

AN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY MALTING BUSINESS IN EAST SUFFOLK

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PATRICK STEAD WAS a very single-minded Scottish business man. His impact in East Suffolk, still set in the 18th-century rural mould, arrests attention because he was so different from most of his Suffolk contemporaries. Unlike them he had no local roots and he lacked their local political or social ambitions. He seems, in fact, more at home in Westminster than in the Suffolk countryside where he created his malting business.

He was born in 1788 at Leith Walk in Edinburgh, and he had the benefit of a Scottish education at Perth Academy. He was married to a Scotswoman and when he retired he went back to live in Scotland (Palmer 1874, 275; Newby 1964, 2, 8). When he started his career in Yarmouth as a corn merchant and factor he found Scottish partners. The first partner we know of was Thomas Mackenzie with whom he bought and sold grain on commission at Yarmouth and Beccles. Then in 1817 Stead and Mackenzie took in another partner, John Robinson of Banff, and the articles of partnership are the first clue we have to Stead's financial position. Stead and Robinson were each to bring in £2,000. Mackenzie was to put in £2,000 when sufficient profits had accumulated. Robinson was to obtain credit with a bank or mercantile house in the City of London to the amount of at least £2,000. If the business on an average of three consecutive years did not produce a profit of £600 a year, then any partner if he was so minded, and in view of such 'unprosperous events', could give notice of termination. No partner was to buy and sell on his own account beyond the amount of £1,500.¹ John Joseph Robinson came from a family of linen and stocking manufacturers in Banff. Their business went bankrupt in 1803 but they had a good many irons in the fire including shipping interests and a brewery company. Presumably John Joseph was able to raise the £2,000 credit, since he continued in partnership with Stead. Mackenzie seems to have left by 1822.²

The declared object of the partnership was buying and selling corn and grain on commission, but the partners were also soon malting barley. By 1822 they were certainly malting at South Town, Yarmouth, at Beccles and at Halesworth (Pigot 1822). In April 1821 they petitioned the Treasury 'for permission to place malt made from barley, the growth of this kingdom, under bond for duties...'. The petition, which was unsuccessful, was sent when a Select Committee was considering the Scotch malt duties and is an early example of Stead's close attention to parliamentary affairs (Ford 1862, 52-53).

The yield from taxes on beer and malt was one of the main sources of public finance at this time and the malt trade was subject to complicated rules on gauging, certifying, assessment and payment. 'Since the reign of Queen Elizabeth — an era celebrated for monopolies, no trade or manufacture has laboured under so vast a complication of oppressions from fiscal regulations and other disadvantageous circumstances as the malt trade', wrote William Ford (1862, 4). Ford approved Stead's 'judicious suggestions' regarding bonding but Stead does not appear to have been much involved in the controversies over the rules which so vexed Ford. The intricacies of the malting regulations may perhaps have appealed to Stead's legalistic mind.

The period after the Napoleonic Wars was a good time for those who could afford to buy or lease country property in Suffolk. Farmers and landowners, encouraged by the very high wartime food prices, had launched out on expenditure, often bringing too much marginal land under the plough. Now they were thrown into depression and debt by the post-war slump in prices. Selling-up resulted, and the shifting of property 'from hand to hand' — and especially from landowners to merchants — which angered Cobbett (Cobbett 1932, 303-305). It was probably about this time that Stead and Robinson either bought or leased the maltings in Bridge Street, Beccles and by 1821 they had also bought the brewery buildings at Halesworth

belonging to a partnership headed by Dawson Turner who ran the Gurney-Turner bank at Yarmouth (P.P. 1845 xvi, 57). A quarter-share in this business, which included a string of public houses, pertained to Turner's son-in-law William Hooker, and under his management the partners had been fighting a losing financial battle since 1815. Hooker was released from his sojourn in the brewery when he became Professor of Botany at Glasgow in 1820 (Allan 1967, 44-82). Stead and Robinson bought only the brewery buildings. They included a handsome dwelling house which faced on to Bridge Street and land and offices including some maltings which stretched down behind to the River Blyth.

Stead and Robinson were not interested in the brewing but they began some malting here in 1821 (P.P. 1845, xvi, 57). At the same time they took further advantage of the penury and financial difficulties which existed in the small country towns and villages around. In 1846 Stead stated that he had had malting establishments (presumably rented) at various times in a list of country places — Ipswich, Woodbridge, Sibton, Ramsholt, Trimley, Bungay, Wainford, Beccles, Saint Olaves Bridge, Southwold, Yarmouth, North Walsham — and he said that in 1824 or 1825 he had been malting in almost all these places (S.R.B. 25 May 1846, 59).

The headquarters of the business was in Yarmouth, for which port Stead claimed, in evidence to a Select Committee, average yearly export figures for corn of 339,766 quarters for the years 1824 to 1832. He proclaimed it to be the port exporting more grain and flour than any port in the world (P.P. 1834, vii, 50). Taking the coastal trade only, modern historians have calculated that Yarmouth at this time was the leading British port, sending a yearly average of 37,274 tons of grain around the coast in the years 1819-27. Of this total tonnage of grain about 85 per cent was barley and malt, so it is not surprising that it was on these that Stead's business was concentrated (Armstrong and Bagwell 1983, 157).

Stead lived in South Town, Yarmouth till 1838, at 34 Southtown Road (the turnpike road). His house was one of a row of solid merchants' houses with substantial gardens stretching down to the marshes. In Yarmouth he actively supported Charles Rumbold, M.P. and the Whig cause. He was also a friend of C.J. Palmer, lawyer and historian, who recorded that Stead was very active in promoting 'mercantile improvements' (Palmer 1874, 275). But Patrick Stead also joined the Rowing Boat Club and must have appeared on the river in their smart uniform of blue jacket, guernsey frock with green belt and straw hat with green ribbons.³

The business in both corn and malt was widely spread. Stead recalled that in the thirties he had sent large quantities of corn from Yarmouth and small quantities from Southwold, Ipswich and Woodbridge. At one time he sent a great deal of malt to Ireland (10,000 quarters in 1823-4). He sent barley to Brighton and Bristol and malt to Brighton, Liverpool and Manchester (S.R.B. 25 May 1846, 63, 85, 89; P.P. 1835, xxxi App. 61). In 1821 he wrote to Charles Rumbold that the town expected the Postmaster General to expedite 'our Northern Correspondence' from Liverpool, the North of England, Scotland and round by Huntingdon.⁴

By 1834 he claimed to be shipping to almost every port in the United Kingdom, but principally to London and the Humber (grain) and to London and Liverpool (malt). He was buying grain from farmers within a circle of thirty miles round Yarmouth and fifteen miles round Halesworth and Beccles. In Yarmouth some farmers brought boat loads of corn to the market on North Quay. But in the country Stead bought from samples proffered by the handful in pieces of brown paper. He needed to see and handle the barley and the art of selecting the grain was the main key to successful malting (P.P. 1834, vii, 50-63).

At some stage the partners began to supply Truman, Hanbury and Buxton with malt and barley. They do not appear to have been doing this before 1821, but they certainly supplied 1,000 quarters of barley in 1825 and were supplying pale malt to Trumans each season from 1825-26 onwards. From 1826 to 1829 they supplied Trumans with, on average, 6,886 quarters of malt each year.⁵ This relationship with Trumans was to become a decisive influence on Patrick Stead's career.

In the 18th century when porter was the popular drink, the big London brewers wanted brown malt and obtained it in very large quantities from maltsters in Hertfordshire and Essex. But by the end of the century tastes were changing in favour of a lighter beer and for this the London brewers preferred malt from Norfolk and Suffolk. According to figures from the malt duties Suffolk was the county making the most bushels of malt in 1801-02 (Mathias 1959, 539) and in 1833 the Suffolk collection centre was the second biggest in the country, registering 1,534,968 bushels (P.P. 1835, xxxi, 9).

Best quality malt required fine quality barley and it was 'the lighter well-drained lands which produced the short plump thin-skinned barley which every maltster wanted'. The eastern sands of Suffolk had the right conditions and here, as well as further into the centre of the county, the Norfolk rotation with barley and turnips was well-established. The farmers were thus happily placed to meet the increasing demands of the London brewers. In the early years of the 19th century the brewers were enthusiastically commissioning malt and barley in East Anglia through factors and maltsters such as Crisp Brown of Norwich, who acted for Whitbreads and were also beginning to buy up maltings in the area themselves (Mathias 1959, 403,416-17).

In 1830 the Government took the tax off beer and at the same time passed the Beerhouse Act enabling small householders to open beershops without a justice's licence. It has been estimated that the yearly consumption of beer increased from an average of 426 million standard gallons a year for the years 1825 to 1829 to an average 526 million standard gallons from 1830 to 1834 (Wilson 1940, 331,335). Truman's appetite for Norfolk and Suffolk malt, and for Stead's malt in particular, increased rapidly. From 1830 to 1836 his supply to them averaged nearly twelve thousand quarters a year; for the five years 1837 to 1841 it averaged between sixteen and seventeen thousand quarters a year.

In April 1838 Fowell Buxton raised with the other Truman partners 'the question so often discussed' as to the comparative cheapness of malt from Hertfordshire and Essex on the one hand and Norfolk and Suffolk on the other. Trumans were making that season 44,500 quarters of Essex and Hertfordshire malt (four suppliers) and 43,200 quarters of Suffolk and Norfolk malt (five suppliers). Patrick Stead with 16,000 quarters was the biggest supplier of the latter. His price at 55s. 3d. was the cheapest of all the suppliers and his extract ratio was very high. The Truman partners agreed to write to each of their maltmakers warning them that they had made an accurate estimate of the cost of malt from each — 'both quality, produce and price being taken into consideration' — and that they would cease to deal with those maltsters who stood worst. 'We feel disposed to encourage those whose Malt pays us best.' It was also agreed that they should 'look ultimately to making about two-thirds of our Malt in Norfolk and one-third elsewhere'.⁶

The 1830s are not thought to have been a good time for maltsters (Brown 1983, 44-47) but Patrick Stead was well-placed with the Truman business and also because of the scale on which he operated. Malting at this time was mainly done by small men on a small scale. In 1823 out of a total of 9,800 maltsters only 1,041 made above 550 quarters a year (10.6%) (Ford 1862, 292). In November 1834 Stead told the Commissioners enquiring into the Excise that he was malting from 15,000 to 16,000 quarters a year. Another big maltster who gave evidence at the same time, John Manton of Gainsborough, said he was carrying on the business very extensively and was steeping from 220 to 250 quarters every four days which probably means about 14,000 quarters a year at the most (P.P. 1835, xxxi, App. 61 & 62). In 1846, by which time he had abandoned shipping barley, Stead claimed to be making above 20,000 quarters of malt in the year. In reply to counsel he also claimed to know every town in England where there was a malting establishment and not to be aware that anyone paid more duty than he did. 'Then yours is as large as any in the kingdom?' 'I should say almost the largest' (S.R.B. 25 May 1846, 61,99).

Besides this expanding malt business Stead continued until 1840 to export corn. In 1845 he stated that up to 1840 he was shipping from 10,000 quarters to 50,000 quarters of grain each year (P.P. 1845, xvi, 57).

The Truman Making Account shows Stead making malt for them in the thirties at Yarmouth, Beccles and Halesworth and also at Wainford near Bungay where in 1834 he had three malt houses steeping seventy quarters every four days.⁷ All the maltings were beside rivers and this was essential for large-scale malting both to carry out the heavy loads of malt and to bring in the coal and cinders to heat the kilns. The proximity of the river at Beccles could be a hazard as Stead described (P.P. 1846, xviii, 477).

I stopt one evening at my clerk's house at Beccles bridge, when I anticipated a flood, I left the sitting-room quite free from water at 11 p.m. and at 4 o'clock next morning I was called and obliged to be assisted out by one of the watermen, in consequence of the lower floor being flooded knee-deep; — we were compelled to remove all the malt in process on the lower floors of my malt-houses which was very much damaged and some entirely destroyed and washed away by the floods.

Stead had long had a 'house of business' at Beccles and he made efforts in 1831 to have the navigation improved. He applied to Quarter Sessions to use money which had been collected under the old Yarmouth Haven and Pier Act to deepen the Waveney right up to Beccles bridge for sea-borne ships drawing ten feet of water. He demonstrated the possibilities on 15 April 1831 by sending one of his vessels, the *Friends*, from Yarmouth through St Olave's bridge and loading her with the first and only sea-borne cargo from his malt-houses at Beccles bridge to London.

The worthies of Beccles, however, were distracted by the possibilities, under the Beccles Port Act passed on 22 April 1831, of deepening the river from Beccles to its meeting with the new Norwich and Lowestoft Navigation. Stead complained in 1845 that under the Beccles Port Act tolls had been collected on sea-borne ships but all the money had been used up in legal and other expenses and 'never a penny has been laid out upon the river' (P.P. 1846, xviii, 481).

By 1845, however, he had left Beccles and indeed he may have ceased malting there after 1835 although he was still malting at Wainford in the season of 1836-37. He had lost his partner in March 1832 when the death of his elder brother William caused John Joseph Robinson to return to live in Banff. Stead must have been very stretched. The travelling itself must have been formidable, not only between the maltings but also between his three houses of business in Yarmouth, Beccles and Halesworth. He also attended markets at seven or more towns spreading south from Lowestoft down the coastal strip and as far west as Harleston and Eye.⁸ In 1837 he took the debatable but understandable decision to concentrate his business at Halesworth.

By this time Patrick Stead had achieved a considerable reputation both as a maltster and as a corn merchant. In 1834 he was deputed by the maltsters in the district round Yarmouth to represent them in giving evidence before the Commissioners of Excise Enquiry on Malt (P.P. 1835, xxxi, App. 61). Earlier in the same year he had given evidence as a corn merchant before the Select Committee on the Sale of Corn (P.P. 1834, vii, 50). In now deciding to concentrate at Halesworth he was confining himself to a restricted neighbourhood dominated by landowners and small-town citizens, both still haunted by problems of poverty and bankruptcies.

Halesworth, a small market town, was beginning at this time to expand as commerce related to agriculture and especially to the corn trade took the place of the dying textile trade. A hopeful sign was the interest shown in Halesworth by Gurney's Bank whose Halesworth branch by 1808 had branches under it at Bungay and Harleston and agencies at, among other places, Eye, Framlingham and Woodbridge. In 1839 Andrew Johnston, son-in-law and close ally in Parliament of Fowell Buxton, was appointed Manager of the Halesworth Bank (Bidwell 1900,

322). The developing grain business in Halesworth was signalled by the erection of the Corn Exchange in 1841 behind the Angel Inn (White 1844, 372).

The coombs of barley which arrived in Halesworth in farm wagons were of very good malting quality and there were several maltsters in Halesworth. Their interests, however, like those of the other tradesmen, were mainly local. Most were primarily brewers like William Atmer at the Angel or like the Reeve family who had been brewing in Halesworth since the 18th century. In partnership with Thomas Cracknell the Reeves owned maltings at Halesworth and Rumburgh but also owned the Halesworth brewery in the market place and a string of public houses. The George family at this time were building up a business as merchants and maltsters but the business which Stead envisaged was on a much larger scale and was based on export to other United Kingdom ports, mainly London, by means of the River Blyth which wound its way down to Southwold harbour.⁹ The Blyth had been made navigable in the middle of the 18th century by the determined efforts of Thomas Knights, a Halesworth brewer, but from the early years of the 19th century the tolls paid to the penurious River Commission steadily decreased until the arrival of Patrick Stead. The harbour, administered by a separate commission, became frequently blocked and had had to be dug out thirteen times between 1805 and 1818. Its problems caused Jacob Mealing, a well-known corn merchant, to leave Southwold for Norwich sometime after 1805.¹⁰

Stead must have long been aware of the problems presented by Southwold harbour. Moreover he had experienced in the years up to 1837, both in Halesworth and in the matter of the harbour, deadening frustration and formidable opposition to his plans. These experiences which might have deterred even a resolved disciple of Bentham must now be briefly described.

In 1824 Stead submitted successive plans to the River Blyth Commissioners for linking his recently purchased premises — the old brewery — directly with Halesworth quay. His proposals, first for a new cut and then for a railway, both had to be abandoned because owners of intervening property would not agree. He had to be content with an awkward roadway to the quay head carried along and over the river on posts and pilings. In 1826 Stead became a River Commissioner himself and in the following years he strove with some success to get the navigation improved and with less success to have the quay enlarged and wharves and landing places made for 'the encreased state of trade'. This increase, no doubt due to Stead's advent, was clear enough. The five-year total of dues paid on the River Blyth had increased from £781 for 1815-1819 to £1,986 for 1825-1829. Over the years the Commissioners had surveys carried out and plans made for the quay but their efforts were continually thwarted by small tenancies; in April 1836 Stead was still complaining about the inadequate accommodation on the quay, and he was increasingly dissatisfied with his access road.¹¹

Southwold harbour, at the mouth of the Blyth, was under the aegis of a different set of Commissioners. Under the first Act (1746) constituting the Harbour Commission, piers had been built and the harbour was considerably used particularly during the existence of the Free British Fishery at Southwold, 1750-1772 (Bottomley 1974, 11-12). The piers had stabilised the harbour but the entrance was still periodically blocked by the bar and this problem grew worse round the turn of the century and was exacerbated by the formation of shoals in the river behind the bar. The Harbour Commissioners appointed by the successive Acts, apart from the two bailiffs of Southwold, were drawn from the families and friends of the riparian landowners — Rous, Blois, Barne and Gooch. Encouraged by higher agricultural prices and in accordance with the national enthusiasm for enclosures in the late 18th century, they embanked their mud lands and made therefrom some beautiful pasture ground.

In 1820 John Rennie, C.E., then working at Yarmouth harbour, was asked to survey Southwold harbour. Rennie placed the blame for much of the shoaling in the harbour and for the growth of the bar on the lack of scour from the river during the ebb tide. This lack of scour, he said was due to the embankment of

about 1100 acres of ground over which the tides used to flow . . . of these about 550 are ancient embankments — 200 were embanked about 50 years since, — 100 in 1780 — 100 in 1804 — 100 in 1807 and 43 acres in 1818. . . the greater part of them are at Blythburgh.

Rennie saw the embankments as the chief obstacle to any real improvement of the harbour:

I am not aware that any remedy can be substituted for the deprivation of back water. To destroy the embankments already made and to allow the tide-water to flow into its ancient receptacles is no doubt the most obvious and effectual remedy that could be devised; but I fear that is now out of the question, particularly the 550 acres of ancient embanked land; but unless something of this sort is done, I fear but little I can advise will be of much use.

He did, however, go on to advise various measures, particularly the extension of the northern pier. It seems clear that he was seised of the position of the land-owning families and he seems to have been resigned to the embankments.¹² Stead was not. He seems, like some contemporary Utilitarians, to have felt a personal duty to fight entrenched rights and impediments to business efficiency. The harbour dues were paid by the ship-owners and merchants and as a first step he worked for their representation on the Harbour Commission.

The Commission was greatly strengthened in 1828 when John Edward Cornwallis Rous, Earl of Stradbroke, took the place of his lately dead father on the Commission and with it automatic chairmanship. Stradbroke quickly brought in Lieutenant F. W. Ellis, R.N. as Collector and Surveyor of Works. Ellis was a man of substance and intelligence. He lived in Southwold at Hill House on South Green; he took an active part in the affairs of the town; and he improved the harbour very considerably. He was appointed in June 1829 and at this time it also became necessary to apply to Parliament for a new Harbour Bill (S.H.C. Sept. 1828-Jul. 1829).

Sir Thomas Gooch and Sir William Rowley, the county Members, were to see this bill through Parliament and, with the astute assistance of Lord Stradbroke, Gooch out-manoeuvred Stead and his Whig and Radical supporters. The Act which emerged named thirty-two Commissioners. All of these apart from the bailiffs of Southwold were either members of land-owning families (including Rous, Blois, Barne and Gooch) or clergymen of whom there were fourteen named (11 Geo. IV, c.48).

According to Stead, before the Committee stage was reached there was reasonable discussion and he was satisfied there would be provision for periodically elected Commissioners. The Committee, however, delayed their vital clause naming the Commissioners till the last. Petitions against the bill then had to be rushed through for the third reading. There were petitions from the Borough of Southwold; merchants, ship-owners and ship-masters of Southwold; bankers, merchants, ship-owners and inhabitants of Halesworth; the growers of grain; and from Patrick Stead himself.

In his speech on the third reading Sir Thomas Gooch concentrated his attack on Stead. His speech, as reported by Barrow, also embodied a complete lack of comprehension of Stead's point of view — a lack of comprehension which he no doubt shared with his fellow land-owners.

Several of the Commissioners appointed by this Bill are gentlemen resident in the neighbourhood, who feel a strong interest in the prosperity of this harbour, as their tenants export their produce from it . . . Now the principal export of the port of Southwold is corn, and the merchants among whom Mr Stead classes himself are only the carriers of it. He has not a single foot of property of his own to stand on there — and it is not long since he has settled in that town.

It was property which the baronet understood, and with reason. Property counted for

everything in the 18th century and there had been little to disturb the power of the landed gentry in Gooch's constituency. 'This Mr Stead' Gooch complained again 'has no property in the town or in the county', and he also asserted with truth that 'there is not a Gentleman connected with that part of the country who would present such a petition'.

The petitions were in fact brought forward by Radicals and Whigs — Spring Rice, Poulett-Thomson, Member for Dover, Rumbold, Member for Yarmouth. The Radical, Joseph Hume, who was a strong supporter of Stead's cause now and later, attacked Gooch in the debate but rather muddled the issue by trying to introduce a clause prohibiting the election of clergymen as Commissioners.¹³

This last ditch attempt to thwart Gooch in the Commons was unsuccessful. Stead, who was staying at the Tavistock Hotel in Covent Garden, subsequently felt he had a chance of having the Bill defeated when the Lords sent it back to the Commons with an amendment. According to Stead, however, Lord Stradbroke then gave him to understand that he would use his influence to ensure that four or five Commissioners from Halesworth would be appointed at the first meeting of the new Commission. Stead therefore wrote to Hume and to Gooch saying he would withdraw his opposition to the Bill (R.B.C.1, 5 June 1839).

Patrick Stead did not get the Halesworth Commissioners he wanted, but in any case one of the main weaknesses of his position was that his was such a lonely voice. In 1845 he claimed that he had been paying about one-third of all the Southwold port dues ('I believe I am paying £300 and £400 and sometimes £500 a year in port dues, the whole revenue of the port being £1100'; P.P. 1845, xvi, 58). No other payer of dues came near to Stead's figures. And for the most part the men who used the port were locally based, dependent on local goodwill and thus in the main on the local landowners — merchants like Samuel Gayfer of Walberswick who supplied the Blois family with oats and lime, and tenant farmers like Cooper of Westwood Lodge, Blythburgh.¹⁴

In face of these experiences Stead none-the-less decided about 1837 to centre his business at Halesworth. Death enabled him to purchase land beside the old brewery property and in May 1837 he asked the River Blyth Commissioners to agree to extend the Navigation from the present quay basin towards this new property, purchased as he told them 'with a view of concentrating his Business in the town of Halesworth'. He also agreed to have all the work done, including the necessary new lock and a bridge over it, for a total sum of £200.

The River Commissioners agreed and within a year both this work and the construction of the new malt offices was completed. Stead was now able to bring his wherries up a new creek which penetrated into the maltings complex. The complex extended from the river to Quay Street. Further buildings stretched along Quay Street and in them there was a low arch through which the carters with bent heads steered their wagon loads of barley.

Stead had four malting offices here (Fig. 23) (now all demolished) and the following year he was able to purchase land and buildings beside the Quay and again stretching to the road where he constructed three further malt offices (Fig. 24). He had moved his household from Yarmouth to the Halesworth house in 1838 and in 1840 Yarmouth ceased to be his business centre.¹⁵

In taking his decision to concentrate at Halesworth he was certainly influenced by the excellent barley grown on the farms in the neighbourhood.

I found the advantage of having a malting establishment at Halesworth beyond all other places where I had carried on the business of a malster on account of the quality of the water and also the quality of the barley which is of a very fine kind and which is grown in the neighbourhood — in fact it is so good that I cannot find any so good anywhere else.

... Generally speaking we find the finest barley comes out of the Parishes of Middleton and Leston — Halesworth is also very fine and sometimes there is very fine grown at at Harleston (S.R.B., 25 May 1846, 60-62).

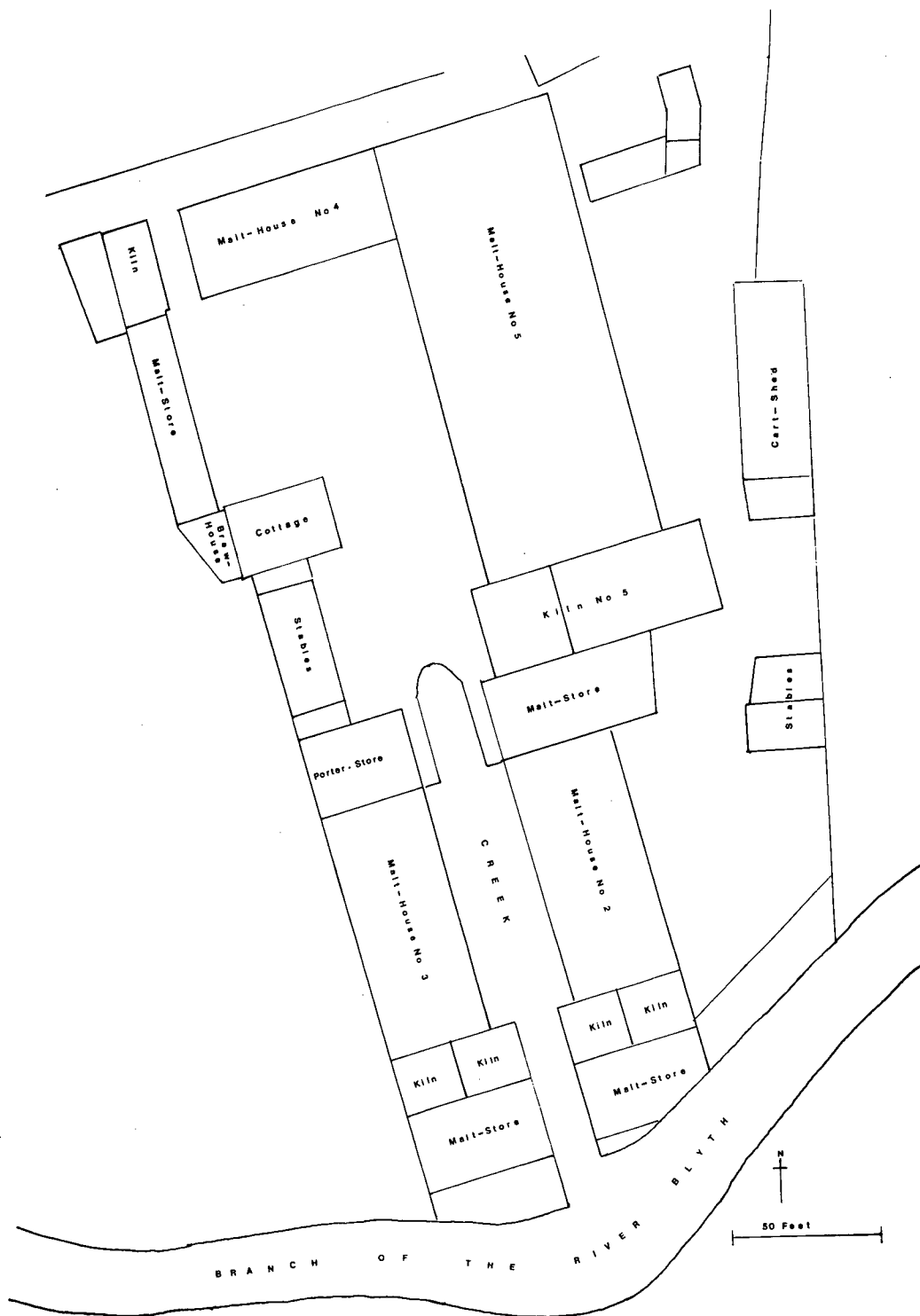


FIG. 23 — Stead's Halesworth maltings: the first complex, as shown in plans drawn in 1867 by J. Stagoll.

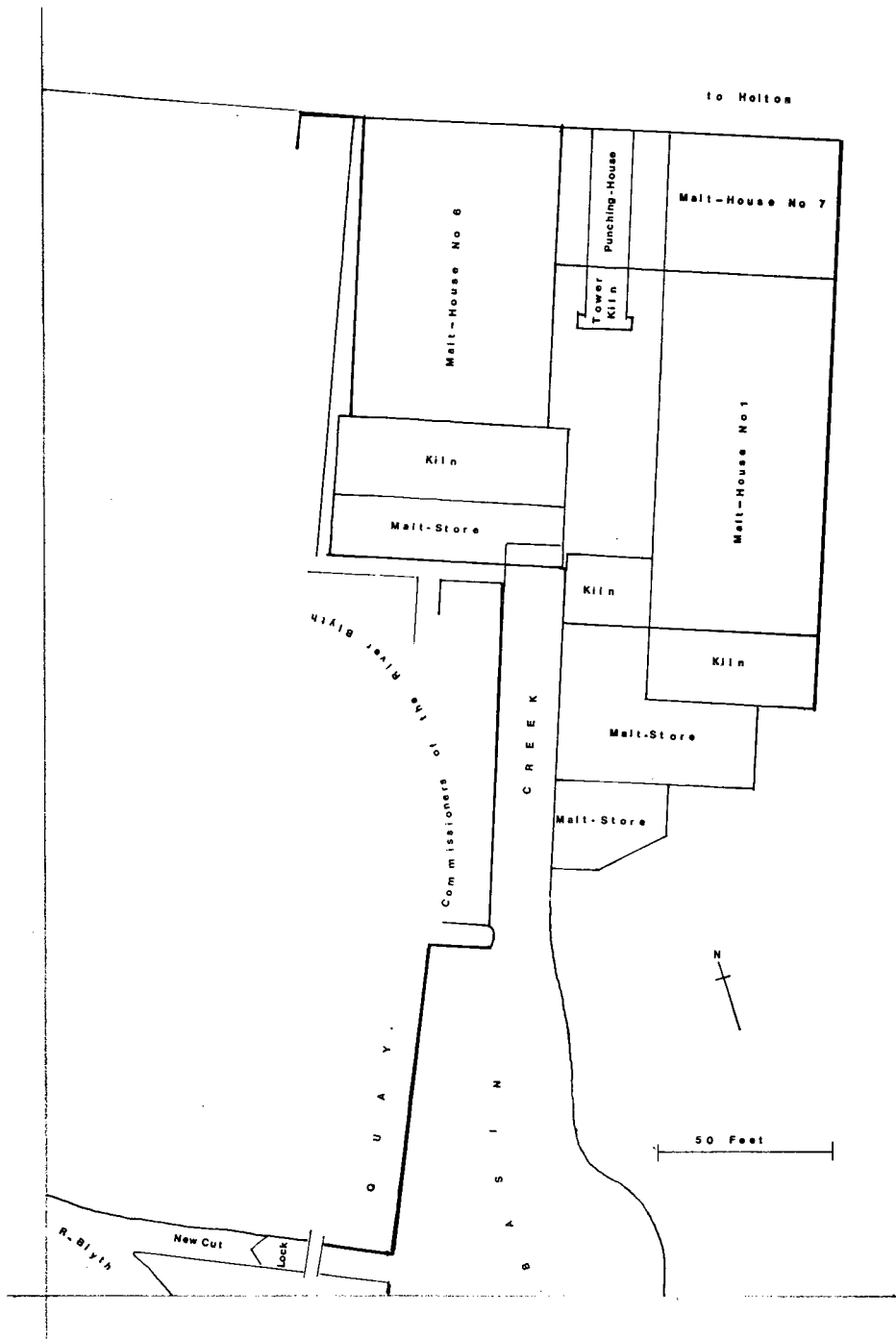


FIG. 24 — Stead's Halesworth maltings: the second complex by the Quay and including the tower kiln, as shown in plans drawn in 1867 by J. Stagoll.

The quality of the barley and the opportunity which at last came his way of constructing his own buildings on sites with excellent access to the river and to the road were obvious attractions. Patrick Stead also had another reason for wanting to build and plan his own malt offices. With the adaptable ingenuity and self-confidence shown by many entrepreneurs of his time Stead patented and built maltings using steam for both heating and damping. Malting has been until recently a very conservative industry in this country. Stead's inventions made scarcely any impact, a fact which Stopes in his authoritative book on malting, written forty-three years later, remarked on with surprise and derogatory comments about 'singular insular prejudices' (Stopes 1885, 207-8, 224, 372).

Stead's patent, dated 1842, was very comprehensive. It included the use of steam and steam-produced heat both when the grain was swelling on the floors and also in the kilning process. Instead of the one-floor kilns then in use he advocated a four-floor kiln. Each floor was to have a trap door and the malt would be moved down from floor to floor. The higher floors would be heated by steam forced through the floors with the application of a blowing machine.¹⁶

In Halesworth Stead had an iron foundry conveniently at hand and he built his kiln in the form of a tower fifty feet high which certainly caught White's attention and was carefully described by him in his 1844 Directory (White 1844, 371-2). It was in his second set of buildings, beside the quay, that Stead put his steam machinery. The tower kiln is shown on a plan drawn in 1867 (Fig. 24) and can also be seen in Plate VIIIa. Only one small section of Stead's buildings now remains — a five-floor building facing on to the road and shown on the plan as malt-house no. 7. From 1843-44 to 1846-47 Stead was delivering 'hot air' and 'steam' malt to Trumans in considerable quantity. But about 1847 the steam apparatus must have completely failed, facing Stead with a serious loss.¹⁷

These bold developments naturally turned Stead's mind in the direction of the Halesworth fire engines. In the small-town atmosphere of Halesworth, as in the Blyth valley, Stead was an indigestible figure. His attendance at vestry meetings was very spasmodic and he was generally there to urge the spending of money in the interests of his business. There was a strong party in the Vestry, led by John Read, solicitor, which opposed any expenditure whether on a new coat for the beadle or on the town fire engine. Stead, however, did have an ally in Andrew Johnston, a fellow Whig but also a man who as bank manager and churchwarden had an established position in the town. Protracted arguments about the fire engine lasted from 1842 to May 1844 when a grant of £10 was agreed to put the fire engine in an efficient state, and Stead's offer to erect a shed for the engine at the end of his maltings was accepted.¹⁸

Under the arrangement with Trumans they paid for the barley bought on their behalf, together with duty and freight. They paid Patrick Stead around 5s. a quarter for making the malt and from 1838 to 1851 he received from this on average about £3,800 a year. Trumans were not his only customers for malt, but his dependence on them must have been greatly increased in 1840, when he gave up shipping barley after bitter experience with the bar at Southwold harbour.¹⁹

His customers for barley were other maltsters, like William Catt of Brighton, brewer and maltster, and they could not tolerate the late arrival of their barley (P.P. 1845, xvi, 60-61). Stead explained the position of his customers:

A maltster must have his barley as the case requires because we have to wet it every four days and unless you do it you lose the wages of the men, the rent of the house and there is the want of the malt for making the beer (S.R.B. 25 May 1846, 87).

During much of the thirties Lieutenant Ellis by the use of steam dredgers had maintained a relatively free passage through Southwold harbour to Blackshore and Reydon quays. From 1837, however, the situation deteriorated with shallow water on the bar and shoaling within the

harbour. Ellis hired the Lowestoft steam dredger to deal with the shoaling and in June 1839 reported that 'the interior of the harbour may be said to be at the present time in a far better state than it ever was known before in the memory of the present generation'. The problem of the bar he regarded as due to unsurmountable natural causes which presented 'a combination of adverse and disadvantageous natural evils unparalleled in the globe' (Ellis 1839, 7-8, 21-22).

The hazards of the bar were described by Stead in evidence in 1845:

Do you mean that the bar had been raised in 1838 so high that persons could walk across? — In 1838 or 1839 not only persons but even horses and carriages for many days. A great number of vessels were inside; no water ebbed in or went out; it was a perfect lake.

His vessels were detained for long periods, including the *William* and the *Hawk*, loaded with corn bound for Newcastle and Perth. Because of the detention both were lost in the dreadful gale of January 1839 (P.P. 1845, XVI, 53).

Patrick Stead's main remedy for the harbour was demolition of the embankments so that the tidal waters would accumulate as they once had and scour the harbour at the ebb tide. He embarked now on an energetic but fruitless campaign against the entrenched riparian owners. Their weight and strength in the locality was illustrated in July 1838 when in Stead's absence a meeting of the River Blyth Commissioners was called at the White Hart, Blythburgh. Lord Stradbroke, a shareholder, took the chair and the meeting condemned proposals for straightening the navigation between Rous and Blois lands and also confidently decided that the county magistrates and the trustees of the turnpike road would not entertain proposals to replace the bridge at Blythburgh — described by James Walker, C.E. in 1841 as 'a disgrace to the Navigation and the County'.²⁰

The following year, however, Stead galvanised the River Commissioners to memorialise the Harbour Commission on the 'ruinous state' of the harbour. In response, in the late summer of 1839 a Committee appointed by the Harbour Commission met in Southwold Town Hall to receive evidence from the River Commissioners as to how the harbour might be improved. Stead had produced eight captains of vessels to testify to the parlous state of the harbour and prepared to state that the main cause was the decrease of backwater due to the banks. Stead was concentrating his attack on the embankments and he had already privately obtained counsel's opinion that they were 'public nuisances' and illegal.²¹

His views on the banks were confirmed by James Walker, C.E. in his Report of 1841 which gave details of the acreage of marsh enclosed and the number of cubic feet of water this excluded. But Walker, like Rennie, felt that it was too late to try to destroy the banks — indeed practically out of the question. He adopted the rôle of conciliator and optimistically suggested that a first step would be 'a perfect understanding between the Harbour and River Commissioners' (R.B.C.2, 21 Jan. 1842).

Stead forged obstinately on — angry that he, the main payer of harbour dues was not permitted to inspect the harbour accounts except as a matter of courtesy; angry at the way the accounts were kept, lumped together without quantity or price; suspicious of Ellis; above all angry both that he was effectively excluded from the management of the harbour and that the families who benefited from the embankments now controlled the management but made no contribution to the expenses of the harbour's improvement.²²

Locally there was no more action he could take. He therefore wrote to the Admiralty, the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, and to the Board of Trade; he petitioned the House of Commons.²³ In July 1844 the Admiralty sent down Captain Washington to hold a public inquiry and to report on the past and present condition of Southwold harbour. Washington held a very thorough enquiry, including a row up the river with Ellis and Stead. He concluded that

Ellis had made great improvements by dredging and straightening but that these could not compensate for the 'enormous loss of scouring power sustained in consequence of the embankments'. He calculated that 'the 1500 embanked acres would yield upwards of £2000 a-year' and suggested that those who benefited might reasonably be asked to contribute to the deepening of the bed of the river, which was the main improvement he suggested (P.P. 1845, xvi, 173-75).

The following May Southwold was scrutinised by the Tidal Harbour Commission. Joseph Hume was in full cry and under his leading questions Patrick Stead laid before the Commission all his grievances and tribulations. The Commissioners reported that in the north of England 'the spirit of commercial enterprise' had finally broken through the barrier of landed and fishing and corporation interests but in some southern ports

we regret to report that those interests have proved too powerful and that the consequence has been in several cases a dry bar, a deserted port, and all but ruin to the ship-owner and merchant. The river Blyth and the port of Southwold on the east coast offer strong proof of the correctness of these statements (P.P. 1845, xvi, viii-ix).

The position at Southwold was not altered by the Reports of the Tidal Harbour Commission and the riparian owners apparently felt their position was more secure with the passing of the general Enclosures Act of 1845 (P.P. 1845, xvi, 67). The scene was now beginning to change with the boom in railways. At the end of 1845 the River Blyth Commissioners received notice of application for a railway proposed to run through Halesworth. More immediately relevant, the line from Norwich to London via Ely was completed in 1845. In 1846 Arthur Prior stated that Trumans were now bringing in a great deal of malt by rail and were finding it cheaper than by sea. And at the same enquiry Stead said that he had been told by his customers that he must purchase his barley for 2s. or 3s. less to compete with suppliers able to use the railway from Norwich.²⁴ Stead, who was himself a director of the Ipswich line, was fully aware of the potential of railways for transporting malt:

If they [obstructions to navigation] continue as they are, I think the railway will carry a great deal of the traffic; indeed for malt going to London, the whole. My thorough belief is that the effect of railways will be to do away with the small ports and make Yarmouth, Ipswich and Lynn the three ports for Norfolk and Suffolk (P.P. 1846, xviii, 519).

Stead delivered himself of this opinion at the end of 1845. From about this time onwards he was probably thinking of selling up. Sometime in the next eighteen months he was faced with the failure of his ambitious steam installations. Trumans had been interested in buying his malting establishment since 1843 and in April 1849 the partners agreed 'to offer £18,000 for the whole of Mr Stead's malting houses and landed property at Halesworth including all his cottages and all property whatever connected with the malting establishment including fixtures as well as the Canal shares'. In October they agreed that he should rent the maltings from them for £1,200 a year but this arrangement was only for a brief period. In March 1851 they were arranging for Robert Burleigh to 'work the Maltings at Halesworth at the ensuing Season upon such terms as we may consider most advantageous to us'. Stead wrote to the River Commissioners in June 1851 that he had disposed of all his property in the River Blyth Navigation — £910 with interest — to Trumans.

He sold his business to Trumans for £18,000. Subsequently he tried to induce the partners to bear half the loss of the steam apparatus which suggests that he must have discussed this project with them. He was, however, unable to produce any written agreement and Trumans were not forthcoming.²⁵

Patrick Stead returned to Scotland and lived at Helensburgh, Dumbartonshire. He died in 1869 at the age of eighty-one and left £55,825 of which about £25,000 eventually went at his bequest to build and endow the Patrick Stead hospital in Halesworth (Newby 1964, 7-12).

He had succeeded as a corn merchant and maltster in East Suffolk in the difficult post-war years when things could easily go wrong and bankruptcy was never far away. He had accumulated capital and he used it to build up a lasting business in Halesworth where he employed thirty-six men.²⁶ The red caps of the maltsters became part of the Halesworth scene.

The plumes of steam and the smell of roasting malt continued to rise from Stead's maltings and the export of malt from Halesworth to London, only gradually taken over by the railways, continued for over a hundred years. The drive and persistence which were somewhat wasted in Stead's losing fight with the landed gentry over the embankments benefited their tenants whose wagons, loaded with barley, could still be seen in the early 20th century lined up outside the maltings Stead had built.

A NOTE ON MEASURES

Malt at this time was measured, not weighed. The basic unit was the quarter which comprised eight bushels. The East Suffolk farmers and merchants reckoned their barley and malt in coombs. There were two coombs to a quarter and one coomb filled a sack. A sack of barley weighed about 16 stone; a sack of malt weighed about 12 stone.

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I am most grateful to Mr. B. Ballard for kindly lending the original plans on which the Figures were based.

NOTES

- 1 Articles of partnership, Stead, Mackenzie, Robinson, 1817, N.R.O. D51/1978.
- 2 I am grateful to Mrs N. Greatrex, Nottingham, for information about the Robinson family. J.J. Robinson married the sister of C.J. Palmer.
- 3 Palmer, *Diary*, 2 Jul. 1823.
- 4 Stead to Rumbold, 15 Jun. 1821, N.R.O. YL 14/8.
- 5 Truman Malt Ledgers, 1818-21, 1825-34 (There is a gap between 1821 and 1825), T.H.B.
- 6 Truman Malt and Barley Ledgers, 1834-44 and Thursday's Private Memoranda, 12 Apr. 1838, T.H.B. 'Norfolk' was often used to include Suffolk.
- 7 Making Account, 1835-37, T.H.B.; P.P. 1835, XXXI, App. 61.
- 8 Palmer, *Diary*, 4 Mar. 1832; S.R.B. 25 May 1846, 94-95.
- 9 Robson, 1839, 44-5; sale of Halesworth Brewery, 1855, N.R.O. MS 18622/252.
- 10 R.B.C.1; Abstract of tolls on R.Blyth, N.R.O. EAW 9/24; Maggs, 1842, 12; P.P. 1845, XVI, 57.
- 11 R.B.C.1., 2 Jun. 1824-5 Apr. 1836; abstract of tolls, N.R.O. EAW 9/24.
- 12 J. Rennie, C.E., Report, 6 Jan. 1820, B.L. 8775 d 4.
- 13 P.P. 1845, XVI, 57-58; House of Commons Journals, 1830, Vol. 85, 4 Mar., 3 May, 19 May, 21 May; Barrow, 1830, II, 3 May.
- 14 S.R.O. I., HA 30:312/418; S.R.B. 25 May 1846, 140.
- 15 R.B.C.1., 31 May 1837-5 Jun. 1839; P.P. 1845, XVI, 57. I am grateful to Mr B. Ballard for his help and information about the Halesworth maltings.
- 16 Patent No. 9475, 1842, Specification of Patrick Stead, 'Manufacture of Malt', Patent Office.
- 17 Truman Barley Ledgers, 1843/44-1846/47, Private Ledger, 1845/46, Thursday's Private Memoranda, 10 March 1853, T.H.B.
- 18 Halesworth Vestry Minute Books, 20 Apr. 1840-9 Jan. 1845, S.R.O.I., FC 184/A1/2; Johnston above p. 118.

- 19 Truman Barley Ledgers, T.H.B.; P.P. 1845, XVI, 57.
- 20 R.B.C.1., 17 Jul. 1838; R.B.C.2., 21 Jan. 1842.
- 21 R.B.C.1., 5 Jun. 1839, 8 Jul. 1839; P.P. 1845, XVI, 55.
- 22 P.P. 1845, XVI, 56-60; Petition, Aug. 1848, B.L. 8775 d 4.
- 23 Stead's petitions, N.R.O. EAW 9/36; P.P. 1845, XVI, 58.
- 24 N.R.O. EAW 9/45; S.R.B. 26 May 1846, 107-8, 25 May 1846, 92.
- 25 Truman, Thursday's Private Memoranda, 20 July 1843, 23 April 1849, 19 Oct. 1849, 28 Mar. 1851, 10 Mar. 1853, 7 Apr. 1853, T.H.B.; R.B.C.2., 4 Jun. 1851.
- 26 Census Return, Halesworth 1851.

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Abbreviations for MSS

- B.L. British Library.
- N.R.O. Norfolk Record Office.
- R.B.C.1 Minute book of the River Blyth Commissioners and Committee, 1757-1839, N.R.O., EAW 9/1.
- R.B.C.2 Minute book of the River Blyth Commissioners and Committee, 1839-1856, N.R.O. EAW 9/2.
- S.H.C. Minutes of Southwold Harbour Commissioners and Committee, 1804-1859, Southwold Town Hall.

- S.R.B. Minutes of Evidence, Commons Select Committee on Railway Bills (Group 22), Ipswich, Norwich, Yarmouth and Halesworth and Norwich Bills, HC 1846, vol. 42, House of Lords Record Office.
- S.R.O.I. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.
- T.H.B. Truman, Hanbury and Buxton papers, Ac 73.36, G.L.C. Record Office.