



Edition 17

11th July 2018

FRIENDS *of* WARMINSTER MALTINGS

SUMMER TOURS

Our Summer Tours kicked off in May with a tour party from the Chelmsford Branch of CAMRA, on May 25th, quickly followed by a party from the nearby village of Chitterne, on May 30th. The latter party provided us with two group photographs, the first from that evening...



... and the second, courtesy of Sue Robinson from Chitterne, a photograph of the maltsters who were employed at our Pound Street Maltings in 1949. A valuable edition to our photographic display, so thank-you very much, Sue.



Pound Street Maltsters and Colleagues 1949

“CELEBRITY ANTIQUES ROAD TRIP”

On June 26th we played host to the popular BBC2 Series. Our celebrities were actor David Bradley (Game of Thrones, Broadchurch etc.) and auctioneer Natasha Ruskin. They arrived in a rather uninspiring 1965 Triumph Herald saloon car, along with an even less inspiring drunken gentleman on the other side of the street who managed to completely disrupt the opening filming!

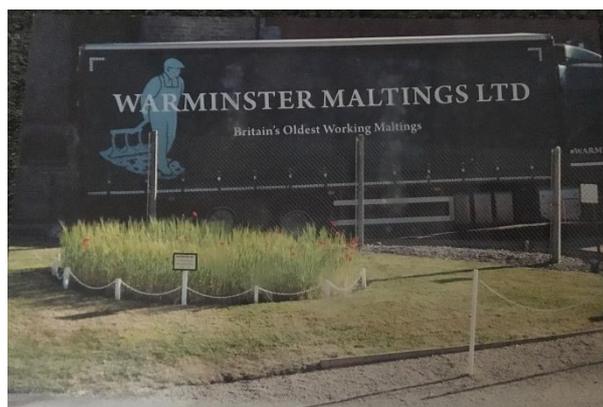


The story line focused around The Malt Tax, and how it impacted on the design of our maltings, and the unique features derived from the tax that we still work with today.

This episode is due to be screened in November of this year, and Scottish Television have assured us that they will advise us in advance, and we will in turn advise you.

WAR MEMORIAL

As you drive along Cobbett Place, on the south side of our maltings, just before you reach the entrance to our delivery yard, you might notice a small patch of barley growing on the grass bank, with a white chain link surround. It is the inspiration of our very talented gardener, Chris Bull, who had the idea of commemorating the centenary of the end of World War 1, by recreating “Flanders Fields”: barley laced with wild poppies. The poppies have been flowering over the last couple of weeks, and have been captured in this photograph kindly submitted by one of our neighbours.

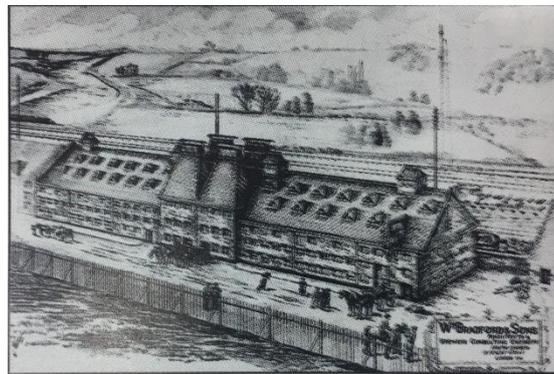


1914 -18 War Memorial, Cobbett Place

We have no record of men from the maltings going away to fight, but it almost goes without saying. Because what we do know is, and there is ample photographic evidence across the industry, women stepped in to replace the maltsters on the floors. With the surrounding district (Salisbury Plain) an area of concentrated training for recruits to the army, it is unlikely Pound Street would not have had to resort to this alternative strategy.

A MALTINGS CLOSURE

At the beginning of June, Tuckers Maltings in Newton Abbott, Devon, announced it will close at the end of October this year. A ‘floor maltings’, like Warminster Maltings, but constructed later, in 1900, Tuckers Maltings have, for a long time, been close friends of ours, the two of us being the only two working maltings in the western half of the country (all the others are dotted along the eastern seaboard).



Architects Drawing of Tuckers Maltings, 1900

This closure could be attributed to a number of factors, an ageing workforce and lack of succession management standing out in particular. But also to blame would be the particularly aggressive pricing policy of the eastern counties factory maltings, targeting the flourishing craft brewing sector across the south western peninsular, which they see as fuelled by a vibrant and lucrative tourist trade.

But for the craft breweries across Devon and Cornwall, this should be a serious wake up call about the vulnerability of malt supplies. With export demand for UK malt being ramped up every week, at prices that are at a premium to domestic values, a “race to the bottom” to supply 2 tonnes of malt per fortnight to a craft brewery not a million miles from Land’s End will surely become a thing of the past. At Warminster, we stepped away from this several years ago.

Now we stand alone in the west country, and a whole lot more defiant!

MOVE OVER HOPS!

So ran the editorial in the Waitrose Weekend newspaper (April 26th 2018), “...the single most important component of beer is malt!” So say all of us.

The reason Waitrose have to say it, and why the brewing industry has failed to pick up on this, is because brewers cannot find anything sexy to say about malt. They could help themselves by having a more in depth look. So far, for most, the different flavour profiles of varieties represents an economic challenge they are not prepared to confront. They should, because at a recent Global Malt Conference in Minneapolis “...all modern Canadian and European barley varieties” were described as “thin, harsh or tasteless!” Older varieties, which we favour at Warminster Maltings, represent a huge contrast, and in particular, our very own Maris Otter barley appears to be the global ‘Gold Standard for flavour’!

Brewers could talk about the soil type on which the best barley is grown (the Icknield Series – Salisbury Plain is all Icknield Series), and Britain’s maritime climate (not many of them in the world), all of which they could wrap up under the heading of ‘terroir’, so liberally exploited by the wine industry.

A grasp of these elements could add a valuable 'healthier' image to the responsible consumption of beer. If we look back, beer was often promoted for its health giving properties, properties derived more from the malt than that which can be attributed to the hops I suggest. I give some examples:

We have in our Museum at Pound Street a Henry Morgan's Brewery, Warminster, price list from 1883 which advertises his "AK Family Pale" (Ale) at just "one shilling a gallon" and "...recommended by the Medical Profession for family use."

When I was a boy, railway bridges across busy roadways, often carried an advertising banner proclaiming "Guinness is Good for You", and doctors commonly recommended a daily glass of stout to pregnant mums.

And most recently, chatting over Sunday lunch to a retired dentist, he advised me that throughout his professional career, he regularly noticed that beer drinkers had healthier teeth!

So there you are, that is something to, er, get your mouth around! I just wish the brewers would follow suit.

HARVEST

Finally, the harvest began last week. I spent that week in Norfolk, reviewing barley crops across the county. The winter barleys (autumn sown) were looking alright, albeit a bit on the lean side, but the Spring sown crops were a much more mixed bag, with some still very green, and at the other extreme, some that were dying prematurely. The heat is forecast to last to the end of the month, so the outcome of this year's barley harvest is set to be a bit of a mixed bag. But each year, UK farming sets out to grow between 6 and 7 million tonnes of barley, only 2 million tonnes of which is required for UK malt production. So panic not, we might have momentarily run out of carbon dioxide, but your long term beer supply should be perfectly safe!



Robin Appel