



## THE CLAY FAMILY OF FORD MANOR

Joseph Spender Clay purchased Ford Manor in Dormans Land in 1874, he was a partner at Bass Breweries, whose ancestors were brewers from Burton-upon-Trent.

In 1757 Burton had at least six 'common brewers', a term used for men who brewed for the retail trade and not simply for consumption on their premises, and beer was then said to be the chief manufacture of the town. By the early 1780s there were 13 breweries: William Bass, Joseph Clay, Thomas Dicken, Henry Evans, John Greaves, Hill and Sherratts, Charles Leeson, Thomas Morecroft, James Musgrave, Samuel and William Sketchley, John Walker Wilson, Benjamin Wilson and William Worthington.

Two of those listed above had established their breweries in the 1750s: Joseph Clay, a Derby maltster, in 1751 in the premises of the former Lamb inn on the south side of Horninglow Street, and Charles Leeson in 1753 also on the south side of Horninglow Street. Leeson died in 1794 and his son, another Charles, in 1800, as did Clay, and later in 1800 Clay's son, also Joseph, acquired the Leeson brewery. By 1818 Joseph and his son Henry had established one of the first banks in Burton in their house at the corner of Horninglow Street and the High Street and the management of his brewery was delegated to a maltster, Thomas Salt, who later worked it as part of his own brewery in the High Street. Joseph died in 1824 and the bank was carried on by Henry until 1839, when it was amalgamated with Blurton's bank, founded by Robert Blurton of Woodford in about 1805. The new bank formed in 1839 was known as the Burton, Uttoxeter, and Stafford Union Bank until 1843, when it became the Burton, Uttoxeter, and Ashbourne Union Bank, which eventually was taken over by Lloyds Bank.

Henry Clay Esq was born at Burton-upon-Trent in 1796, the son of Joseph Clay Esq, banker and brewer, of Burton-upon-Trent and his wife Sarah, daughter of John Spender of Burton-upon-Trent. In 1824 Henry married Elizabeth, second daughter of J Leigh, Esq of Sandhills and Upton, Lancashire and became a JP for Staffordshire and Derbyshire. His residence was Piercefield Park, once an impressive mansion and park in Monmouthshire. They had 3 sons, Henry, Joseph Spender, and Charles John, and 2 daughters, Caroline Elizabeth and Emily Jane. In 1874 Piercefield Park estate passed to Clay's eldest son, Henry Clay jnr, a JP for Monmouthshire, who lived there until his death in 1921, aged 95. His eldest son Henry Hastings Clay then sold the house and much of the estate to the Chepstow Racecourse Company, who opened the new racecourse there in 1926, but sadly abandoned the grade II listed house which over time has become a ruin.

Burton-upon-Trent's Bass brewery was established in 1777 by William Bass who purchased a house on the east side of the High Street, which included a small brewery, and was soon supplying local customers, inns in London and Manchester and merchants in Hull, for the all important Baltic trade. The output of the Bass brewery at this time was probably about 300-500 barrels per annum.

In 1787 William Bass died and his eldest son, Michael Thomas continued to build up the brewing business begun by his father. In an attempt to expand the business quickly, Michael Bass formed a partnership which by 1835 was known as Bass, Ratcliff & Gretton.

The business increased production from under 15,000 barrels in 1834 to over 80,000 barrels in 1849, this massive increase meant that there had to be a significant programme of extending the Burton brewery premises and plant, including the purchase of malshouses in the town. This was followed in 1854 by the admission of a new partner, Joseph Spender Clay, to the company. Joseph's brother, Charles John, a barrister-at-law, also became a partner of Bass, Ratcliff, and Gretton.

The decade from 1865 to 1875 saw continued expansion of Bass & Co, with annual production increasing from 440,476 barrels in 1864 to 871,994 barrels in 1874. Bass & Co was the only British brewer at this time with an annual output in excess of 650,000 barrels per annum. As annual production increased, so did the number employed by the company, which went from 1,167 men and boys in 1861 to 2,760 in 1888.

A new partnership established in 1863 brought the sons of the original partners into the firm, which became a private limited company in 1880 and a public company in 1888, Michael Thomas Bass having died in 1884. Described in 1879 as 'a mercantile Colossus', Bass, Ratcliff, and Gretton was then the premier ale brewery in the United Kingdom, and its annual output in the mid 1870s was a third of the total production of all the Burton breweries put together.

Joseph Spender Clay was born in 1826 and in 1874 married Elizabeth Sydney Jane, daughter of Rev James P Garrett of Cilgarron, Ireland. He bought the Ford Manor estate in Dormans Land from Norman Morris who in 1868 commissioned Robert Kerr, the influential Victorian house designer and author of *The English Gentleman's House*, to build a new mansion on the site and this was where Joseph's two children were born, Herbert Henry Spender Clay on the 4th June 1875 and Violet Sylvia Blanche Clay who's birth was registered in East Grinstead in early 1877 as: Sylvia Violet Blanche Clay.

On the 30 November 1896, at the age of 19, Violet S B Clay, OBE, married George Charles Bingham, 5th Earl of Lucan, GCVO, KBE, CB, PC, OBE.

Their son Herbert Henry 'Bertie', was educated at Eton and Sandhurst, he joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Life Guards in 1896 and served in South Africa in 1899-1900 (medal and 6 clasps), resigning in 1902, but serving again in the European War. He was awarded the Order of St Michael and St George and decorated with the Military Cross. On 29 October 1904 he married the Hon. Pauline Astor, born in 1880, the daughter of

William Waldorf Astor, 1st Viscount Astor and Mary Dahlgren Paul of Hever Castle. William Waldorf Astor, whose family made their fortune in fur trading and real estate in America, decided to take up residence in England, purchasing Cliveden in Buckinghamshire and Hever Castle in Kent which he lovingly restored. His daughter and Herbert often visited Hever being only a short distance from Ford. Herbert's father Joseph Spender died in 1885 and his wife remarried Beresford Valentine Melville, a politician who was nominated by The Conservatives as their candidate at The South Derbyshire Parliamentary Election in 1892. He stood as Member of Parliament for Stockport from 1895 to 1900. In 1904 they lived at Ford Cottage and passed The Ford Manor estate over to Herbert and Pauline to become their family home. They had three children, Phyllis Mary, Rachel Pauline and Sybil Gwendolen who died an infant, 25.3.1910 – 3.3.1912. Her birth and death (as Sybil G S Clay), were registered in the district of St George's, Hanover Square, London. Tragically Pauline's sister Gwendolyn Astor had also died in childhood on 12 September 1902, aged 9.

Along with his father Joseph Spender Clay, Herbert also used his name Spender, his great grandmother's maiden name, within his surname. Herbert was a JP and DL for Surrey and stood for several years as Conservative MP for Tonbridge, Kent (1910-1918). He was invested as a Privy Counsellor and was a Charity Commissioner from 1923 to January 1924 and December 1924 to May 1929. He died of influenza on 15 February 1937 at his London residence, 2 Hyde Park Street, W2, when he was 61. Pauline died in 1972 at her home in Guernsey, aged 92. They are buried at St. John's churchyard in Dormansland.

Herbert and Pauline's eldest daughter Lady Phyllis Mary Clay was born 4 October 1905 and married diplomat, Sir Philip Bouverie Bowyer Nichols. Rachel Pauline Clay, born 19 January 1907, married David Bowes-Lyon, the son of the 14th Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne and brother of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. Phyllis and Rachel, were brought up at Ford in a large and cheerful household well described by their cousin by marriage, Joyce Grenfell in her autobiography *Joyce Grenfell Requests the Pleasure*. The Clay sisters attended a private school run by a Miss Griffiths at 'Ridgeway' in Hollow Lane, where they met with Winston Churchill's children when the family lived at nearby Lullenden, from 1915 to 1917. During the Clays' ownership Ford had many influential visitors, several politicians such as Winston Churchill and his father Lord Randolph Churchill were often guests, as well as the Astor family. Nancy Astor was the first woman to take a seat in the House of Commons.

Pauline was the driving force behind the development of the estate gardens as not a great deal existed before she married into the Clay family. To the west of the House is an attractive oval-shaped sunken formal garden, dating from the early 20th century, the design of which is attributed to Harold Peto. Stepped terraces and flower beds surround an oval pool set in decorative paving. Beneath the south façade of the house is a broad terrace with views over the park and woodland beyond.

The Clays were a very well respected family in the district, employing many staff on their estate. When Herbert and Pauline returned from their honeymoon, the estate workers decorated the drives and gateways with bunting, flags and banners to greet

them back to their new family home. The family gave generously to the village of Dormans Land, Joseph Spender-Clay being a major benefactor towards the building of St. John's church during the early 1880s and his son Herbert gave the land where Dormans Land's War Memorial Club was built. The family also opened Ford Manor's gardens to the villagers on special occasions such as coronations and jubilees.

From early times the estate was supplying goods to the local community, such as meat and dairy products. Bannister's Bakery in Blindley Heath often received a delivery of faggots from Ford for fuelling their ovens. During the 1950s Ford Manor Market Gardens were selling flowers, shrubs, cut flowers and wreaths. Cordwood was also delivered.

During the First World War the house was used as a convalescent home for American soldiers and Pauline gave up her time to work as a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse, wearing a light blue uniform and veil. During the Second it was taken over by the Canadian army. In 1946 it was leased to the School of Divinity, London University, whose principal was Dr Donald Coggan who subsequently became Archbishop of Canterbury. In 1959 the house was let on a long lease to Mutual Households (subsequently the Country Houses Association) who converted it into retirement apartments. The CHA changed the name of the house to Greathed Manor in memory of their founder, Rear Admiral Greathed.

The house is listed as Grade II and the gardens are listed Grade II in the Register of Parks and Gardens. The estate lies within an area of the High Weald protected by the Green Belt and has been designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an Area of Great Landscape Value. It has been passed down through the family and is currently owned by the Nichols family<sup>1</sup>.

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Sources:

The Coors Visitor Centre, formerly the Bass Museum

*Burke's Landed Gentry*

*Victoria County History:*

'*A History of the County of Surrey*': Volume 4: 'Parishes: Lingfield', by H E Malden (editor) 1912

*A History of the County of Stafford* Volume 9: 'Burton-upon-Trent: Economic history', by Nigel J Tringham

The Country Houses Association

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<sup>1</sup> In 2008 a new lease was purchased by Pressbeau Ltd and in 2009 became Greathed Manor Nursing Home, providing luxury rooms for 23 residents.