

BOOK REVIEW

Oasts and Hop Kilns A History

Grattan, P.

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Oasts and hop kilns are an attractive and distinctive feature of parts of England's rural landscape. Today there are two specific areas where hops are still grown and processed: the South East counties of Kent, Sussex, Surrey and parts of Hampshire, and the West Midland counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Most publications on hops deal with one region or the other. Patrick Grattan's work is probably one of the first to deal with both from an architectural as well as a social point of view. He also compares the buildings used for hop production in England with those on the continent of Europe as well as the USA.

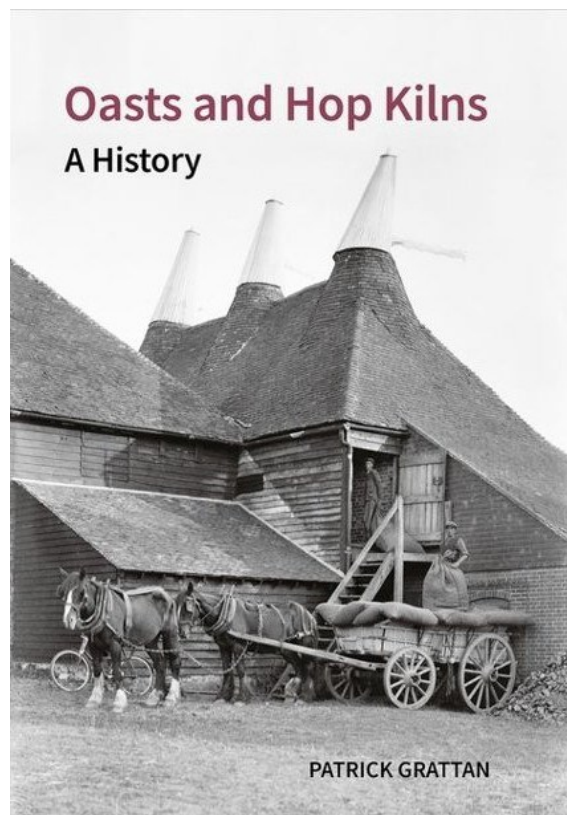
Patrick's work on hops started as a personal one, in that he picked hops in Kent to earn pocket money, and then in 1960 he started out to survey as he says hundreds of oasts and hop kilns. He concentrated on the older buildings. This has meant that he has been able to include photographs of sites which have now disappeared or been substantially altered. Throughout the book is very well illustrated with his own and other historic photographs, his delightful sketches, and colour images of many of the surviving kilns. There are maps of the modern hop growing regions as well historic one of specific areas.

There is an essential explanation of the weights and measures used in the industry. He emphasises the importance and the impact of hops on brewing, perhaps most importantly that it increased the keeping properties of beer as well giving it flavour.

The early chapters (1 to 4) explain what the hop plant is and the problems involved in growing what Patrick refers to as a demanding plant. Then the whole process is detailed from growing and picking with useful details on the implements

used and the changes over the centuries from independent poles to poles and wires and the skill required to provide the framework on which the hops could grow. Contemporary sources are quoted so that the reader understands the historic difficulties. The picking of the hops was a short season, and the way it was undertaken is given with details on the hop pickers who considered it a holiday from the smoky towns of London and Birmingham. It is of the pickers that there are some of the most evocative historic photographs.

The next part of the process is the drying of the hops, included are details of the drying floors, the different types of hearths, the fuels, the draught require and the temperatures needed to properly dry the hops. Patrick uses historic litera-



ture and so enables the reader to understand the changes over the centuries. The final stage of processing was cooling the kilned hops, pressing them and bagging so that they could be sent to the brewery. The cooling took place on the stowage floor, and the cooled hops were packed into sacks referred to as pockets which were awkward to handle.

The hops kilns and oast are introduced in Chapter 5 which deals with their different types. It starts with inset kilns which were in use from the 17th to the 19th centuries and were found in both hop growing regions. The next type to be described is the square pyramidal kiln which came into use in the 18th century and remained in use to the 20th century. The round or roundel kiln did not develop until the 19th century and like its pyramidal counterpart continued in use into the 20th century. Finally, there were louvered ridge vent kilns of an 18th to 20th century date. This chapter also introduces the main hop growing regions as well as others in earlier periods: parts of the counties Nottinghamshire, Essex, Suffolk and Hertfordshire.

The following chapters (6 to 12) provide detailed accounts of the types outlined in chapter 5. The evidence for the use of hops abroad and in England is outlined. This evidence is varied, ranging from archaeological excavation to literature from the 16th century most notably Reynold Scot's 1576 description which will be of particular interest to brewery historians. Other, later 18th century, literature sources are also quoted and give details of the size of kilns. Even in the second half of the 20th century some kilns managed to retain the style of these early kilns and an example is given of one at Golford in Kent. Throughout these chapters there are examples of all the kilns described. Chapter 8 deals with the hop business as a whole and the effects of taxes and regulations. Chapter 10 concentrates on the roundels of Kent and Sussex and John Read who has been described as the roundel inventor. There then follows as a section on Samuel Rutley who as a hop farmer devised a layout for a kiln and the necessary storage.

Chapter 13 reveals that the later 19th century was the high point of the English hop industry. However, it was also one of change with the introduction of fans and larger kilns, an expanding railway network and increasing foreign competition. Of particular interest are some of the inventions for heating kilns which are suitably illustrated. Chapter 14 deals with the effect of politics and profits (taxes and tithes) on the industry. The major Hop Market at Southwark is mentioned as well as the probably less well-known one at Weyhill, Hampshire.

Two chapters, 15 and 16 deal with hop drying, and the buildings, in continental Europe and the USA respectively. In Europe the hop growing regions were: Flanders, the Alsace and Burgundy regions of France, Bavaria in Germany and finally Bohemia and Moravia. In the USA the hop growing states were: New England and New York in the east; Wisconsin more in the middle and in the west Washington State, Oregon, California and Idaho.

The final chapter is on modern times and deals with international competition, hop markets and, mechanised picking, fan assisted drying and integrated mechanised operations and industrial units. Importantly there is a section on the conversion of oasts and hop kilns into residences.

There is a glossary, and Appendix 1 is on Hop Picking and Appendix 2 is on Hops and Brewing. There is a good bibliography including internet sources, and an excellent index.

In the early pages Patrick refers to this book being for general readership and certainly the general reader will gain a very good knowledge of the industry, and its buildings. However, this book is an essential source for the brewery historian because of its use of historic literature enabling the reader to understand the changes over time, and likewise for those studying the development of the oast and hop kiln buildings in the two main regions. From a personal point of view, I would have liked a little more on the other counties where hops are no longer grown.

AMBER PATRICK