

# The life of Charles Spurrell and his family's links to the Watney and Gray brewing families

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Up higher - 'opposite the School',  
We found an open stinking pool;  
And Scarp proposed to vault it over -  
But Scurrell, who could not discover,  
The use of that, - save bricks to sell,  
Thought vaulting o'er would do as well:  
But he perhaps knows less of drains,  
Than malt and hops, and beer and grains.

The poem from which this verse is taken is a humorous account of an inspection into housing and sanitary conditions in early Victorian Dartford by eleven of the town's leading figures.<sup>1</sup> The author, Richard Tippetts, himself one of the inspectors, altered everybody's name, so that in this verse 'Scarp' is James Sharp and 'Scurrell' is Charles Spurrell.

This article is divided into in two parts. In the first, we shall look at the life of Charles Spurrell (1783-1866), who apparently knew 'less of drains, than malt and hops, and beer and grains'. He was my great-great-great-grandfather and my immediate link to the brewing industry, having worked for many years for Barclay, Perkins & Co. Using details from Charles's life, we shall examine the social background, connections and

interests of a nineteenth-century brewer. In the second part, we shall explore the Spurrell family's relationships with other brewing families, such as the Watneys and Grays, and look at their links to other 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialists, such as the Shears family of coppersmiths.

Throughout this article I shall show that brewers in the 1800s were key figures in society, with interests often encompassing religious and political issues.

## The three careers of Charles Spurrell

Charles was the fourth and youngest son of John Spurrell, a prosperous farmer who had built up an estate in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in the small village of Bessingham, near Cromer in north Norfolk.<sup>2</sup> Although Charles later inherited land belonging to one of his maternal uncles, he would not, as the youngest son, have grown up expecting any of the family's estates to be passed to him.

I do not know whether Charles was taught at home or away as a boy, but at the age of about 18 the world became his educator after he left England's

shores for a career as a merchant seaman.

His father John stated in his will that he had 'expended the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds or thereabouts towards the advancement in life of my said son Charles'.<sup>3</sup> This included protection against impressment, although, as we shall see later, this did not deter the press gangs from trying to forcibly recruit Charles into the Royal Navy.

A miniature portrait on ivory from Charles's early days at sea has been passed down through the family, showing him in his uniform at the age of 18. According to an inscription on the back, the portrait was done 'by a China hand.' It was probably painted while Charles was aboard the *Henry Addington II*, an East Indiaman in the service of the Honourable East India Company, on which he had been appointed sixth mate in the year 1802/3.<sup>4</sup>

In February 1804, Charles was serving as an officer on board the *Henry Addington II* when it was part of a squadron of East Indiamen that defeated a much larger French naval fleet at the Battle of Pulo Aura,<sup>5</sup> largely removing the French threat to British trade with China.

The following year, in April 1805, Charles's brother James informed his mother in a letter that Charles had written to him from *Sav-la-Mar* in Jamaica where his ship, the *Ida*, was anchored.<sup>6</sup> Charles wanted his family to know that



*Figure 1. Miniature portrait of Charles Spurrell (1783-1866) aged about 18, painted on ivory 'by a China hand.'*

he had arrived in good health after a ten-week voyage from Portsmouth and that the *Ida* was part of a convoy that would soon be returning to England.

James reassured his mother that the French and Spanish fleets in the West Indies were not near Jamaica and that Charles should be safe:

I hope we have nothing to apprehend for his or the fleet's safety, but that they will make a good and speedy voyage to England, without being annoyed by the enemy.

The French and Spanish fleets, under the command of Vice-Admiral Villeneuve, were hoping to capture British possessions in the West Indies so that the Royal Navy would dispatch a number of ships to the Caribbean, thereby leaving British shores undefended and enabling Napoleon to invade the United Kingdom. But things did not go to plan. Villeneuve's fleet returned to European waters and later that year - in October 1805 - was famously defeated by Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar.

In his letter James told his mother that, 'notwithstanding [the] costly protection' arranged by his father, Charles had fallen prey to one of the Royal Navy's press gangs. He was saved, though, after the *Ida's* captain came to his rescue, although he did have 'the misfortune to split his middle finger on his right hand' when leaving the Royal Navy vessel. James then explained that Charles's

protection, if the press choose to behave rascally, will not hinder them from taking him, as they can send him away immediately to some foreign part, where he cannot communicate the circumstance to England, ... but he assures me there is no danger of that whilst he is with Captain Marshall.

James ended this part of his letter by telling his mother that Charles hoped to be back in England in June and would probably spend some time with his family in Norfolk. This is one of several references to Charles's trips home that I have found in surviving family let-

ters. No doubt his visits were eagerly awaited. His family would have missed him greatly and been concerned for his safety, and they were probably also eager to hear his tales of excitement and adventure on the high seas.

It would not have been long, though, until he set sail again. I know that at some point after 1808, Charles commanded the 343-ton *Orion*, which had a crew of 35, but have so far been unable to find more information about the ship or its voyages.<sup>7</sup>

After a few years Charles no doubt became homesick and began to think about settling down in his home country. While in England in 1811 he wrote to his eldest brother William, who had inherited the family's Thurgarton estate, saying that he had called on the Rev. George Chamberlain to enquire about taking over the lease of a farm in the neighbouring village of Sustead.<sup>8</sup> 'I told him I could afford to give as much as any one for it,' wrote Charles, 'and would be punctual in my payments.'

However, Charles did not succeed in leasing the farm, and probably set sail once more before finally retiring from the East India Company in about 1812. A letter from that year tells us that his company was once again being enjoyed at his family's home in Bessingham:

Charles has made you a long visit. I make no doubt but he has spent his time pleasantly with you by the fireside these

long winter evenings in chatting over some funny tales.

This letter came from his sister Frances, who lived in London. She went on to say that 'I missed him very much when he first left town - his friendly calls, which I hope he will repeat when he returns'.<sup>9</sup>

Early the following year the next phase of Charles's life began. Once again we refer to his sister's letters to learn that in February 1813

Charles appears very comfortable in his new situation. He is at present with brother James until his rooms are fitted up by the brewhouse.<sup>10</sup>

We need to stop our story here and rewind to 1790 when Robert Barclay bought Northrepps Hall as a summer retreat on the north Norfolk coast. Robert was a partner in Barclay, Perkins & Co., which owned the enormous Anchor Brewery in Southwark, London. He was also a Quaker who had married into the great clan of Norfolk Quakers that included the Gurney, Fry, Hoare and Buxton families.<sup>11</sup>

It would not have been long before Robert Barclay met members of the local gentry and started making friends in the area. The Spurrell estates were located not far from Northrepps, and Charles's maternal grandfather, James Flaxman, also owned land in several north Norfolk villages, including Northrepps.<sup>12</sup> The Spurrells and Barclays soon became friends.

In the 1805 letter quoted above, James Spurrell closed by telling his mother that

Mr. Barclay frequently asks if I hear from you, and desires whenever I write to give his respects to you, and my uncle Flaxmans; he also speaks of the neatness of your house.<sup>13</sup>

The Barclays had therefore been guests at Bessingham Manor and the Spurrells had probably been invited to Northrepps Hall too.

The friendship continued over several generations. In the 1830s, for example, Robert Barclay's son Charles paid for Charles Spurrell's two sons (Charles and Frederick) to attend King's College, London.<sup>14</sup>

As a result of the families' friendship, Robert Barclay offered James Spurrell a job at the Anchor Brewery in about 1800, and thirteen or so years later Charles Spurrell joined him.<sup>15</sup> Charles and James's brother John, who had inherited their father's estate at Bessingham, is described as a farmer and a maltster, and may well have benefitted from the friendship too by supplying malt to the Anchor Brewery (or to any of the other breweries in and around London with which the family had connections). Family letters sent from London to Norfolk at this time often provided the latest information about the price of barley or malt, which no doubt influenced John in deciding to sell or hold on to his stock.

Charles and James both worked as brewers, and James has also been referred to as a hop merchant,<sup>16</sup> although I have few precise details about their work. When James died unexpectedly in 1840 after 'about 40 years in the service of Messrs. Barclay Perkins & Co.', Charles recorded the event in one of the company's account books, on a page that also lists, in what looks like James's handwriting, the price of a pot and barrel of porter at various times between 1722 and 1830.<sup>17</sup> James was buried in the Bishop's Vault under St. Saviour's Church (now Southwark Cathedral, where a memorial to him was erected on one of the columns in the nave).

An idea of Charles's work is given in an 1823 letter to *The Philosophical Magazine*, in which John Murray explained that he had asked Charles to carry out an experiment into the advantages of fermentation in closed vats, a subject with which, as we shall see later, some members of Charles's family were closely involved:<sup>18</sup>

It appeared to me to be of some consequence to ascertain whether [fermentation in closed vats] might be advantageous to retain the *carbonic acid gas* developed in fermentation, or suffer its entire expulsion. Mr. Charles Spurrell, connected with the establishment of Messrs. Barclay, Perkins and Co., made, at my particular request, the following experiment:- Half a bottle of mild porter was filled with carbonic acid gas from the fermenting guile, and a similar experiment made with table beer. These were placed in a cellar by the side of



Figure 2. 21 and 23, Park Street, Southwark, built in about 1820 for senior employees of the Anchor Brewery (then owned by Barclay & Perkins Co., and later by Courage). Charles Spurrell and his family lived at No. 23 from about 1820 to 1835.

full bottles of the same beer and porter; all hermetically sealed. They were examined at the end of 13 months. Those with carbonic acid gas and only half full, were very mild and pleasant, without any tendency whatever to acidity, while the others were considerably acid and otherwise unpleasant to the palate.

Charles may also have been responsible for overseeing the company's paperwork. A number of brewing books and other papers have survived which were 'collected, arranged, collated and bound by

Charles Spurrell in 1832 after the Great Fire in 1832 of that year'.<sup>19</sup>

Charles and James's social status as members of the gentry and their family's friendship with the Barclays meant that they would have held important positions at the Anchor Brewery. This is confirmed by the fact that in about 1820 Charles moved the short distance from a house on Stoney Street, Southwark, to 23, Park Street, which had been built to house 'senior employees' of Barclay, Perkins & Co. and which was situated close to the brewery entrance.<sup>20</sup> His brother James lived in one of the Georgian terraces

opposite. In the mid-1830s Charles's move to Anchor Terrace, an elegant row of houses built by the brewery on Southwark Bridge Road, caused his annual rent to increase from £25 to £63.<sup>21</sup> Charles lived at number 4 Anchor Terrace, which was located at the centre of the row, and next door at number 3 was John Hoy Waterman, a brewer who witnessed some of the codicils to Charles's will, as well as that of his brother, James.<sup>22</sup>

Charles married about a year after starting work at the brewery. He did not look far for a bride. In 1808 his brother James



*Figure 3. Anchor Terrace, Southwark Bridge Road, the rear of which overlooks the former site of the Anchor Brewery. Charles Spurrell lived at No. 4 (the central part) from about 1835 to 1840. The original Globe Theatre has since been discovered underneath the building.*

had married Rebecca Shears, whose father was a prosperous copper merchant with premises on Bankside, Southwark, and Charles followed suit in 1814 by marrying one of Rebecca's younger sisters, Hannah (1790-1882). The marriage lasted over half a century and Charles and Hannah had a total of eight children. The first, born a few months after Wellington's decisive victory over Napoleon, was nearly called Hannah Waterloo Spurrell, according to Charles's sister Frances ('I think it a strange whim of her Papa'),<sup>23</sup> but in the end the less unusual name of Hannah Elizabeth was chosen.

In about 1840 Charles moved to The Vineyard in Richmond, Surrey.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the death of his brother James that year played a role in his decision to leave Southwark, or perhaps he sought cleaner air away from London's fuming factories. Whatever his motives, he did not stay there long. He soon moved to Hill House in Dartford, where he remained until his death in 1866 at the age of 83.<sup>25</sup>

In Dartford Charles was appointed to the Commission of the Peace, serving for many years as a magistrate (or Justice of the Peace) until his health prevented him from carrying out his duties.<sup>26</sup> No doubt he possessed that paternalistic sense of public duty that often characterised the Victorian elites, but more importantly he had the necessary credentials:

For centuries, those appointed to the Commission were either land owners or

merchants of great substance, whose social position and economic power was so strong that their authority went undisputed.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, many of Charles's Norfolk relatives had served as chief constable of the North Erpingham hundred over the years. As a Justice of the Peace Charles would have been responsible for granting licences to premises that sold alcohol and, as we have seen, was one of the inspectors who surveyed the town's housing and sanitary conditions in the late 1840s. He was also involved in efforts to build new roads in the county.<sup>28</sup>

I do not think that Charles retained any connection with Barclay, Perkins & Co. after moving to Dartford. However, after visiting the site of his now-demolished



*Figure 4. Charles Spurrell in later life.*

residence, Hill House, in April 2009, I decided to have a sandwich and a pint at The Malt Shovel a few hundred yards away and was surprised to see an old photograph inside showing the pub with Barclay, Perkins & Co. signs hanging outside. The beer was probably taken there via the Thames. Maybe Charles had a role in overseeing the operations in Dartford, or maybe it was pure coincidence that this pub was so close to his house.

When Charles moved to Dartford, his younger son, Frederick (my great-great-grandfather), having completed his studies at King's College, London, went up to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, to take Holy Orders.<sup>29</sup> Ten years later, after a couple of curacies on the Sussex coast and a chaplaincy in Stockholm, Sweden, Frederick was looking for a parish of his own, and his father assisted him by using his wealth and social position to purchase the right to appoint the rector of the small parish of Faulkbourne in Essex,<sup>30</sup> a living that Frederick enjoyed for the next 45 years.

Brewing was undoubtedly a profitable career in the early nineteenth century when safe drinking water was still scarce. Indeed, when Barclay, Perkins & Co. bought the Anchor Brewery in 1781, Dr. Samuel Johnson famously commented that 'we are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dream of avarice'.<sup>31</sup> When Charles died in 1866 his estate was valued at just under

£35,000 (about £1,500,000 in today's money),<sup>32</sup> but it is impossible to estimate how much of this is directly linked to his career as a brewer, considering his various private sources of income. In addition to several bequests of money from his family, Charles inherited land from his Flaxman uncles, including a farm in Tioga County, Pennsylvania,<sup>33</sup> which he sold after a few years, and for much of his life he enjoyed the rent from a 'freehold house and land'<sup>34</sup> in the Norfolk village of Roughton.

After marrying, Charles and Hannah used a coat of arms that combined features of both the Spurrell and Shears crests. A coat of arms was an essential item for any aspiring 19<sup>th</sup>-century gentleman, and Charles no doubt used his to emphasise his position in society. Interestingly, though, it was never officially registered with the Royal College of Arms, despite their offices being just across the Thames from Charles and Hannah's home in Southwark.<sup>35</sup> Charles and Hannah probably wanted the accessories of an affluent social status without necessarily having to pay for them.

Charles's will is representative of a Victorian gentleman. As well as various amounts given to family members, ranging from £5 to £3,000, there are a number of charitable bequests that indicate Charles's diverse interests. He left £50 to each of the following four charities: the Shipworkers, Fishermen and Mariners Royal Benevolent Society, London; the School for the Indigent Blind, St George's



Fields, Surrey; the Lying in Charity, Norwich; and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. The first charity is a link to Charles's first career as a merchant seaman and East India Company officer, and the other interests - education, health and religion - reflect some of the primary concerns of the Victorian middle classes.

Another of Charles's interests was archaeology. He was a member of both the Kent and Sussex Archaeological Societies<sup>36</sup> towards the end of his life, at a time when prominent members of society, such as General Pitt Rivers, were beginning to develop an interest in the subject. Charles would have been interested in subsequent discoveries at two of his homes. A Roman cemetery was excavated in the grounds of Hill House, Dartford,<sup>37</sup> and Shakespeare's original Globe Theatre was discovered under part of Anchor Terrace, Southwark.<sup>38</sup>

This overview of Charles Spurrell's three careers provides a great deal of information about the life of an early 19<sup>th</sup>-century gentleman brewer. It shows that he would often have various sources of private income as a member of the landed gentry or middle classes, and that family connections often influenced the decision to become a brewer and facilitated entry into and retirement from the industry. Such acquaintances ensured easy access to senior positions within a brewery. He was also likely to have a sense of public duty and to have made bequests to schools, hospitals or religious societies in his will.

## **Family connections in the brewing world**

In the first section of this article we examined the three careers of Charles Spurrell, who for many years worked as a brewer for Barclay, Perkins & Co. in Southwark. I suggested that Charles acquired his job there in about 1813 not only because his older brother James had already been working there since about 1800, but also because their parents were friends of Robert Barclay, a partner in the brewery.

Glancing over the Spurrell family tree reveals many more links to the brewing trade. For example, Charles's brother James had two daughters and a son. The eldest daughter, Rebecca, married the brewer James Watney, who died in 1884 with an estate worth just over £1,000,000 (around £50,000,000 in today's money).<sup>39</sup> Despite her family's involvement in the beer trade, or perhaps as a result of it, Rebecca supported the temperance movement. Shortly after her husband's death, the family doctor called on her at Haling Park, the family's house in Croydon, and found the butler pouring wines and spirits down the drain, including 'rare vintage ports and old brandies'. For medical reasons he considered this an unfortunate waste and rescued the remaining bottles, donating them to Guy's Hospital.<sup>40</sup> Rebecca's teetotalism may have been influenced by her youngest son Herbert. Initially employed in his father's firm, he resigned after witnessing the effect that

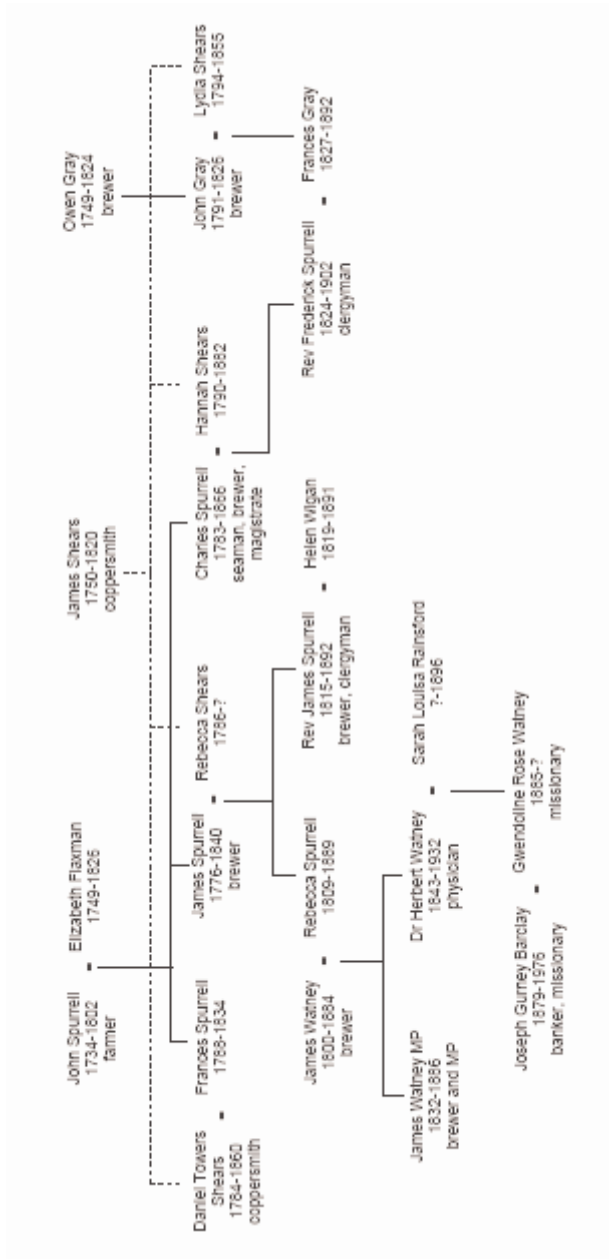


Figure 5. Spurrell family tree (abridged).

drink was having on the working classes in Watney pubs in the East End of London, and went on to arrange the emigration of several hundred men, women and children to Canada.<sup>41</sup>

One of James Watney's early business partners was his brother-in-law James Spurrell. In *The Red Barrel*, Hurford Janes mixes up the two James Spurrells - the father and the son. He says that James Spurrell senior helped his son-in-law James Watney to acquire the Stag Brewery in Pimlico, entering into partnership with him in 1837 and retiring in 1842 'in consideration of £50,259, of which £30,000 was left on mortgage'.<sup>42</sup> But James Spurrell senior died in 1840 and, as his will reveals, it was not he but his son who entered into business with James Watney (albeit with James Spurrell senior's money). In a codicil to his will dated 1838, James Spurrell senior requests that

whereas since the date of my said will my son James Spurrell and my son-in-law James Watney have become partners in the Stag Brewery at Pimlico and I have lent and advanced to them the greater portion of my property to be invested and employed as part of their capital therein,

this money should be paid back at the rate of £1,000 per year plus interest.<sup>43</sup>

Information about the Watney family and their business interests is readily available elsewhere, but some details are worth mentioning here. One of Herbert

Watney's daughters, Gwendoline, married Joseph Gurney Barclay, a member of the great Quaker clan that had once employed her great-grandfather, James Spurrell senior, and great-great-uncle, Charles Spurrell, at the Anchor Brewery in Southwark.

It is also worth noting that Herbert Watney's eldest brother, yet another James, served for many years as a Member of Parliament. Many brewers sat in Parliament in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but James was the only one with a Spurrell connection to do so. He was elected as Conservative MP for East Surrey in 1871 and served until 1885, the year before his death.<sup>44</sup>

A speech by James during the second reading of the Spirituous Liquors (Retail) Bill shows that his views were very different from those formed by his youngest brother Herbert.<sup>45</sup>

It must not be forgotten [reported Hansard] that the public-house was to the poor man what his wine cellar was to the rich man - he wanted access to it at all seasonable opportunities - and therefore they should deal with the subject reasonably, and not approach it in any party or narrow spirit.

Licensing laws were among the issues at stake:

As the men who used public-houses had no stock of wine or spirits in their own houses, it was necessary that the public-houses should be open at a time which suited their

own convenience; and he did not think 6 o'clock in the morning too early. In fact, he thought that in a good many places they would have to allow public-houses to be opened much earlier. At Covent Garden Market, men were at work all night; and if it were right that they should have anything to drink at all, he held that more latitude should be given in this matter than the Bill granted. On Sunday the houses should be open a sufficient time for everyone to get what he wanted for dinner, and also a reasonable time in the evening to accommodate those who took supper, as well as the large and increasing number of excursionists who returned home at a late hour. He reminded the House that during the debate there had been a great deal of unnecessary talk about drunkenness. He did not believe there was any more respectable class of shopkeepers than the publicans, and thought that the House ought to treat them with proper consideration, instead of passing Bills of pains and penalties. It ought to be the study of Parliament to raise that class of traders in the social scale, rather than to degrade them by such propositions as had been advanced in that House.

As a partner in one of Britain's leading breweries, James obviously had a vested interest in seeing that public houses remained open as long as possible.

The Watneys' interests and influence covered many areas outside brewing. For example, in 1831 William Dewing Spurrell, who had inherited the family estate at Thurgarton, Norfolk, wrote to his uncle, James Spurrell senior,

at the request of my friend Mr. Pilgrim ... to solicit your interest for a presentation for his son to the Blue Coat School, hearing that Mr. James Watney's turn to present is for next year.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike his son Herbert, for whom Christianity and drink were uncomfortable bedfellows, James Watney often donated large amounts of money to the building of new churches<sup>47</sup> - money that had been acquired as a result of his brewing interests. But his brother-in-law, James Spurrell junior, with whom he went into business in 1837, withdrew from the Stag Brewery partnership in 1842 and went up to Cambridge the following year to take Holy Orders.<sup>48</sup> Growing up close to the Anchor Brewery where his father and uncle worked, it was not surprising that James Spurrell junior had started his career as a brewer. A codicil to his father's will mentions that he had taken 'possession of a brewhouse at Hatfield in the county of Hertfordshire' a year before he went into partnership with James Watney at the Stag Brewery.<sup>49</sup>

I do not know what brought about James Spurrell junior's change of career. Perhaps he too was shocked by the negative effects of drink and could not continue his involvement or investment in the brewing trade. In any case, his career in the Church did not last long either. Less than ten years after being ordained, James retired to a large terraced house on the seafront in Hove, Sussex, where he lived out the rest of his

life with his wife Helen, the first woman to translate the whole of the Old Testament from Hebrew into English.<sup>50</sup> Helen's father, Edward Wigan, was a brewer and hop merchant from Highbury, north London,<sup>51</sup> whose family entered into partnership with the Phillips family, which afterwards, trading as Phillips & Co., bought the riverside brewery in Mortlake, south-west London, that was eventually taken over by Watney & Co. Ltd in 1889.<sup>52</sup>

The reason for James's early retirement may have been a pamphlet he published in the early 1850s denouncing the ritualism of the Sisters of Mercy in Devonport, a sisterhood closely associated with the Oxford Movement within the Church of England.<sup>53</sup> The pamphlet caused a minor scandal, and James may have considered it expedient to retire. The money he had inherited or earned as a result of his earlier brewing interests, though, meant that James was able to make a long list of charitable bequests on his death in 1892 (his estate was valued at just under £600,000, the equivalent of about £35,000,000 today). Most of the beneficiaries were hospitals, orphanages and evangelical associations, the two largest being the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East, which received £50,000 (or £3,000,000 in today's money), and the Sussex County Hospital, which was given £30,000 (or £1,800,000 today).<sup>54</sup>

The first section of this article referred to an experiment carried out by Charles

Spurrell, my great-great-great-grandfather, to investigate whether fermentation in closed vats improved the quality of beer. This was described in a letter written by John Murray to *The Philosophical Magazine* in 1823.<sup>55</sup> Mr. Murray had been prompted to send his letter following earlier reports in *The Pamphleteer* that the Gray & Dacre brewery in West Ham had adopted the closed vat system used by the French brewers Deurbroucq and Nichols.<sup>56</sup>

It was reported that in 1822 Gray & Dacre brewed and fermented a gyle of porter in closed vats and shipped it

to a port in the Mediterranean, where it has created a great demand, and was considered by all who tasted it to be at least ten shillings a barrel better than that fermented on the old system.<sup>57</sup>

Later the same year they likewise fermented some pale ale of

such superiority of quality and flavor, that Messrs. Gray and Dacre were induced immediately to adopt the system, and are now, as far as the alterations to be made to their working-tuns will permit, fermenting on no other plan.<sup>58</sup>

*The Pamphleteer* went on to say that

Messrs. Deurbroucq and Nichols, having testified their satisfaction at the zeal and management of their system by Messrs. Gray and Dacre, have appointed them agents for England.<sup>59</sup>



Figure 6. Frances Gray (1827-1892), youngest daughter of the brewer John Gray and Lydia Shears, born a few weeks after her father's death.

John Gray then travelled to France to gather further information about fermentation in closed vats from, among other people, the British Ambassador, who said he hoped that England would soon adopt the new system.<sup>60</sup> Though criticised by some as being slower than fermentation in open vats, closed vats were generally recognised as a way of improving the flavour and strength of the beer.

It is not surprising that *The Pamphleteer* notes that the apparatus required for these closed vats could be purchased from Messrs. James Shears & Sons Co.,

coppersmiths.<sup>61</sup> For John Gray - like Charles and James Spurrell - had married one of James Shears's daughters. The need for copper vats had brought these brewers into contact with James Shears, and family letters show him to be a generous, friendly man who must have built many lasting relationships with many of his customers.

John Gray was born in March, Cambridgeshire, in 1791, to Owen Gray, who owned a brewery and many public houses in the town and was also captain of the local yeomanry, the Doddington Cavalry, for 26 years.<sup>62</sup> It was probably alongside his father that John learned the tricks of the trade, but his entrepreneurial spirit took him to London, where, with money from his father, he founded a prosperous brewery with his business partner Mr. Dacre.

John's promising career came to an abrupt end, though, when he died in 1826, leaving his wife Lydia pregnant with their seventh child, Frances (my great-great-grandmother). He was buried under the floor of All Saints' Church, West Ham.<sup>63</sup> The Gray & Dacre brewery survived his death, and in 1837 consumed 1,760 quarters of malt per year.<sup>64</sup> Although this was a small amount compared to leading brewers such as Barclay, Hanbury or Whitbread, it nevertheless put them among the top 50 London brewers at a time when the capital contained a very large number of them. Part of the firm's success may have been down to Lydia, who is record-

ed in 1841 as living with her family at the brewery as the head of household and a 'brewer'.<sup>65</sup> With family connections with a number of prosperous breweries, she would have had a large network of support when difficult business decisions had to be made. But in June 1846 the brewery and its contents were put up for auction, as announced in *The Times*:

Mr. Snow has received instructions from Messrs. Gray and Dacre, who are relinquishing business, to SELL by AUCTION, on the Premises, West Ham, Essex, on Thursday, the 11<sup>th</sup> inst., at 11 o'clock, in lots, two four-wheel and two two-wheel DRAYS on springs, chaise cart on springs, suitable for a tradesman, a pleasure van on springs, gray mare, gig, and harness, loose articles in the brewery, five English oak vats, gauging respectively - two of 50 barrels each, two of 60 barrels, and one of 130 barrels, about 80 barrels of porter, near 500 feet run of capital single working stillions, upwards of 700 casks, in sizes from barrels to firkins, blacksmith's tools, stable, utensils, and other articles. May be viewed two days preceding the sale, and catalogues had on the premises.<sup>66</sup>

The brewery was bought by Messrs. Charrington & Co.

Before ending this article I shall say a few words about the Shears family, since they are the thread that united the Spurrell, Watney and Gray families. In 1763 James Sheeres, son of Thomas Sheeres, of Ockham, Surrey, is recorded as being apprenticed to William Gore.<sup>67</sup>

In 1770 Gore was operating from 67, Fleet Market, London, and by the end of the decade had taken James Shears, whose surname had undergone a slight change of spelling, into partnership; Gore soon died or retired, though, as later commercial directories show only James Shears at 67, Fleet Market,<sup>68</sup> an address the firm continued to use well into the next century, even after 17 and 27, Bankside, Southwark, became their main premises. James built up a successful business, which mainly involved supplying copper to breweries,<sup>69</sup> although one of his more unusual jobs was to provide copper for the guttering when the Pantheon, which stood on the site now occupied by Marks & Spencer on Oxford Street, London, was converted into an opera house - his work could not be admired for long, however, as the Pantheon went up in flames in 1792 after just one opera season.<sup>70</sup> Reports of James Shears's death in 1820 at his house in The Oval, Kennington, describe him as an 'eminent coppersmith' who for many years represented the ward of Farringdon Without on the City of London Corporation.<sup>71</sup>

Before his death, James handed over the running of the company to his two sons, Daniel Towers Shears and James Henry Shears, who expanded the company's interests, with varying success, into mining and sugar refining,<sup>72</sup> and exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851.<sup>73</sup> In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the company's main business had been as suppliers of copper vats to the brewing industry

and manufacturers of boilers for steam engines. Boulton & Watt, the famous steam engine manufacturers of Birmingham, recommended Shears boilers to their customers,<sup>74</sup> and other examples exist of Shears copper being recommended, even by customers as far away as the United States.<sup>75</sup> James Shears & Sons Co. became Bennett Sons & Shears Ltd. in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>76</sup> and in about 1908 was bought by H. Pontifex & Sons Ltd<sup>77</sup> - a company that still exists, supplying pressure vessels and storage tanks to the chemical and pharmaceutical industries.<sup>78</sup>

The second part of this article confirms the conclusions made at the end of first section. I have shown that 19<sup>th</sup> century gentleman brewers often had considerable sources of private income, derived from the land or from a range of business investments, and that they often had a large network of family connections within the brewing trade. There was often a sense of public duty and an interest in religion, which sometimes went hand in hand with being a brewer and at other times was a reaction to the worst effects of drink.

*I am keen to hear from any readers who can provide further information about any of the people or companies mentioned in this article, especially Gray & Dacre and James Shears & Sons Co. I can be contacted by email (jonathan@spurrell-genealogy.com) or by post (46 Beechwood Drive, Harwinton, 06791 CT, USA).*

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