

## FROM GRAIN TO GLASS - ENGLISH HERITAGE'S ROLE IN CONSERVING THE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE OF BEER

KEITH FALCONER

Over the last 40 years English Heritage and its predecessor government agencies have been in the forefront of the study, identification, protection and conservation of industrial sites. Initially the focus was on the preservation of the most significant relic sites as monuments to past industry. But increasingly the limitations of this approach have become apparent and emphasis is now more holistic, with attempts being made to sustain as well as preserve historic industries in their wider setting. This however is proving to be much more difficult. Without innovative approaches to conservation and funding, skills and processes especially will continue to be eroded while the building stock, through unrelated re-use, will cease to be the main evidence for the particular industry. This has already happened in England as regards most traditional heavy industry and the textile industry for example is now largely represented by a few working museums and by many spinning mills converted to retail and residential uses. The buildings associated with the brewing and consumption of beer are similarly threatened and provide a case-study illustrative of a much wider problem.

Beer has a rich legacy of buildings associated with its production and consumption, but it is a legacy that is being severely eroded with changes in the brewing and leisure industries. Recognising these threats English Heritage is involved in identifying, recording and conserving all aspects of the industry's heritage from the malting of the grain, the drying of hops and the brewing of beer itself, to the traditional public houses where the beer is drunk.

This introductory paper outlines the efforts that English Heritage is making to preserve the character, processes

and architecture of beer making and drinking. Beer is produced by yeast-induced fermentation of malted grain liquor, flavoured by hops and historically the separate ingredients have been produced and combined in distinctive types of building - malthouses, hop-kilns and brewhouses. The basic tool is the S.H.I.E.R. (Strategy for the Historic Industrial Environment Report). A S.H.I.E.R. on Maltings was completed some years ago while that on Breweries is the focus of this special issue of *Brewery History*. In general these S.H.I.E.R.s:

- characterise an industry to give an indication of the numbers of sites occurring originally.
- establish the known stock of significant surviving sites
- summarise the existing designation position, analyse its adequacy and provide a framework for ongoing assessment of further sites
- identify existing gaps in understanding, archive content and management cover and review the portfolio of preserved sites nationally
- give guidance on future management and stewardship of the national portfolio of preserved and publicly accessible sites.

Part One of the S.H.I.E.R. characterises the industry - its processes, its evolution and its distribution - and quantifies the resource. Part Two makes stewardship recommendations for the resource.

### **The maltings S.H.I.E.R.**

Brewing begins with malted grain. The grain, usually barley but historically also wheat, oats and rye, is steeped in water and then kept damp until it begins to



*Figure 1. Pound Street Maltings, Warminster, Wiltshire (1995). One of two traditional floor maltings still operating in England in 2011. Copyright English Heritage.*

germinate. It is then heated in a kiln to kill off the growth. To achieve this, distinctive types of buildings developed - floor maltings and pneumatic maltings. Until 1880 floor malting was the traditional British arrangement and indeed conservatism within the industry ensured that it remained so until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The early examples of floor maltings are generally two-storied but from the 19<sup>th</sup> century they are usually multi-storied. In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century pneumatic malting was introduced to England from Europe. There were two systems: the Saladin box system and the drum system. In both systems turning was done by mechanical means obviating the need for multi-storied buildings. In all these systems the germination is killed by heating in a kiln where the degree of heat is also used to control the final taste and colour of the malt.

The dried grain is then screened to remove shoots and any impurities. Each of these processes called for distinctive plant and structures and ideally representative examples of all of these should be preserved.

Floor malting and other historic processes have virtually disappeared in the last twenty years so in 2004 English Heritage commissioned a S.H.I.E.R. to ascertain the national situation. The S.H.I.E.R. it found that of the some 600 listed buildings named as maltings most have already been converted to other uses and only six traditional floor maltings were operating in 2004. Now in 2011 there are only two one of which, Tuckers in Devon, operates privately as a preserved exhibit and is open to the public. The other a small commercial maltings in Warminster, Wiltshire, precariously continues to

operate using traditional hand turning of the grain on open floors and English Heritage recommended upgrading its Listing to II\* in recognition of the rarity of the surviving internal features facilitating some grant aid for repairs.

### **Hop kilns and oasthouses**

Hops, the main difference between old ale and beer, were introduced to England in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and because of their preservative qualities the use of hops became universal by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hops are still grown in a few areas in the south and west of England but most are now imported. They have however left a legacy of distinctive barns and kilns (commonly called oasthouses in the South-East) where hops were dried and processed and packed. A rapid desk based assessment showed that there are over 500 Listed oasthouses in S.E. England, some single more often multi-kilned but most have now been converted into residences. A few oasthouses, such as that at Scotney Castle Farm, still provide hops for locally brewed beer. Owned by the National Trust these oasthouses provide the hops for a beer brewed in the Westerham Brewery which also is operated on a National Trust property. There were also grand Hop Exchanges in London and Worcester with some fine warehouses but, although some of the buildings survive, none are still associated with the trade.

### **The S.H.I.E.R. on the brewing industry**

The threat to the brewing heritage was discussed at a conference organised by the Association for Industrial Archaeology, English Heritage and the Brewery History Society (B.H.S.) in June 2003 and it was apparent that there was a huge collective knowledge and expertise amongst the assembled delegates and that this could be harnessed to undertake a S.H.I.E.R. on the brewing industry to fulfill the following objectives:

- to provide up to date information on all the operating ‘historic breweries’, generally pre-War II.
- to compile a comprehensive list of historic brewing buildings identifying any plant of particular interest.
- to undertake a national assessment on the industry identifying sites worthy of designation and those ‘at risk’

- to explore avenues to provide a secure future for photographic and drawn archives of the industry.

The idea was taken up by a small working party and by September 2006 a project, framed by the B.H.S., was agreed as the basis for the present report and its findings are elaborated elsewhere in this volume.

### **The consumption of beer**

As part of its holistic approach to the industry English Heritage has also been concerned with the heritage of the consumption of beer which has been consumed in a variety of establishments over the centuries. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the classic English public house had evolved and some of these pubs had assumed grand designs and lavish details. Indeed, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the pub was to become one of Britain’s great institutions but because of their popularity they have been regularly and insensitively modernised with a consequent loss of historic internal detail. CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale) with English Heritage recognised this problem and in 1991 began a major survey to seek out and record those pubs which retained genuinely old interiors. Alarming only 200 out of Britain’s stock of 60,000 pubs could be regarded as intact enough to be of national significance and only 4% of even regional importance. The CAMRA Inventory was published in 1999 and the English Heritage lavishly illustrated book *Licensed to Sell - The History and Heritage of the Public House*, in 2004. To encourage the industry to treat its pub interiors more sympathetically CAMRA in conjunction with English Heritage decided to give an annual Award to the best renovated pub interior but even this has had only limited success with, in some years, no award being made.

### **Conclusions**

Despite great public interest in drinking beer in pleasant surroundings and also in visiting traditional breweries, all aspects of the heritage of beer are ‘at risk’. The threats identified in 2003 have turned out to be very real - several notable historic sites, such as the Ram Brewery have closed. However, thanks to the S.H.I.E.R.s the information available to English Heritage is now less patchy and it can now make assessments of significance

informed by both national and county contexts. The benchmarking and internal advice aspects of the report are already informing English Heritage's Designation Department and this has led to significant new Listings in face of demolition proposals such as that of Mitchells of Lancaster where further detailed investigation found



*Figure 2. Hook Norton Brewery, Oxfordshire (1997). Remodelled in 1899-9 by the noted brewers' architect William Bradford, Hook Norton Brewery contains much early equipment and a Buxton & Thornley steam engine of 1899. Currently listed at Grade II it is recommended in the S.H.I.E.R. for upgrading to at least GradeII\*. Copyright English Heritage.*

that an 18<sup>th</sup> century maltings within the complex. English Heritage has decreed that the theme of its 2011 Heritage at Risk campaign is to be industrial heritage. (I.H.A.R.) and the S.H.I.E.R. will be featured as an example of how our contextual understanding of industry provided by harnessing voluntary expertise is informing our protection programme. The S.H.I.E.R. has been placed on English Heritage's website and its findings can therefore provide guidance for Local Planning Authorities' management of historic breweries.

However, although English Heritage can identify and quantify the problems besetting the heritage of the industry by tools such as S.H.I.E.R.s, the solutions are not so easy. While the buildings can be protected, and many thousand already have been, it is much more difficult to preserve plant, processes, character and ambience. The industry itself is in reasonable health and, where circumstances are favourable, has made some small efforts to preserve and interpret its historic buildings. Attempts must be made to generate more public interest to pressurise the industry to take even more regard of its own heritage. Publications such as *Licensed to Sell* and initiatives such as the CAMRA/English Heritage Pub Interior Award have raised awareness in the case of pubs and it is to be hoped that a companion volume to *Licensed to Sell* on the brewing heritage, commissioned by English Heritage, may do likewise. The partnership between English Heritage and the Brewery History Society has been outstandingly successful so far - long may it continue.

*Keith Falconer was the former Head of Industrial Archaeology, English Heritage and his views are not necessarily officially condoned.*