

Closure of a Traditional Maltings

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Pictures by Andy Fish

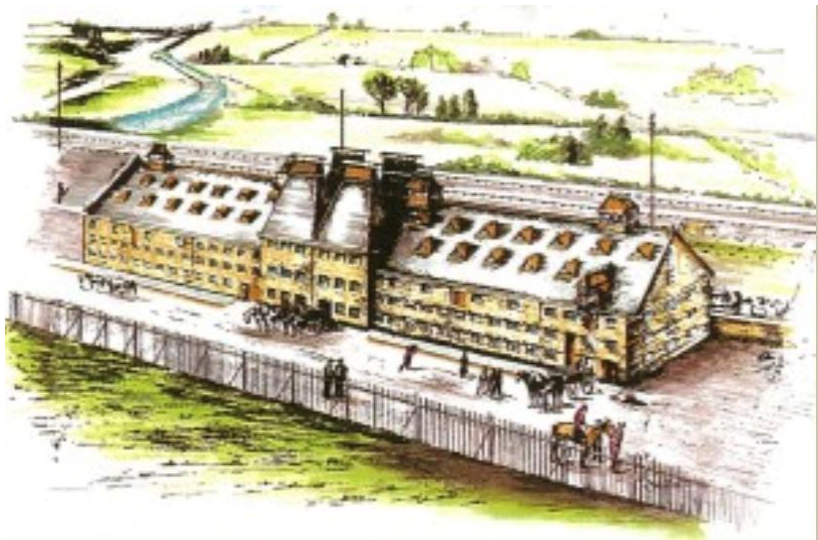


Tuckers Maltings at Newton Abbott, Devon, closed at the end of October.

This was one of only 4 traditional 'floor' maltings still operating in England and Wales, the others are at Warminster, Wiltshire, Great Ryburgh, Norfolk, and Castleford in Yorkshire. In Scotland there are eight more 'floor' maltings, each one part of their own distillery, but only one of these, Springbank, makes all its own malt, the others just make enough to maintain the craft, and satisfy the tourist industry. It would be fair to say that traditional 'floor' maltings are more rare than working windmills and water mills.

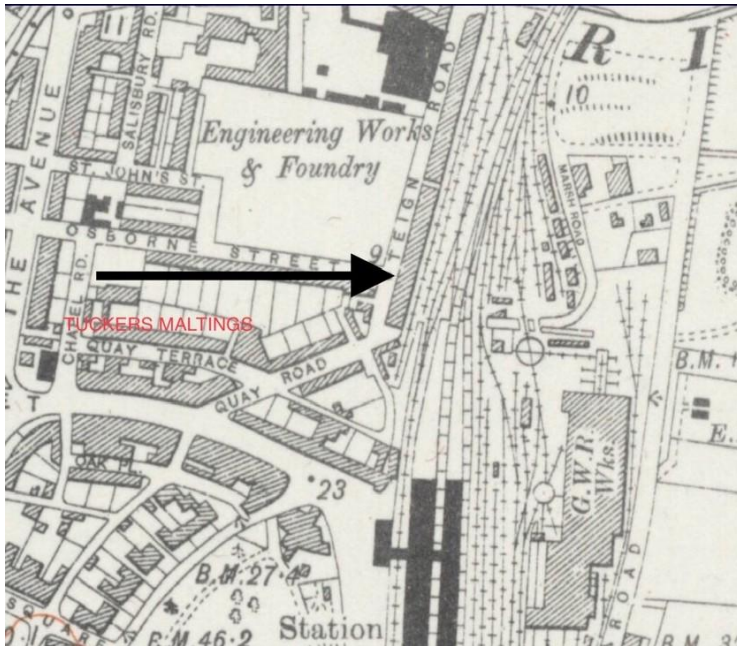
Edwin Tucker started a seed business in Ashburton, Devon, in 1831. The company quickly expanded into malt production with many tiny malt houses dotted across the West Country, before consolidating into one large malthouse at Ashburton in 1870, which remained open for the next 100 years.

At the end of the 19th century, Edwin's son, Parnell Tucker, seized the opportunity to build an even larger new maltings alongside the railway line at Newton Abbott. Designed by the well known maltings and brewery architect and engineer, William Bradford, the first phase of the construction, with two germination floors and two kilns, was completed in November 1900.



Architects drawing of the new maltings

With a capacity of 60 quarters (12 imperial tons) of barley per batch, this was always known as the "big side". The second phase of construction, with three germination floors and two more kilns was completed in 1901, with a capacity of 50 quarters (10 imperial tons) of barley per batch, and known as the "small side".



The structure of the maltings was a north-south configuration, with a public road (Teign Road) running along the western elevation, off which deliveries of barley in sacks could be loaded into the malthouses, and a railway siding ran along the eastern elevation, onto which deliveries of malt could be loaded out. The design of the building was eventually replicated, south, all along Teign Road. After World War 2 Tuckers acquired a large part of this for a granary for both barley storage,

and cereal and other agricultural seeds. Today part of this space is the Teignworthy Brewery, which until the end of October, boasted the shortest (malt) supply line of any brewery in the country!

The 4 original coal fired kilns, which took at least three days to dry and cure the malt, were replaced with oil fired technology in the 1960's – safer and half the time – but only two of the kilns were converted, and the other two were deconstructed.

Sadly, Parnell Tucker, and his immediate successors, could never have foreseen the day when sacks of barley would be replaced by deliveries in bulk aboard huge lorries, requiring a whole new logistical and engineering solution. At the same time, a housing development to the north of the maltings, converted Teign Road into a busy thoroughfare. Then the demise of the railway as the preferred transport for delivering the malt added another logistical challenge. All of these features represented a major drawback to developing and expanding the business



Right up to the end, the maltings continued to employ a whole raft of vintage equipment, including hand pulled malt ploughs, hand operated 'Redler' malt turners, and 'Robert Bobby' malt barrows, all of which would be up to 70 years old. None of this is unusual for traditional 'floor' maltings. However, until recently, Tuckers still operated a 1900 vintage 'Nalder and Nalder' barley screen, along with its twin malt screen. The original invoice on the wall showed that the pair were purchased for the princely sum of £203 0s 0d.

Since the millennium, exponential growth in the number of Craft Breweries, offered Tuckers a new lease of life, feeding an almost frenzied demand for Craft Ale from the tourists flocking onto the south-west peninsular. But, eventually, the big malt factories from the eastern counties, with their huge economies of scale, came barging in with offers of cheap malt,

stealing Tucker's customers away from underneath their noses. With no apparent inclination to fight back, and no succession plan, the business was inevitably, and sadly, doomed!

Now, Warminster Maltings in Wiltshire, Britain's oldest working, and most original 'floor' maltings (1855), stands completely on its own in the West Country.



View along Teign Road, looking away from the river.
Note the interesting discharge shoot, with chain, just beyond the 'For Sale' sign.

