



John Gillies was born on 22 April 1802 at the Royal Burgh of Rothesay in the Isle of Bute, Scotland. Although his father was a small crofter and hand-loom weaver, Gillies received a good education at the parish school and, in 1820, was articled to Alexander Irvine, the local town clerk, sheriff, and comptroller of customs. He entered a merchant's office in Greenock but in 1827, returned to Rothesay as deputy town clerk and agent for the Greenock Bank. In 1832 he was appointed town clerk, clerk to the harbour trustees, and admitted to practice as a notary public. Ten years later he drafted the local Bill to provide police, a water supply, and lighting for Rothesay and went to London to supervise it through Parliament.

In 1830 Gillies was ordained an elder in the Church of Scotland. He took an active part in church affairs during the "ten years' conflict" and supported his minister when he withdrew from the Established Church. Gillies represented his Church in the Free Church Assemblies for many years after the "Disruption". In 1851 he decided to emigrate to the Free Church Settlement at Otago and sailed for Dunedin in the *Slains Castle*. On his arrival he took up a 10-acre farm at Halfway Bush, near Dunedin, and a larger one at Tokomairiro. He was admitted as a barrister and solicitor and went into partnership with John Hyde Harris. In September 1853 he was elected to the Otago Provincial Council where he remained for two years, acting as Speaker during the 1854 and 1855 sessions.

In 1857 he was appointed Sheriff of Otago and Resident Magistrate. From 1861 until 1870 he was Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages for Otago. Gillies rendered considerable service to the Presbyterian Church in Otago. He was a founder and elder of Knox Church, Dunedin, a trustee of the Church's lands, and organised the flotation of the Church Sustentation Fund. Although an ardent friend of elementary education, Gillies supported strongly the proposal to devote one-third of the income from the Church estates to endow a chair at Otago University.

Gillies was a man of sound capacity, with sincere if somewhat narrow religious convictions; in short, very much a product of his times. As his obituary in the *Otago Daily Times* put it: "Holding the Gospel to be the true remedy of many of our social and all our moral distempers, he laboured for its diffusion by tract, book, and the living preacher".

In 1827, at Glasgow, Gillies married Isabella, *née* Lillie. They had five sons and three daughters. Three of his sons — Thomas Bannatyne, John Lillie (1832–97), and Robert Craig (1835–86), became well known in New Zealand political life. Gillies died at Dunedin on 22 July 1871, and is buried in the Southern Cemetery where his headstone lies flat on its face after being pushed over by vandals.