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Ups and Downs in the Malting Industry

The recording of processes at work before closure is a valuable aid to our understanding of the surviving industrial archaeology, in this case the malting industry. Recent losses are reported in the industry through closures in Norfolk while, in contrast, a floor malting in Devon has recognised that its traditional methods can be part of a tourist attraction.

Amber Patrick

In all industries, methods of production are always subject to change, gradually or speedily, depending upon circumstances, but to understand surviving industrial remains it is often helpful to see the process at work. The buildings of the floor malting industry are no exception. It is therefore regrettable that in December 2000 two floor maltings closed at Beeston and East Dereham in Norfolk. Not only do we lose a little bit of technical knowledge each time a malting closes but we also lose details of machinery and perhaps the building's structure. Both maltings had belt driven screens, that at East Dereham being substantially older than at Beeston. How these screens operated is of importance when recording other maltings where remains are incomplete, for example, Mistley, Free Rodwell No 1, which is currently undergoing conversion. And, to add the debate on Doorman Long of Middlesbrough, it is interesting to note that the steelwork forming part of the roof structure at Beeston is by Dorman Long.

To appreciate what will be lost in one way or another it is necessary to know something of the history of each site. The Beeston maltings were originally the brewery of the Beeston Brewery Co Ltd which was acquired by Shipstone's in 1922, and converted by then to a floor maltings in about 1926. Two kiln furnaces, by Robert Boby of

Bury St Edmunds were added. It operated as their No 4 Maltings until they ceased production in 1990. It was then operated by Moray Firth and at closure by Baird's Malt. The malthouse is a substantial red brick building with a slate roof. It has four original conical hopper bottomed steeples serving two growing floors, and a modern pressure kiln, although one Boby furnace was retained, unused. There is a fine belt driven Boby rotary malt screen and an equally fine Porteus malt mill. Unlike many floor maltings the floor to ceiling height is good because it was built as a brewery, but there are now no other features to indicate its original use. As far as I am aware the maltings is not listed. It is understood that its future use is as a dwelling.

The East Dereham maltings was F. & G. Smith's (now Crisp Malting) No 8 Malthouse and, unlike Beeston, was built as a malthouse. Originally it was one of a pair, but one was destroyed by fire leaving just one malthouse of 1870 and the office of 1894 fronting onto Norwich Road. It is a three storey brick building with slate roofs to the office building and tile roofs to the malthouse, and the kiln roofs are of corrugated iron. There were three growing floors and typical cast-iron columns support the upper floors. Originally there were ditch steeples but conical hopper bottomed ones were installed in 1993. Air conditioning had been installed in the 1950s. The kilns had wedge wire floors and, as there were no mechanical turners, the turning was done by hand! The heat was produced by Sux? anthracite furnaces. Very fortunately, the building was recently listed, but that does not mean its future is secure.

Both buildings have been recorded photographically, with English Heritage photographing Beeston in November and December 2000, just before closure. We, as



East Dereham maltings, Norfolk

Photo: Amber Patrick

COVER PICTURE

Highlight of TICCIH 2000 in Scotland – a view looking south from the hoist on the Fife Cantilever which carried conference delegates to the top of the Forth Bridge last September. (See Regional News)

Photo: Miles Oglethorpe

industrial archaeologists, will not, at least in the short term, be able to affect the economics which have resulted in the closure of these two maltings, and no doubt others in the future. It should be pointed out, however, that the reasons for closure were actually different. East Dereham's contract had been with Marston's Brewery (until at least 1998, although I do not know the position at closure), and anyone who reads the financial pages will be aware of that particular brewery's problems, not to mention those of other companies. In contrast, Beeston had plenty of orders from small and in particular micro breweries, but the business did not own the building, and the owners presumably consider housing more profitable than malting. We can ensure that at least some record is made and that not all the information is lost to future generations, and that closure does not go unnoticed and without discussion.

It should not be thought that the malting industry has no regard for its heritage, even amongst those firms closing their floor maltings, but one company has made a particular effort to present itself to the public, and that is Tuckers Maltings of Newton Abbot, Devon, who received the AIA President's Award in 1998 for their 'excellent standard of interpretation and presentation of the floor malting industry.' (the award plaque is now in prominent display). In November I was pleased and privileged to attend their centenary celebrations: the maltings had opened for business on 5 November 1900. Designed by the well-known malting and brewing



One of the Suxé anthracite furnaces at East Dereham maltings

Photo: Amber Patrick

architect, William Bradford, they were no doubt one of the most modern of their time. As those of you who visited during the 1998 conference will know, the barley screen, the solid cast-iron steeping cisterns with hopper bottoms, the growing floors with a reasonable head height, the kilns and finally a Nalder's malt screen for cleaning the dried malt, are still in use as they were a hundred years ago, although the kilns have changed from anthracite to gas. Tuckers are

to be congratulated on keeping so much of their original machinery in use and for opening their maltings so that the public can see how malt was (and is) traditionally made. They are open from Good Friday to 31 October each year, but their Speciality Beer Shop is open all the year! Also, a booklet has been produced for their centenary: *Tucker's Maltings – History in the Making* by Brian Gates. This complements the one on the malting process.

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