Reprinted from: Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology Journal for 1998 pages 55-58

THE MALTHOUSE, THE OLD CORNER CUPBOARD, GLOUCESTER STREET, WINCHCOMBE, GLOS.

Amber Patrick

Introduction

A visit was made to this malthouse on 24 March, 1997, in response to a Listed Building Consent Application to convert the bottom floor of the malthouse into a restaurant. Access was by kind permission of the tenant, Dave Ayre. The tenancy is held of Whitbread Pub Partnerships and has been a Whitbread pub for a number of years. This report was prepared for deposition in the National Monuments Record Centre at Swindon.

Location

The malthouse is located to the rear or north of The Old Corner Cupboard inn which is on the corner of Gloucester Street and Malthouse Lane. The long western elevation of the malthouse fronts onto the eastern side of Malthouse Lane.

History

The list description describes the inn as being of sixteenth century date and the malthouse as nineteenth century. It also indicates that the main building only became an inn in 1872 and that prior to then it was a farm house. No detailed documentary work has been undertaken on the inn and its attached malthouse. However, it is worth noting that a number of maltsters appear in the trades directories. In 1830 there were four maltsters but by 1870 there were two, Charles Richardson of Gloucester Street and Samuel Wills of Coats Mill. There are no maltsters recorded in the 1885 directory, although this is not conclusive evidence that no malting was being undertaken in the town.

The Malting Process

Malt is artificially germinated grain. Malting was and to some extent still is a seasonal process and historically took place between the months of October and May. Barley is usually the raw ingredient for making malt. It has to be stored and often dried prior to use to ensure dormancy is broken. Barley also has to be cleaned of dust, small stones and loose husks.

The first stage in the malting process after any drying and the necessary cleaning was and is the steeping of the barley in the cistern to begin germination. The water in the cistern was ideally about 54°F (12.5°C). Lower than this and growth would be retarded and higher more water would be taken up. The steeping period lasted between 60 and 72 hours.

During this time the water was changed several times and the barley was rested for periods varying between eight and twelve hours. The aim of steeping was to give the barley sufficient moisture to ensure perfect and regular germination. The moisture content of the barley after steeping should be 40 to 45 per cent. The next stage prior to the repeal of the Malt Tax in 1880 was couching. The couch was a rectangular frame in which the soaked barley was put in order that the excise men could measure its volume. The barley stayed in the couch for twenty four hours. Couching was still practised after the repeal of the Malt Tax but it did not have to be undertaken in a frame, nor did it have to be for a set number of hours.

From the couch or the steep the soaked barley was spread out onto the floor to grow. In the later nineteenth century the growing of the barley to the point where it was ready to be kilned might take as long as fourteen days. The depth of the grain on the floor would vary from four to eight inches depending upon the weather conditions. The temperature on the floor ranged from 56°F (13°C) to 65°F (15°C) or even 70°F (22°C) with the higher temperature being reached at the end of growing. As growing progressed the rootlets began to grow and it was necessary to turn the growing grain to prevent it from matting together and to ensure the growth was/is even. Originally this was done by hand using a broad flat bladed shovel. Later ploughs, which were a three pronged, flat bladed 'forks' were used and more recently, in the twentieth century mechanical shovels were introduced.

When the green malt as partially germinated barley is called had reached the required extent of growth, it was ready to go to the kiln. In the kiln the green malt was laid on the floor which was often of perforated ceramic tiles, a foot square. By the end of the nineteenth century the drying floor was often of wedge wire, although an earlier drying floors of woven wire were used. The depth of the green malt on the kiln floor was usually about eight to twelve inches (20 to 30 cms). It was turned during kilning, by hand in the early days, or later on by mechanical turners. The malt was on the kiln for three or four days. The temperature varied according to how well the kiln was constructed and the type of malt being made, but could be as high as 220□ F (105□ C). The fuel used in malt kilns by the nineteenth century was mainly anthracite or coke and as the combustion products usually passed directly through the malt a fuel of low arsenic content was essential. The kilning of the malt arrested germination and therefore halted the breakdown of the starch molecules. It also reduced the moisture content, to about three per cent which was necessary for safe storage and produced an ideal grain for grinding to grist in the brewing process. Kilning also gave colour and flavour to the malt.

Finally, the kilned malt was dressed (the rootlets removed and the grain cleaned) and then stored until it was required for brewing. It was usual to store the malt for at least a month before it was used.

The Building

The malthouse is a three storey stone building with a slate roof. There is now no indication of the location of the kiln. The malthouse has been partly converted already, in that the middle floor is used as living accommodation. The top floor is used as storage, as is the bottom floor, although there is rather more open space on the bottom floor.

Exterior

The roof is a single gable and there are three dormer windows in it on both the eastern and western elevations. In the eastern elevation there are three small windows at ground floor level. This bottom floor is very much semi basement now and the windows are almost completely obscured on this eastern side. However, this may not have been the case when the malting was in operation, since the soil outside seems to have built up perhaps through levelling the car park or perhaps demolishing the kiln. In this elevation there is a fourth window besides the three small ones mentioned above. It is located at the southern end, next to the pub. There are now two windows on the middle floor one located between the second and third bottom floor windows from the north and one to the south of the southern most small bottom floor windows.

In the western elevation there are four windows on the bottom and middle floors. They are larger than those in the eastern elevation and are boarded up thus completely obscuring the frames which can only be seen on the inside.

The northern elevation has a single plain gable with one window in the elevation at top floor level. There is now a door in this elevation at middle floor level which provides access to this floor and by the stairs described below to the upper floor. It is worth noting that the north east corner is of dressed quoin stones which makes it less likely that the kiln was attached to the building at this corner.

Interior

The top floor was reached by wooden stairs inside the building at the northern end. It was not possible to determine whether they were in their original location. The top floor was largely obscured by the goods stored in it but it was possible to determine that it is of timber boards which run east west at the northern end. It was not possible to determine whether there had been any other covering, such as screed, either at the northern end or to the south. The walls were plastered but again it was not possible to determine whether this was original or a replacement. There was newer timber work to the dormer windows than elsewhere in the building. The roof structure appeared to be of the simple collar type.

The middle floor as has been stated above is converted to residential accommodation. The present floor is of timber boards but it is not known whether these are original. The walls are now without plaster but this is a feature of the conversion. It is worth noting that there are numbers on some of the timber beams which support the upper floor but again a modern inserted walls obscure the full details. It is not now possible to determine whether there were any columns supporting the main beams of the upper floor.

The bottom floor is the one which will be altered if the proposal to turn it into a restaurant goes ahead. This bottom floor appears to consist of two periods. The southern end contains in the eastern elevation the larger window mentioned above and appears to be older than the rest. This window is in the first bay north of the wooden partition, under the main beam, which now separates the bottom floor of the malting from the lobby. The floor of this first bay is of brick whereas the rest was cement screed as far as could be seen. The walls are plastered and this is probably original or a replacement of the original.

The malting is of five bays, excluding the southern most which contains the large window. The small windows of the eastern elevation are located in the north most bay, the third bay from the north and the fourth bay from the north. The windows have plain wooden frames. Under the second and third beams from the north are slender cast iron columns, squared at the top and bottom. As additional timber has also been inserted from the eastern end, it is possible that the columns were later inserts to give increased support to the upper floor. There are now no other cast iron columns in this malting.

In the western elevation there are windows in the first, third fourth and fifth bays from the north. These are larger than those in the eastern elevation. They have wooden frames which have a fastening at the top. There are three lights, one across the top and that underneath split in two vertically.

The ceiling of this bottom floor consists in places of timber boards but where there are none the timber floor boards which run east west.

The Development of the Building and the Malting Process

The malthouse is externally fairly intact except that it has not been possible to determine the location of the kiln. The fenestration in the eastern elevation means that it was unlikely to have been attached to the eastern side. The alternatives are that it was attached to the northern end despite the quoin stones on the north eastern corner, or that it was located between the malthouse and the inn.

Internally the malthouse has been most altered on the middle floor. Also, it has not been possible to determine the position of the steeping cistern, nor the position of any couch frame. The columns appear not to be original but apart from that there are no apparent alterations.

Although the building has undergone few alterations either as a malthouse or subsequently, it has not been possible to determine how the malting process operated in this building. This is due to the fact that it has not been possible to locate either the steeping cistern of the kiln. An idea of the position of one or both of these would have enable the possible determination of the pattern of malting in this building.

Conclusions

This malthouse is a simple building with no outstanding features, unlike the attached inn. Although little altered it has lost its kiln and this together with the inability to locate the steep has meant that it has not been possible to determine how it worked. If the kiln is located by map evidence it may be possible to make some determinations. This is plain malthouse but because of its location and because it is built of stone, it adds to the townscape and the fenestration in its western elevation should be retained so that it continues to present a typical malthouse elevation.

Bibliography

Kelly's *Trade Directories* for 1870, 1885 and 1894.
Patrick, A., 1996, Establishing a Typology for the Buildings of the Floor Malting Industry, in *Industrial Archaeology Review*, Volume 18, Number 2, Spring issue, pages 180 to 200.
Pigot's *Commercial Directory* for 1830.