

Warminster Maltings Visit

Eleanor Yates

Photos by Carol Burdekin

HMG member **Robin Appel** kindly invited members of HMG to visit Warminster for a guided tour of the Maltings. Sixteen of us enjoyed an interesting afternoon which ended with a delicious cream tea in the garden.

The Maltings was built more than 160 years ago just as the other 'floor' maltings in the area were closing. Robin, an independent grain trader selling barley, bought the Maltings in 2001 and continues to run it now.



Robin told us of the development of barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), a grass and a major cereal grown globally from as early as 10,000 years ago. Robin and his predecessors at Warminster have selectively bred modern strains of barley. 70% are used as animal food and 30% as a source of fermentable material for beer, whiskey, soups and stews, and in some types of bread. Barley, which grows in six-row, two-row, and hull-less varieties, has wonderful names including Golden Promise, Steptoe, Plumage Archer and Maris Otter. This last is an English two-row winter variety commonly used in the production of malt and remains popular with craft and home brewers. A statue of an otter forming part of a water feature is in the Maltings garden. Craft brewers like to use locally grown barley for environmental and other reasons.



Barley grains are turned into malt in a traditional and ancient process. Robin explained this process before our guided tour. We then saw the various stages in action as we walked around the building beginning with the delivery of the 7 ton sacks of barley. Like all grains barley is not always at the correct moisture content for malting so it will be dried to 14% and, most importantly, stored for about 6 weeks in dormancy. Then when malting starts the grains will be steeped in several changes of water to start germination. This is stopped by drying when sprouting is seen and the correct enzymes for sugars have been measured.

We saw the drying floor where the grains were raked and spread several times a day for about 4 days to air-dry them and eliminate carbon dioxide.

The grains are then roasted in a kiln or oven to the correct colour and specification for their future job. They will then be dried and smoked again before storage on upper floors before being sacked for delivery to breweries. This is a labour intensive job in a very warm building and the malt-men need to work as a skilled team.

The tour ended with a much appreciated tea party. We visitors had not done any work but admired the hard labour we'd observed. On our behalf Ashok thanked Robin very much for the extremely interesting tour.

