



Edition 6

7th September 2016

FRIENDS of WARMINSTER MALTINGS

OUR BIGGEST ENGINEERING PROJECT

At the beginning of August malt production was shut down completely so that we could replace the Burner that fires our kiln. This has been almost the biggest engineering project of my tenure, and at a cost of close to £250,000, certainly the most expensive. First of all, it required the removal of the old unit, including retaining walls, ready for a completely new configuration, all bespoke engineering that has been two years in the planning and preparation.



Out with the old...



...and in with the new.

Half of the hardware was manufactured by Max Weishaupt GmbH of Germany, and then married up to the other half fabricated by Don Valley Engineering in Doncaster. It then all had to be taken apart, loaded onto a lorry, and delivered to Warminster on the morning of Monday 1st August. Engineers from both companies then had just 14 days to install, mostly because that was as much time as we could afford to be out of production, and also because the said engineers wanted to go off on their summer holidays!

Quite apart from the installation of all the hardware, there was a huge and complex wiring project required to enable the electronics, carried out by our local contractor, and then there was the fragile re-connection of the gas supply, all subject to strict and rigorous regulation. Needless to say “the best laid plans...” did not quite work out, overcome by the unforeseen, as usual, and our new kiln was not fired up until Friday 19th August, by which time ‘green malt’ was sitting on Floors No. 1, ready and waiting.

The superstructure of our single ‘modern’ kiln was installed in 1953, and originally oil fired. It was far more efficient than its four coal fired predecessors, taking less than 24 hours to dry a single batch of malt, compared to a 3-day duration for each of the old furnaces. (It also overcame the risky juxtaposition of four 24 hour coal fired kilns alongside dry and dusty barley and finished malt. The aforesaid components had always been the cause of fires which had regularly and spectacularly destroyed floor maltings over the previous 100 years, the Pound Street maltings itself a victim in the autumn of 1924).

The burner we have just replaced was subsequently installed 32 years ago, and it owes us nothing. It has been fired up at least six times every week since, 52 weeks of the year. I calculate it has responded to the challenge of drying somewhere in the region of 10,000 batches of ‘green malt’ throughout its life time.

Our new installation is, of course, a much more sophisticated piece of engineering, with a greater power output, and an ability to increase the range of malts we supply. It is the beating heart of the maltings, around which everything else depends. And more than anything else, this investment secures the maltings future.

HARVEST REVIEW

Over August, while our attention has been focused closer to home, the farmers around the country have been focused on gathering in their harvest, and a spectacular run of good weather has ensured their progress has been almost uninterrupted. Overall, where yields have not been as good as last year (2015 was a particularly outstanding harvest), quality has been very satisfactory, and, in particular, all grains have been harvested very dry, a seriously important factor to all participants within the supply chain!

The winter barley harvest (barley crops sown in the autumn) has been the most disappointing element of the total outcome so far, although our venerable Maris Otter barley seriously outperformed all the rest, delivering enough quality barley to ensure it marches on into its 52nd year of commercial production!

The spring barley harvest has, overall, delivered a more satisfactory result, and with a substantial national crop, there are more than adequate supplies of good quality barley to feed the UK malting, brewing and distilling industry.

TRIUMPHANT AGAIN

Talking of Maris Otter, our vintage barley variety is back in the limelight! Once again, it is the ingredient malt of choice for this year’s Supreme Champion Beer at the annual Great British Beer Festival (GBBF) held at Olympia at the beginning of August. **Bingham’s Brewery**, from Twyford in Berkshire, scooped Britain’s most prestigious beer trophy with their ‘**Vanilla Stout**’ a 5.0% “dark stout infused with vanilla and dark malts”.



Bingham’s Vanilla Stout

This is the 11th occasion in 17 years (since year 2000) that the Supreme Champion Beer at the GBBF has been brewed from Maris Otter barley malt. I am tempted to say, nay repeat “they do not breed barleys like that anymore” because the truth is they don’t. Attempts to do something about this are much talked about, but there are no urgent messages from within the industry to stimulate real progress.

TEAS IN THE GARDEN

The last for this summer...

WEDNESDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2.00 – 4.00 pm

Our August event proved hugely popular, 46 servings in total, which cleared us out of all the scones and cakes (the maltsters were most disappointed!). We have had to go onto E-Bay and buy another china tea service, as washing up and turning round the crockery did prove to be a bit of a 'bottle neck'. But we learn from every event how to improve the service, so do come and see us next week if you are free, and you fancy a special treat of Pat's quite delicious homemade scones and cakes. I'm reliably informed the sun is set to shine on us again, the beginning of an Indian Summer perhaps.

At our August event we entertained two particularly special guests, Alan and Penny Morgan. Alan's great-great grandfather, who was also a maltster, was the brother of William Morgan who built our maltings way back in 1855. So it was a great thrill to make this connection.



Penny and Alan Morgan

The Morgan family were very prominent in Warminster in the second half of 19th century with both maltings and breweries to their name. The very philanthropic William Frank Morgan, son of William, not only re-modelled our Pound Street maltings in 1879, he bequeathed a whole raft of public works to the town, including the Obelisk and the Old Fire Station. To go right back to the beginning of this newsletter, it could, of course, be said that the Fire Station represented a vested interest. But why not? For it almost certainly served his successor and saved our maltings from total destruction by fire in the autumn of 1924. We have much for which to be forever grateful to the Morgans.

Robin Appel.