

THE MALTHOUSE, WOODMANCOTE, DURSLEY

Amber Patrick

Introduction

This malthouse was neither visible from the road, nor was it recognisable as such when seen from the garden of the house. I visited the malthouse on two occasions in June and August 1988, and undertook a small amount of recording and measured survey work. This short report is the result of that work.

The site and its history

Woodmancote is the A4135 road running south from Dursley. The malthouse is located behind the house on the eastern side of Woodmancote (ST 7588 9788). The house is one of a distinguished row of Georgian houses, and of an 18th century date. The house itself gives no indication that there was ever any industrial activity in its back garden. The malthouse runs back, and therefore eastwards from the house, being almost literally an extension of the kitchen. It is a typical burgage plot maltings (Fig. 1).

Relatively little is known of its malting history, although the owners at the time of my visit had undertaken some research into the history of the house.

The main evidence for the building's malting history comes from early trades directories. Pigot's for 1822-3 records three maltsters in Woodmancote: a Mrs Millard, a William Robinson and a James Taylor. By the time of Pigot's 1830 directory only William Robinson is listed as a maltster in Woodmancote. Later directories do not record any maltster in the road but that does not necessarily mean that malting had ceased. The production of malt was clearly of some local importance in Woodmancote in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.



Fig. 1 South elevation of the Malthouse

(Amber Patrick)

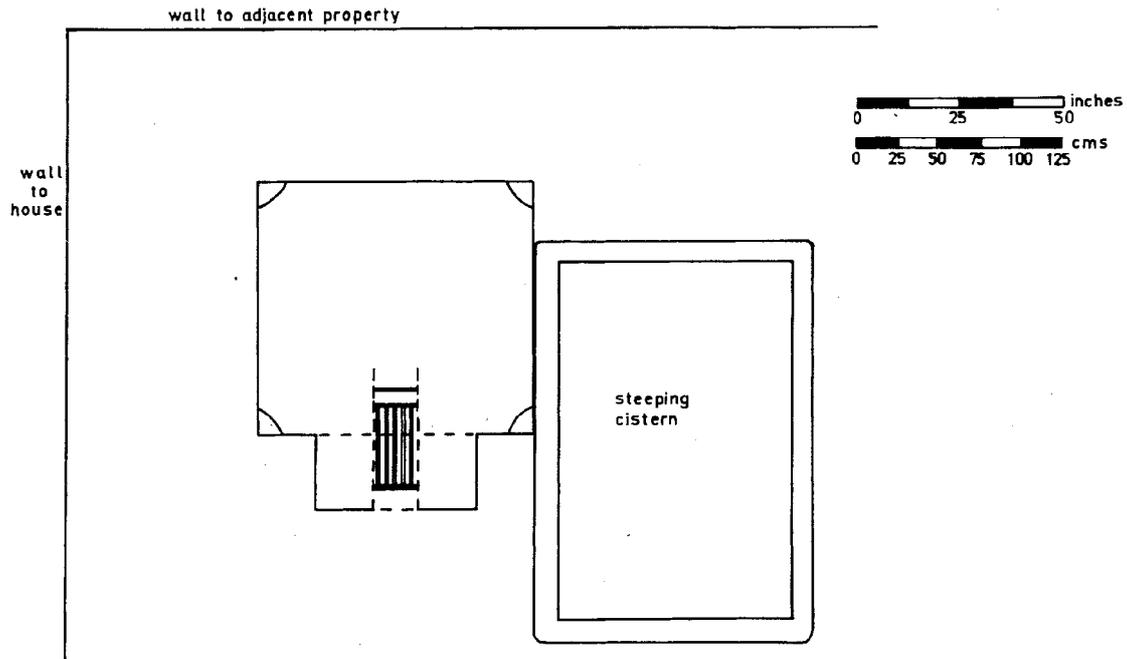


Fig 2 Plan of kiln furnace and steeping cistern, ground floor

The building

The malthouse was a three storey building, but its original roof had been removed with the result that the top floor is of minimal height. The replacement roof was a shallow pitched felt roof. The slope was down towards the garden of the house. The malthouse had ordinary sized windows and therefore looked just like any other domestic building.

Exterior

The malthouse was built of coursed limestone, rough hewn but with brick replacement sections under the windows perhaps indicating that the existing ones were replacements for smaller original ones. The brickwork had been painted a light colour to match the stonework. The frames of all the windows were relatively modern. The eastern end of the building, (from the west of the eastern most pair of windows) appeared to be of a different build from the rest, although the coursing of the stones did run through. That may have been the result of differential wear or stone cleaning. There were rough dressed quoins at the corner of the east to south elevations.

The western elevation was essentially an internal one at ground floor level, being the one between the house (the kitchen) and the malthouse. The northern elevation was the boundary wall with the next door property and therefore was not viewed externally, but there were no windows in it. In the eastern elevation was the door to the middle floor. At the time of the visit there were just a couple of stone steps up to it because of the level of the lawn, but originally there may have been more if the then ground level was lower. The door was a modern one in a modern frame.

Finally, the southern elevation had the most features associated with it, having both windows and a door in it. On the ground floor, running from west to east was firstly a window then a door, the main external access to the ground floor, and then two more windows. The door was a simple wooden plank door with wooden frame and a slightly curved brick lintel. All the windows had timber lintels and six lights, three either side of a central glazing bar. There was one exception, the eastern most window which had just two lights because of its proximity to the ground level. At the extreme western end were stone steps up to first floor level. Their use

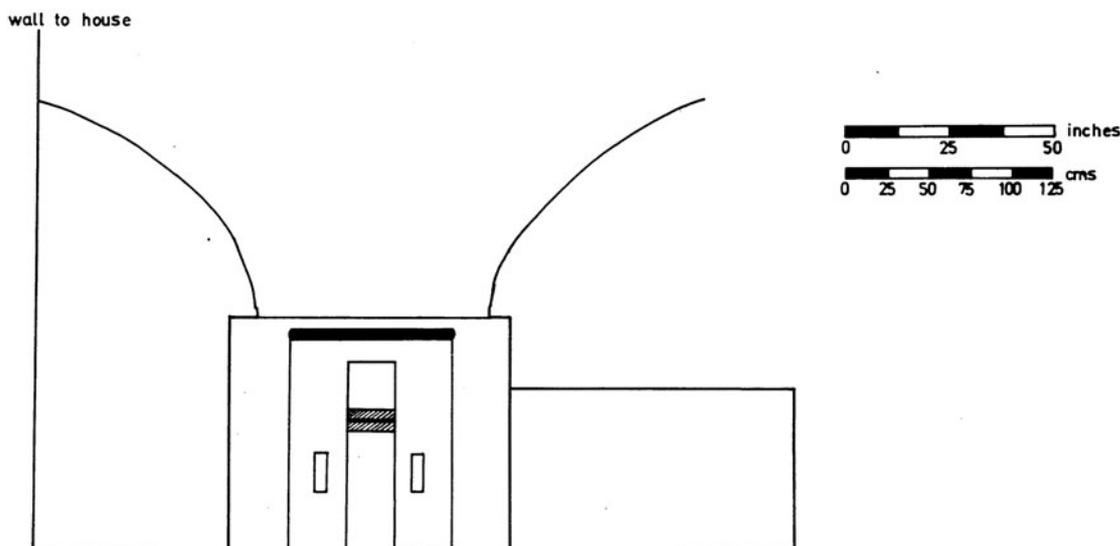


Fig. 3 Elevation of kiln furnace and abutting steeping cistern, ground floor

was not clear but they may once have provided access to the kiln. There were three windows to the middle floor, one above each of the easternmost ground floor windows and one above the door. All these windows had timber lintels and six lights, three either side of the central glazing bar. There were no features for the top floor which was effectively non-existent.

Interior

The general layout of this malthouse is on the Newark pattern. In consequence the kiln and the steep are next to each other and the middle floor is the storage floor, and the bottom or ground floor, and the top or second floor were germination floors.

The ground floor was semi-basement. There was door access to it from the house and from the outside. On this floor was the kiln furnace and the steep, which abutted it, at the western end more or less next to the kitchen of the house (see Fig. 2). The steep was constructed of large stone blocks which were held together by iron ties. The furnace was constructed of brick but had a stone slab on top of the projecting furnace mouth brickwork (see Fig. 3). The brickwork of the main part of the furnace was painted white. The furnace had five iron fire bars which were set back from the furnace mouth (see Fig. 2). There were several ventilation holes - one on either side of the furnace mouth and a somewhat larger one on the rear elevation of the furnace. All were rubble filled from the collapse of the kiln floor above.

This bottom germination floor had a surface of stone flags which would have been ideal for growing the wetted barley. There were no supporting columns to the first floor as the building was relatively narrow and therefore none were necessary. The main beams were however substantial, measuring 16 inches (41 cms) by 14 inches (35 cms) and were chamfered.

The middle floor was the storage floor with access to the kiln drying floor. The main access to this floor at the time of inspection was via an external door in the eastern elevation. The storage part of the floor was of timber boards. There was a wooden partition towards the kiln end and the kiln itself was partitioned off from the rest of the storage floor by a simple wooden wall. There were three windows to this floor and they appeared to be of unexpected construction in that instead of just serving the middle floor they also extended to the top of the floor below (the ground floor). They had a brick lining. The main beams which supported the top floor were chamfered like the floor below.

The kiln drying floor was of perforated ceramic tiles which were laid on stone kiln bricks or lintels which in turn were supported on stone piers. The kiln at the time of inspection was very much in a state of collapse. Although no longer evident there would have been access to the kiln drying floor from the top growing floor. There was no access onto the top floor because of its proximity to the roof, however it was possible to see that it had a plaster screed surface which was 2½ inches (6 cms) thick.

The malting process in the building

The process in this building was a simple one. Barley, the raw material of malt, was taken in on the middle, storage, floor, and cleaned ready for steeping. The barley for immediate use would probably have been kept in the small wooden partitioned section. When needed it was dropped into the stone steep. (As the overlap was small a wooden chute was probably used.) After steeping, the wetted barley was thrown out by hand shovelling and couched (when the volume was measured for excise purposes) and then spread out to grow on the bottom floor. Part way through germination it was hoisted in a basket to the top floor and moved back towards the kiln drying floor. When growth had reached the required extent and the green malt was ready for kilning it was dropped onto the kiln drying floor. Once kilned it was removed, probably on to the main part of the middle storage floor where it was cleaned of its rootlets and stored until need for brewing.

Conclusion

This malthouse was a good example of a burgage plot maltings. It was attached to the house with the kiln and the steep next to it at its western or house end. This appears to be a typical layout in such malthouses with a relatively local example being that at Chipping Campden where the kiln with its steep next to it were adjacent to the house. Other examples are to be found at Marshfield in what is now South Gloucestershire.

The layout is also typical of a Newark pattern malthouse with the kiln and the steep next to each other, and the growing floors being the top and bottom ones with storage on the middle floor. Other local Newark pattern malthouses were to be found at The Street, Uley, Brockhampton Brewery, and at Wightfield Manor, Deerhurst, as well as the already mentioned example at Chipping Campden.

Although the building was not particularly recognisable as a malthouse, the two most important features, the steep and kiln furnace were well-preserved and of interest because of their good survival.

Bibliography

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