



## CLAY ESTATES

### STEWARDSHIP AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Clay estates cover some 4,500 acres and are situated in one of the most beautiful parts of the Wye valley. 75% of the land holding is part of the Wye Valley AONB. Within this there are three sites of scientific interest (SSSI's). The River Wye is one, and the other two are close to its banks. One is the flood plain at Hole in the Wall and the third is triangle of ground that runs from the quarry at the Dean and Chapter to the road at the bottom of Capler Hill. We have two scheduled monuments, the Iron Age hill fort at Capler, and the original section of Offa's Dyke at Perrystone.

In 1999, the family made a commitment to leave their land for future generations in a better state than they found it. Farming, forestry, and the property portfolio are managed to deliver that aim. Over the years there have been several environmentally focussed initiatives:

#### Traditional Perry Orchards

In 1999, 7ha of traditional Perry Orchards were re-established on sites that had a history of Perry Orchards. Only traditional Perry pear varieties were used. These have been maintained and managed ever since. The establishment was funded by the estate.

Some of the maintenance costs and fencing have received contributions from DEFRA's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS) and Countryside Stewardship (CS). Since these first orchards were established, three further Perry Orchards were established, notably at Wobage Craft Centre and by Brockhampton Church, a total of 6ha containing a mix of 23 heritage/endangered varieties.

#### Wildflower Meadows

Eight wildflower meadows totalling 15ha have been developed to date. These range from river meadows to Perry Orchards. All the meadows are on ground previously farmed traditionally either as permanent pasture or part of an arable rotation. The first meadow was established in 1999 at Brockhampton Cottage and now supports nine different varieties of orchids. Herefordshire Meadows, Plantlife and the Open University have all been involved in monitoring and mentoring since inception, but a new piece of research over the next 3 years by scientists from Kew on the Brockhampton meadow will look at the relationship between orchids and mycorrhiza. This aims to advance scientific understanding of factors influencing soil health and lead to greater successes in meadow development across the UK.

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## Hedgerow Restoration and Tree Planting

In 2008 we instigated a program to plant and maintain native hedgerow trees. Majoring on oak, around 2000 trees have been planted by our staff around the estate. Only 200 of these received external funding. More recently, the trees planted have been grown from acorns from a venerable 'Mother Tree' on the estate.

An extensive hedgerow restoration program of poor-quality hedges has been ongoing since 2003. Around 3 miles has been tackled so far with sections being coppiced, gapped up or completely replaced. In addition, all newly planted hedges have been laid in the traditional Midland style.

## Grey Partridge Reintroduction

In 2007, Perrystone Estate was purchased. At the earliest opportunity we entered the land into a second HLS agreement, based around the same principles as the Brockhampton agreement. Work began with Peter Thompson of the GWCT to design an area for the reintroduction of grey partridge. Stewardship grants helped put the right margins and habitat in place, however, the introduction and management of the grey partridge was funded by the Estate. Progress is monitored annually and has shown how other bird numbers such as quail and linnet have increased during the program.

## Woodland Improvement

We actively manage 750 acres of forestry across Brockhampton and Perrystone, together with a further 80 acres of woodland at Rodmore in the Forest of Dean. Over half the woods are classified as ancient woodland. Since 1999 we have worked with the Forestry Commission on management plans that plot 5 years of sustainable woodland management activity. Over a cropping cycle of 100 or so years, we plant, maintain, thin, coppice, and harvest the timber before replanting again to sustain a diverse range of age classes and tree species. A significant amount of our woodland borders the Wye (above Hole in Wall at Perrystone and below Capler Hill at Brockhampton) two of the most beautiful stretches in the county.

In 2017 and 2018 we developed stewardship agreements to cover the woodland on both estates. These agreements, which are now being renewed, focus on woodland management that makes environmental improvements.

The importance of trees is no longer a debate, nor is the need for diversity, particularly given the devastating impact of Ash Dieback and Dutch Elm disease. Our rapidly changing climate and a procession of new pests and diseases make the choice of what to plant increasingly difficult. We have chosen to plant oak from seed taken from trees in southern France to aid resilience in a warming climate. We are trialling Black Walnut as an alternative to Elm and Japanese Red Cedar as one of the few conifers currently unaffected by debilitating pests and diseases.

We have planted 30 acres of new woodland at Perrystone and Brockhampton since 1999. Next year, we recommence planting 5 acres of new woodland on arable ground and have identified a further 150 acres of ground with potential.

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## Soil Erosion and Run Off Mitigation Schemes

With the advent of the new stewardship schemes in 2005, Brockhampton Estate was one of the first in the country to join. The aim was to stop soil leaving our fields and entering the river, to improve habitat for wild birds and to benefit the whole estate. A comprehensive scheme was put together: every field at risk from erosion had buffers, all arable fields at risk of flooding by the Wye were reverted to grassland and 13ha of wild bird cover was created. Management plans were set up to look after and protect in-field trees and hedgerows.

## Improving Water Quality in the River Wye

Over the last 25 years the Estate has been keen supporters of the Wye and Usk Foundation (WUF). Originally it was to aid their work for fishing but latterly to support their initiatives to improve farming practices affecting water quality in the Wye valley.

As part of this collaboration, we became founding members of Hereford Agri Group (HAG) which aims to share and promote better farming practice across the county. We now collect data on phosphate loss and recently hosted a cross-border meeting between DEFRA and the Welsh Government to look at ways of developing wider strategies for soil and phosphate.

Perhaps the biggest and most significant venture we have embarked on as an estate is an ELMS funded Landscape Recovery scheme. This is a joint initiative with 36 other landowners covering approx. 11,120 acres (4,500ha) of farmland stretching from Leominster to Goodrich. Over a 20-year period this will involve long-term land use and management changes to restore and enhance water quality in our rivers, boost biodiversity, sequester carbon, and produce food sustainably. This will afford us the opportunity to not only look at how best to manage our land areas near the river but consider how the whole estate may be managed for better environmental outcomes. This is not 'rewilding' but will involve the creation of interconnecting wildlife corridors and/or specific areas of habitat for different types of wildlife e.g. managing some hedgerows to help reintroduce nightingales.

## Natural Capital

This is a way of thinking about the intrinsic value of land the world over. With the help of WUF we have carried out a full Natural Capital audit of the Estate. We have also undergone a full carbon audit for the farm which has shown that we are carbon negative.

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