

'Titanic' mansion open to public for first time since 1882

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(Image: Andrew Teebay Liverpool Echo), (Image: Andrew Teebay Liverpool Echo)

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Just a stone's throw away from Crosby beach is a Victorian villa built for the founder of the shipping company that launched the Titanic.

Thomas Henry Ismay, who founded the White Star Line, lived at Beach Lawn House in Waterloo, which he purchased for £2,500 on December 17, 1860. Clifford Ismay was delighted to be invited to stay at the property for the first time in October after he received a message on Facebook from the owner Tracey Robinson, who had discovered his family history.

Clifford, who is Thomas Ismay's fourth cousin, twice removed, told the ECHO: "She contacted me on Facebook and said 'Hi. Having realised you are related to Thomas, how would you like to come down and stay with us for a couple of days?"

"It was totally out of the blue. It was something I was delighted and excited to do. I'd never visited Thomas' home before.

"It was magical really. In a strange way when I walked through the door it felt like I was coming home."

Beach Lawn House was the childhood home of Thomas Ismay's son Joseph Bruce Ismay, known as Bruce, who eventually went on to become the chairman and managing director of the White Star Line. Clifford, from Cumbria, stayed in a suite on the ground floor of the house which would have been home to the Ismay dining room.

He said: "A strange thing happened on the first night in the bedroom, which was the Ismay dining room. It was about half past five in the morning and I swear I could smell tobacco in the room. It was old pipe tobacco, not cigarettes."

The following day, Clifford was invited for look around a private flat upstairs in the house, in what would have been Thomas' bedroom.

He said: "There was a cabinet on the wall which was there from back in Thomas Henry's day. A long term tenant there showed me the cabinet; when I opened the door she said 'you can smell tobacco from when Thomas lived there.'

"It was almost identical to the scent that I had smelt when I woke up at half five the previous morning."



13 Beach Lawn is situated in a row of English Heritage houses that are all grade two listed. The property has beautiful views, overlooking Crosby beach in the distance. All crews of White Star Line ships sailing from Liverpool are said to have saluted the house as they sailed past it on the River Mersey.

The house has been privately owned since it was sold by Thomas Ismay in 1882 and previously, anyone interested in the house could only view it from the outside. However, since it came under new ownership in August last year, the house is now open to the public for the first time.

Guests can book to stay in two suites on the ground floor in what was Thomas Ismay's lounge, dining room and billiard room. Clifford said you can "sense what life would have been like in the house" for Thomas and his family.

After commissioning the build of RMS Titanic in 1912, son Bruce came to international attention as the highest-ranking White Star official to survive the sinking of the ship, for which he was subject to severe criticism.

Clifford said: "Everyone called Bruce a coward for leaving the Titanic. Being related to him I used to read the same stories as everyone else. I thought was he really a coward? I was interested and thought all this information is one sided."

After carrying out his own research into the Titanic disaster and reading letters written by Bruce at the time, Clifford published his findings in his book: 'Understanding J. Bruce Ismay: The true story of the man they called 'coward of Titanic'.

The book is a biography of both Thomas Ismay and Bruce Ismay's lives. Clifford added: "I want people to see both sides of the story of Bruce and let people make up their own minds."

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