

The mysterious Mr Golding

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Considering what a huge impact he had on the taste of British beer, astonishingly little is known about the man who gave his name to the Goldings hop.

About all we do have comes from a book published in 1798 with the marvellously long title of *The Rural Economy of the Southern Counties: Comprizing Kent, Surrey, Sussex, The Isle of White, the Chalk Hills of Wiltshire, Hampshire etc, and including the Culture and Management of Hops in the Districts of Maidstone, Canterbury and Farnham*. It was written by William Marshall, which says (on p. 183), talking about hop varieties in the District of Maidstone:

In West Kent there are several varieties in cultivation. The 'Canterbury' is the favorite sort and is the most cultivated: it is a 'white bine' hop, of the middle size. The 'Golding' has, of late years, been in high repute. It is a sub-variety, I understand, of the Canterbury; which was raised by a man still living (1790) Mr Golding, of the Malling quarter of the district; who observing, in his grounds, a hill of extraordinary quality and productiveness, marked it, propagated it, and furnished his neighbours with cuttings, from its produce.

This doesn't give us a lot of information,

but we can have a stab at guessing when Mr Golding spotted his 'hill of extraordinary quality.' A very good hop plant might produce upwards of 100 rhizome or root cuttings suitable for planting out the following year. But each newly planted cutting will need to grow for a couple of years before it can supply cuttings itself (and also grow saleable hops).

Mr Golding must surely have set himself up with a good stock of his new hop plant before he started giving it away to neighbours, and an acre of hop garden is going to require more than 3,500 hop plants. Let's guess at each new plant producing 75 viable cuttings, this means an absolute minimum of four years before the generous Mr G starts letting his neighbours share his bounty, six years since the discovery of the new super-hop before they get any sellable hops, and eight to ten years, at least, before there is a sufficient acreage of Mr Golding's hops growing for it to have the 'high repute' that Marshall refers to.

So if, as Marshall says, he heard about Mr Golding's marvellous hop of 'high repute:' in 1790, when the gentleman was still alive, the plant could not have been first spotted any later than

1779/1780, and probably not much later than 1775, or 15 years earlier. For comparison, the hop that was later named the Fuggle grew from a seed supposedly thrown out with the crumbs from a hop-picker's dinner basket in 1861, and did not enter commercial use until around 1875, 14 years on.¹

We can safely say, then, given that it was at least six years on from the plant's discovery, which was no later than the 1770s, before it could have been producing viable crops in other people's hop gardens, that the Golding hop began to be grown commercially in or before the 1780s.

But where was the Golding hop first discovered? Marshall says it was 'in the Malling quarter,' that is, around East and West (then called Town) Malling. Unfortunately, Mid-Kent was (and indeed still is) one of the main centres of the surname Golding and there are several possible candidates for the 'Mr Golding' who found the hop. (Incidentally, the 'Mr' is significant, indicating, given the usage of the time, that the person in question was a member of the minor gentry, one step up from a simple yeoman farmer, though perhaps not quite elevated to be called 'esq,' or esquire.)

In Plaxtol, near Sevenoaks, they have no doubts who the discoverer was: even in 1870 there had been Goldings farming in the village for 'several generations,' and villagers name 'William Golding' as the farmer who found the hop: there were

several Williams among the Plaxtol Goldings. One of Plaxtol's pubs, a former beerhouse, has been called the Golding Hop since at least the 1890s, and the village also has Golding Hop Farm, while Plaxtol parish council claims that the local Garrett Memorial Land, amenity space 'contains rare varieties of apples and pears, and rootstock of the original well-known Golding Hop (developed for commercial growing by William Golding, a former Plaxtol resident).'²

Ignoring the fact that hop rootstock only lives 25 to 30 years, so that whatever is growing on the Garrett Memorial Land can't be the 'original' Golding hop, and the usual problem of, apparently, no documentary evidence to back the parish up, the main problem with Plaxtol's claim to be the place where Golding hops first grew is that the village isn't in 'the Malling quarter,' where Marshall said Mr Golding came from, but six or so miles from the Mallings, in Wrotham parish and closer to Sevenoaks and Tonbridge.

The Malling district certainly had a heavy crop of Goldings at the end of the 18th century. One was Mr Oliver Golding, of Fartherwell House, Ryarsh, just north of West (or Town) Malling. described in *The Times* in 1790 as 'universally known and esteemed throughout the whole county of Kent.' Oliver was in the newspaper because he had lost a winning lottery ticket, worth nearly £800 - equal to perhaps £250,000 today - in a parcel that fell from a stage coach returning to Kent from London. Amazingly, eight months after

the parcel was lost, the ticket turned up, and Golding received his money. There is no evidence, however, to link lucky Oliver with the eponymous hop, even though someone who had been so generous as to give his neighbours cuttings of such an extraordinary plant would surely have been 'esteemed throughout the whole county.'³

A far likelier candidate is John Golding senior of Ditton Court, Ditton, just north of East Malling. John must have grown hops: when his son John junior was assessed for tithes (church taxes) in 1841 he owned four hop gardens in and around the village totalling more than 36 acres, as well as a 'yard and hopper's house.'⁴ John senior's great-uncle Thomas Golding, sheriff of Kent in 1703, was living in Leybourne, near West Malling when he bought Ditton Court around the start of the 18th century. Leybourne itself was famous for its hops: *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* in 1798 recorded that

As an instance of the fertility of the soil of this parish for the hop-plant, a cottager who lived in Sir Henry Hawley's rents in it, had half an acre of land belonging to his cottage, which in the year 1784 produced a crop of forty-five hundred of hops, which he sold for one hundred and forty-five pounds, an extraordinary crop, and a fortune to the poor man.

Thomas, whose arms were 'argent, a cross voided between four lions passant, guardant gules' (a red hollow cross between four lions lying down with their

heads and front paws up, on a white or silver background), left Ditton Court to his nephew, another Thomas, John senior's father, who seems to have sold it, and then bought it back again around 1735.⁵ John Golding junior was born around 1769, which makes him too young to have been the Mr Golding who discovered the hop.⁶ But his father, who died some time before 1811,⁷ is certainly the right age, in the right place, and with the opportunity. He would have known all the neighbouring hop growers, too, well enough to exchange information - and cuttings - with them all: *Pigot's Trade Directory* for 1840 records for Town (or West) Malling:

The hop planter and factors around this neighbourhood meet in Town Malling at the August fair, agreeably to long established custom, with the view to ascertaining the probable production of the hop harvest; they wager on the amount of duty that they anticipate by which they calculate the price likely to be the standard.

The Golding hop receives another mention in 1799, when John Banister of Horton Kirby in Kent, in a book called *Synopsis of Husbandry*, records among the various types of hop 'the Flemish, the Canterbury, the Goldings, the Farnham etc.' Another well-known type was the grape hop, and a report in *The Times* from May 23rd 1822, speaking about the poor state of the hop gardens around Maidstone, says: 'The grape bine is still very yellow ... With reference to the Golding and Canterbury plant, about one

hill in five are dead, and not one hill in ten has the appearance of a sufficiency of bine to furnish each pole,' suggesting that Canterbury and Golding may have been regarded still as effectively synonymous.

Later reports emphasise the superiority of the Golding: a hop market report from *The Times* on December 8th 1845 shows new Sussex hops at up to £7:10 shillings a hundredweight, but 'Superfine East and Mid-Kents (Golding's)' at up to £11:11 shillings, more than half as much again. The variety's superiority was underlined by a writer in 1848, S.A. Rutley, quoted in Hubert H. Parker's *The Hop Industry* of 1934, who said the Golding:

is undoubtedly the finest, richest and most valuable of any grown, varying in quality, like all other varieties, according to the soil on which they are grown: the soils best adapted to their growth are deep rich soils, on calcareous subsoils.

Brewers grew particularly keen on Mr Golding's hop for beers brewed to be laid down for some time: a report from *The Times* in January 1858 on the state of the hop market says that:

The demand of the country for Golding hops, adapted to the brewing of store beers, having become much more considerable than of late, for this description of hops full prices have been readily obtained, and in some cases a slight advance has been submitted to.

A year earlier a witness to a Parliamentary select committee on the

hop reckoned that a third of all the acreage given over to hops in East Kent were Goldings.⁸ The rich loamy soil of East Kent has been recognised for more than a century and a half for producing the best Goldings hops, just as the Loire valley produces some of the world's best Sauvignon Blanc wines and Java some of the best coffees: ironically, the Mallings (and indeed Plaxtol) are in Mid Kent.

John Golding junior died at Ditton Place on February 17th 1856, aged 85. Although at least some of his descendants have claimed the Goldings of Ditton as the discoverers of the Golding hop, I have not seen any proper evidence. There are quite a few other possible candidates for Marshall's Mr Golding. Henry Golding, gent (who used the same arms as, and was thus related to, the Ditton Goldings), for example, acquired land in East Barming, about three miles south of East Malling, in the time of Charles II⁹ and James Golding was still living in the village and growing hops there in 1841.¹⁰

There was even a William Golding working as a hop factor in 'the borough' (Southwark) in 1794, who was wealthy enough to buy Rhode Court (called Rhodes Court in a contemporary report), in Selling, near Faversham, Kent, about 1798, and who might have had something to do with the hop's discovery.¹¹ The best bet, currently, however, looks to be John Golding senior of Ditton Place for being a hop grower in the right area at the right time. It is surprising no one

seems to have asked before who Mr Golding actually was: more digging among Kentish records may provide a definite answer.

References

1. Parker, H.H. (1934) *The Hop Industry*. P. S. King & Son: London, p. 55.
2. Obituary of John Golding, 1943, at tinyurl.com/2o58g4; Plaxtol parish Council 'Design Statement,' at tinyurl.com/369y26.
3. *The Times*, October 20th 1790, p. 3 col F
4. Ditton tithe award schedule 1841 at tinyurl.com/2nfxzy.
5. Hasted, E. (1798) *The History and*

Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 4. Canterbury, pp. 455-463.

6. Death notice, *The Times* February 10th 1856 page 1 col A.
7. In 1811 at St Clements Danes Mr W.A. Dunning, solicitor, married Elizabeth, 'only surviving daughter of the late John Golding of Ditton-place, Ditton, Kent, Esq, deceased' - *The General Chronicle and Literary Magazine*, November 1811 p. 338.
8. Parker, H.H. op. cit. p. 54.
9. Hasted, E. op. cit. pp. 565-572.
10. 1841 tithe award schedule.
11. Hasted, E. (1798) *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent: Volume 8. Canterbury*, pp. 537-549.