of the family which can be seen online. At the age of 28 Kathleen died from tuberculosis.

When Muriel/Violet married William Bishop, she is shown on the marriage certificate as a spinster. However, on the 1901 census she is shown as Violet Burns, wife of Henry Burns with an 8-month son also called Henry. There does not appear to be a record of the marriage on the England & Wales marriage indexes.

From passenger records we have found that William became a world traveller when he retired, travelling first class to Africa, India, North and South America, Jamaica, Europe, and Australia. Muriel/Violet travelled with him after their marriage and died in Spain in 1933.

After her death William seems to move from Farley Hill to Highwoods in Burghfield Common. On the last voyage that we can find, aged 82 he is heading to Argentina on the ship Auila Star. He died in the Grand Hotel, Rotorua, New Zealand in 1937. In contrast to his father's fortune, William left the sum of £63,339 18s 8d, over £6 million in today's terms.