

Eling Experience

Alison Stott

Following the Annual General Meeting we had a talk by Ruth Kerr, one of the members of the Eling Experience team. The Eling Experience project encompasses the Tide Mill, the Heritage Centre, and Bartley Water. Totton and Eling Council run the site and the New Forest District Council own the Tide Mill.



Copy of FGO Stewart postcard, about 1900, which shows the tide mill and its causeway, and the steam mill which burnt down in 1966 with its grey silos on the waters edge.

Ruth began by asking how many members had experience of applying for a Heritage Lottery grant (hardly any!). She explained that HLF have their own objectives and if yours have nothing in common with theirs then it will not work. Their main aims are 'Heritage', 'People', and 'Communities'.

Eling Experience has received a £1.7 million grant, for capital works for the Tide Mill and the new Heritage Centre and for ongoing work for the community. It was particularly important to give a good first impression upon entering the mill with the new entrance. A large amount of work has been undertaken to repair the machinery so that milling can resume, and improved accessibility throughout the mill enables all visitors to see everything working.

The Heritage Centre has more information about the mill with new displays in the Discovery Room, panels with information, digital displays and some hands-on activities. There is also a new café and extra space for an activity room.

Outdoors the path to Goatee Beach has been widened and levelled and a new footpath built right round the millpond to create a circular walk accessible for everyone including wheel-chair users. During this time the team have worked with University students, the New Forest Camera Club, local schools and many other groups. They are making every effort to involve local families.

Eling Experience was formally opened in April and they now hope to recruit more volunteers for tour guides, to help in the café, and to go out and about to events in the locality. There is a regular programme of events with family activities, talks, science, walks and so on.

Ruth was asked how they would maintain funding for the future and she said they had a business plan, including a farm shop as well as income from the café and activities.



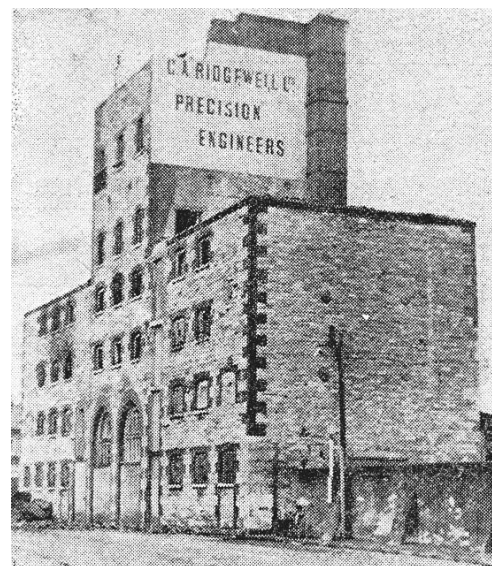
Keith Andrews

These steps at the entrance to the mill convert into a flat-floored lift for disabled access, thereby saving space over the more usual separate stairs and lift arrangement.



Ruth Andrews

Eling Experience (above) occupies the ground floor of the remains of the steam mill.



Tony Yoward collection

Eling Tide Mill Maltings

Robin Appel

HMG's recent visit to Eling Experience for the AGM in September was my first visit to the tide mill. Arriving early, and spotting our chairman on the quayside, I sought his guidance on car parking, and he directed me to the public car park. Walking back across the causeway I was immediately struck by an architectural feature on the so called 'old grain store' which immediately told me I was probably looking at a former maltings!



Two windows which face out over Bartley Water (*left*) feature distinctive square shaped vertical wooden bars, set at 45 degrees to the fascia, all just 4 inches apart, identical to the windows that surround my historic maltings in Warminster (*below left, enlargement of window on right*). Back in the 18th/19th century these wooden bars were imposed on the whole UK malting industry by the Commissioners of Excise who were responsible for regulating and collecting the Malt Tax.



A duty on malt was first introduced in 1644 to meet the growing costs of the Civil War, and over the next 200 years the inelastic demand for beer made the tax a soft target for government revenue in times of need. In fact, right up to its repeal in 1880, it consistently generated in the order of 10% of the total income from taxation. However, by the end of the 18th century, the enormous dependence on this one tax unleashed a complex web of legislation to prevent fraud and evasion.

The tax was levied on volumes of malt produced, and when the tax was hiked up in order to, for example, build a new fleet of warships for the Napoleonic Wars, maltsters struggled with the increase and sought ways to avoid it.

No malt was allowed to be manufactured without notifying the Excise Officers who had to measure the volumes at 3 points in the production cycle: in the steeping vessel, on the 'couch' (the resting floor for the 'green malt' between the steeping vessel and the germination floors), and the germination floor itself. The mean of the 3 volumes was that against which the tax was levied.



Ploughing malt at Warminster Maltings

One trick employed by maltsters seeking to reduce their tax bill was to temporarily remove green malt from the germination floors ahead of the Excise Officer's visit. The ventilation windows along the germination floors were the easy point of exit, and when it was established that this was a widespread practice, the window bars became part of the strict regulations, subject to onerous fines if not complied with.

When I went on to read the guide book *Eling Tide Mill, the history of a working mill* (2010 edition) a whole lot more evidence of malting was revealed. On page 8 it records that in 1581 there were "*two water wheels ... each driving two pairs of stones. One pair ground wheat, while the other (pair) crushed barley for malt making*". No, that is not quite right, 'the other' crushed malt for brewing – you do not crush barley before you make malt, but you do have to crush malt before you can brew beer!

It is also important to point out at this stage that the millstones would not have been interchangeable; crushing malt for brewing should deliver a very coarse grist compared to the fine grist that is flour. Each set of stones would have been dressed accordingly.

Then on page 10 the guide records "*There was also a kiln for drying germinating barley for malt brewers*". From the earliest photograph of the mill displayed in the Eling Experience exhibition (a photograph taken from the northern bank of Southampton Water), the kiln is very evident, albeit inconveniently situated on the eastern elevation of the mill, furthest from the germination floors. The kilning of the green malt is the final critical stage of the conversion of barley into malt. This photograph also clearly shows horizontal shuttered windows on the first floor of the maltings, all three of which are hinged half open for the important ventilation of the germination floor when malting was in process.

So all this suggests that half of Eling Tide Mill's original production was devoted to milling wheat for flour for baking, and the other half was making barley malt, and crushing the malt ready for brewing. We still crush malt for small brewers at Warminster Maltings today. Then, it was something a lot of smaller maltsters had to do, because many of their customers for malt would have been households brewing at home, and milling the malt could have been beyond their ability. My home in Droxford, part of which is the former village malthouse (1672), declared in 1771 that it had a 'Malt Kiln and Malt Mill ...' the latter probably a small pair of stones, gravity fed, and turned by hand. By comparison, Eling's investment in a dedicated Poncelet wheel driving a pair of stones, might have been viewed at the time as positively industrial, feeding a strong demand for milled malt.

Reading on, it is not surprising then, that also on page 10 of the guide, it records "*In 1885, there was even trade in beer supplied by Ashby's Brewery of Totton*". No doubt this would be beer coming back on the horse and cart which had just delivered malt to the brewery.

Back to page 4 of the guide, and it records that "*The mill building today was probably built in 1785 by John Chandler*", a prosperous and enterprising corn merchant, and "*the adjoining brick building, once the grain store ... was added early in the 19th century*". Instead of 'grain store' we need to substitute the word 'maltings'. This was the period when the Malt Tax regulations, which included the vertical wooden bars in the ventilation windows, became overzealous, causing maltsters to complain to the Commissioners of

Excise that they were being harassed "*with a vigour beyond the law*", and accused of "*an apparent delinquency, where none by fair procedure would be found to exist!*".

So it would appear Eling Tide Mill was making and milling malt for brewing for nearly 250 years, a significant part of its recent history. This has not been fully understood, and does not come over in the Eling Experience. This is something that should be rectified, because, although a flour mill and a maltings on the same site under a single proprietor was not uncommon in the 19th century, for example at Burnham Overy Mill in Norfolk, a tide mill based maltings is extremely rare, perhaps even more rare than a tide mill which once milled, or even still mills flour, such as Eling.

In HMG Newsletter 122, I recorded that on this year's summer visit Richard Ellis told us that mills always 'shook themselves to bits'. From my own knowledge and experience, maltings were always catching fire: the juxta-position of coal fired kilns and dried barley and malt grains. Here at Eling, the tide mill has continuously been ravaged by floods. So no wonder John Chandler found himself rebuilding it all at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. That the structures have withstood any further serious damage beyond neglect is particularly fortunate, as they represent a unique piece of history which from now on HMG will probably have to share with the Brewery History Society.