

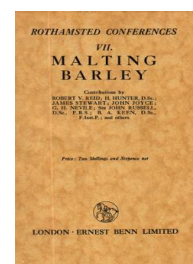
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Malting Barley

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WHAT BARLEY BUYERS WANT

By ROBERT V. REID

Past-President Institute of Brewing

To cry for the moon is to crave what is entirely beyond one's reach! I shall not go so far as to say that the buyers of malting barley crave the impossible, although some of my audience may think they come very near it. I am sure that you do not wish me to-day to expound empirical views on the quality of malting barley, although we all know that to a very great extent they rule the minds of the buyers. I feel sure you expect me to say something of more practical value. You will agree with me that in recent years we have embarked on serious practical and scientific research work to probe the mystery of quality in malting barley; if the results up to the present time do not yet guide the buyer very completely in his selection, there are one or two principles which are emerging, and the future is full of encouragement. As a Past-President of the Institute of Brewing I naturally know more of the details of our own research work, but as on our Barley Committee this experimental station, the N.I.A.B. of Cambridge, and the leading seedsmen's associations are fully represented, we can be satisfied that every interest is pulling its weight; and on behalf of the Institute I would acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe to all who contribute to our search after knowledge. I am sure my colleagues would wish me to take the opportunity I have here at Rothamsted to express our appreciation of the services of the director of this Agricultural Trust, Sir John Russell, in presiding over the deliberations of our Barley Research Committee of the Institute of Brewing.

The first principle which has emerged from the more enlightened policy of to-day is the necessity and usefulness of a very close co-operation and friendship between the fermentation industries and agriculture. A conference such as this we are attending to-day is sufficient answer to those who maintain that a natural enmity must always exist between agriculture and the brewing and distilling industries, and confirms my contention that a very close mutual friendship with farmers is the first answer to "what the barley buyers want." And the second answer is, that we buyers, recognizing the great decline in the acreage under barley in the last twenty-five years, want to find ourselves in the position to purchase increased quantities of British malting barleys. The reason is obvious. Increased output means more profitable business to ourselves and to this branch of agriculture, and the producers and consumers of British malting barley claim that their demand for a reduction of the present beer and whisky duties is reasonable and fair.

I must not take up your time with a lengthy exposition of the reasons why I opposed the proposed tax on imported malting barley,

which is largely supported by, and popular with, farmers ; they centre round the changed conditions of the brewing industry, the lower gravity of our national beverage—largely a matter of taxation—and the demand of the public under existing taxation prices for a bright and clear bottled “cup” that they hope may cheer, but certainly will never inebriate. Now in the manufacture of such a beverage a proportion—small, I am glad to say—of foreign sun-dried barley is an absolute necessity, and in a brewer’s mash a proportion of husky barley for drainage—small again, I am glad to say—is another necessity, and I have no hesitation in saying that, tax or no tax, that proportion of foreign husky malting barley must continue to be used.

Now I have dealt with my first two answers to the title of my paper ; perhaps they are more abstract answers than may have been expected, but when I sum them up—(1) Co-operation and friendship with agriculture ; (2) A large increase in our purchasing power—I believe they would materially ameliorate a certain depression which we know exists among the farmers who give of their best to supply buyers of malting barleys.

When I turn to actual practical requirements as to quality in malting barley I am on very difficult ground, and can only try to “postulate” some views which may guide buyers from our knowledge so far as our research and practice has at present taken us. “Postulate,” I think, is the best word to use, for its dictionary definition is “a proposition assumed without proof,” and probably you will agree that, while we have passed some milestones on the road to “proof,” we are still far from our journey’s end.

The standard required to-day to satisfy buyers with their efficient organization, practical and scientific, is a very high one, but that is fully appreciated, for efficiency prevails on the farm, as in the malt-house and laboratory. It has been said before that “quality is indefinable,” and those who have attempted to define its meaning seldom arrive at agreement. My own firm carries on its operations in the North, South, East and West, and, translating that into malting barley terms, I might say, in the districts where Goldthorpes, Standwells, Chevalliers, Archers, Spratts and Hybrids all present their rival claims to superiority. It would be futile for the maltster buyer to attempt to persuade the brewer in some particular district radically to change his practice where he gets satisfactory results from one seed variety because in another district some other variety appears to be superior. All the same, the experimental work that is being carried out so exhaustively to-day is going to supply us with much knowledge, and will probably prove that many of our accepted standards are false, and the progress of agricultural science may shake our most rooted convictions.

The grower must remember that while there is a class of buyer that requires the finest malt as regards appearance (combining quality, of course) there is another class quite satisfied with a sound malt, from

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which the required results can be obtained, without that exceptional bright colour and appearance required by the former. Therefore growers in districts where sound quality is the rule, without the exceptional colour or brightness desired by some, can carry on with confidence, for their barleys will be required and will be selected by many buyers.

The idiosyncrasies of buyers will always remain, and if they are not too irrational they are valuable, for they will always be an aid to growers by helping them to dispose of the variable crop which we must always grow under the conditions of the British climate.

Therefore, to dream of a standardized barley seed producing a standardized quality is hopeless, but, in its hopelessness, probably a fortunate limitation of what might unthinkingly be aimed at as perfection.

What buyers want generally in our present state of knowledge is barley of the Chevallier class, grown on *barley-land*, well ripened, of good shape, uniform, carefully threshed, thoroughly sound, with a nitrogen-content not exceeding, say, 1.6, free from weed contamination, and capable of producing first-class malt.

It might be worth while to tell you *what we do not want*—i.e. hard, steely, heated, badly threshed (skinned and broken corns), grown corns, high nitrogen. It may be useful to set out these general requirements in more detailed form as follows :

- (1) Careful selection of pure seed.
- (2) Careful manuring and treatment of the land.
- (3) Where possible, fields should be weeded during the growing period of the barley ; this would largely reduce the amount of objectionable extraneous matter in the barley when it is threshed.
- (4) The barley is usually greatly improved after being in stack.
- (5) Very great care should be taken in the stacking of barley to see that it gets proper aeration, so that there is no risk of the grain heating. Farmers do not generally realize that slight heating condemns the barley for malting purposes equally with serious heating. The presence of objectionable weeds (see paragraph 3) is very often the chief cause of a stack heating.
- (6) *Threshing*.—The threshing machines should be set with great care, and watched continually during the process to prevent the barley being damaged and skinned.
- (7) *Roof Corn* should be excluded, as, if mixed in with the bulk, the value is always seriously depreciated.
- (8) Where possible, barleys should always be baulked before delivery, and the sample for selling purposes drawn from all over the bulk, thus being thoroughly representative.
- (9) In the case of a farmer sacking up his barley direct from the threshing machine, and not being in a position to baulk it, his sample for selling purposes should be drawn from each sack.
- (10) Farmers should not be tempted to sell on the best sample, but on a fair average, as, when maltsters examine every sack on arrival at

their maltings there is no possible chance of any inferior barley escaping their notice.

(11) In the event of a farmer having more than one field of barley, it is advisable to keep the barley from each field separate, and to sell it on individual samples. It is possible that all the fields were originally sown with the same seed, but it cannot be taken for granted that each field when harvested will be equal in quality.

(12) Established confidence and a reputation for good deliveries will always secure a preference and the top market-price.

It would appear that of recent years our research work, combined with practical experiments and practical working, has established the importance of the nitrogen-content in the barley as a test of satisfactory malting quality, and much information and assistance is, and will become, available to the barley grower as the work proceeds.

I need not in this paper give you tables to prove the more satisfactory malting results from barleys with low nitrogen-content, these are available in the published analytical reports of the Institute of Brewing Research Work, and very interesting records are given by Lancaster in a paper read by him to the N.I.A.B., and published in that Institute's journal in 1926. In this paper Lancaster dealt with the subject exhaustively, and so fully covered the ground generally as to quality in malting barley that I would commend a study of it to those who would desire to take the important subject of my paper further than I am able to do to-day, for I am sure I have taken my full share of your valuable time, and, having been requested to talk to you on this subject, I have judged that it would not be in the real interest of the growers, the scientific research workers, the maltsters and the brewers if, in this period of transience from darkness to light, I were to dogmatize more particularly than I have done on "what the barley buyers want."

MALTING BARLEY: OLD AND NEW VARIETIES

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VARIETIES of cereals furnish suitable material for research on many lines, for they reflect the character of agricultural and consequently of human evolution in no uncertain manner. The diversity of form and adaptability to environment they display are matters of considerable interest to the botanist and evolutionist alike, but this meeting is mainly concerned with their economic side, and perhaps more particularly with varieties as we know and use them to-day.