

Friends of Warminster Maltings

Newsletter January 2008

The Maltings has again had another extremely busy year. Orders for malt are now fighting to overtake production capacity. More than 240 customers command that some days require 4.00am starts to ensure we have enough malt packed for the delivery lorries arriving at 7.00am. At the same time new enquiries keep coming in, some for expanded demand from existing customers, others from brewers about to start a new business, and this morning we received another e-mail from Australia enquiring after our ability to expand our exports over there. This correspondence appears never ending, and all the time we have to explain that our malt production is, at the moment, sold out.

Following our difficulties in 2006, we now have one of the best line-up of maltsters we have ever had. They are a young, very fit, and above all, a very enthusiastic team, with lots of ideas on how to improve our productivity.

However, we sadly have to report the loss of Malcolm Smith, our Quality Assurance manager, who died just before Christmas after a short illness. Malcolm created our new laboratory following the refurbishment of our administration building in 2003, and was instrumental in bringing some advanced technology to our quality procedures, not least of which is our imaginative micro-malting kit.

Malcolm has been replaced by Sandra Bates, who was formerly quality manager at Wadworth's Brewery in Devizes. Although we might describe Sandra as poacher turned gamekeeper, her experience does give her a particularly keen appreciation of our quality targets.



We have also re-appointed Mark Young, who used to be one of our hardest working maltsters, but left briefly to work at something a little less arduous. Mark has returned to take charge of maintenance, a role that has up to now depended on an increasing expenditure with outside contractors. Mark originally trained in the building trade before he became a maltster, so we have always been aware of his mechanical, construction and joinery skills, and now we are exploiting them full time. Our objective is to both reduce our maintenance expenditure, and push forward with restoration work 'in house'. To this effect Mark has already replaced all the window frames along the north elevation, complete with 'tongue and groove' hinged internal ventilation shutters authentic to the late 19th century. He has also begun work on our biggest challenge of all, the roofs, as well as keeping all the plant 'well oiled' and fully operational.

Another set back of 2007 was the sudden announcement in September by the West Wilts Housing Society of advanced plans to build two low cost houses in Cobbett Place (replacing 13 lock-up garages). This plan included a re-configuration of car parking arrangements that would prevent any further lorry access to our maltings. The plan threatened nothing short of a closure of our operations, and a cruel end to 150 years of malting in Pound Street.

It transpired that the Maltings had been left out of the consultation loop because our address is Pound Street, not Cobbett Place, despite the fact that we occupy 2 acres of land bordering the latter. When we were finally made aware of just what was afoot, lobbying went into immediate overdrive, arranging meetings with and writing letters to everybody we could get hold of within West Wiltshire District Council. The good news is that everybody we spoke to outside West Wilts Housing Society but within the District Council was very sympathetic to our plight, and we were greatly encouraged when Matthew Perks, the Council's chief planning officer, confirmed he was familiar with our maltings. He had been on one of our tours!

A meeting arranged at the maltings on 12th October included West Wilts Housing Society, local District Councillors, and residents from Cobbett Place. The residents were not only concerned about the implications of the development for both vehicle and pedestrian access, but also wanted to support the defence of the maltings. The conclusion was that we invite traffic logistics consultants Capita Symonds from Bristol to advise on a revised access scheme for the maltings delivery lorries. This was to be the priority, with a new car-parking scheme to be developed around it. There were those of us who could not see that there was room for both, but West Wilts Housing was not among them. However, we were right, but even before we proved this, the Re-development Proposal met with a firm refusal from the District Council as the proposal "could potentially destroy the economic viability of the Warminster Maltings by excluding delivery vehicles from the established access for this business premises thus threatening essential local employment opportunity. As such the proposal is therefore contrary to Policies E5 of the West Wiltshire District Plan 1st Alteration 2004".

So yet again the Maltings defies the obstacles put in its way. It is a very special place, and again we witness how it commands a very special affection in the hearts of the people of Warminster. So let no one, including ambitious planners, fail to recognise that!

A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL