

Malting

Beer making was another semi-capitalized industry. There were many brew houses recorded in Banbury during this period. However, much of the malting was done as a sideline by villagers, the resulting malt being sold to the Banbury brewers. Evidence for this can be seen in local inventories, which often list malting, but no brewing equipment or brew house.

‘It[em] In the killhouse seaventeene quarteres of mault rated at fower shillings a bushell
It[em] in the mault house one mault mill & other Cumberments
It[em] In the working house 2 mault garners’

An excerpt of the inventory of the goods and chattels of William Bradford of Bodicote, husbandman. 1623.

Barley would be harvested, then the grain soaked for 65-72 hours. During this time the water needed to be changed daily. The grain was then spread onto the specially tiled malt house floor to germinate before being dried and cured for about four days. The malt house needed constant air movement, so the aroma of toasting barley being vented out into the village must have been a welcome relief to the usual ‘fragrance’ of the village.⁷

Food

Food that could not be produced within the family had to be bought. Most purchases took place in the local markets, or in the village shops. Whilst the scent of a bakery could liven the appetite, to twenty-first century eyes and noses the butcher’s shop must have been a nightmare. With little understanding of hygiene and few laws to protect the consumer, it is no wonder that the Englishman has inherited a taste for well-cooked meat.

Finally, add the pigs, cows and sheep that were grazed on every piece of available common land and the pounds to hold stray animals that wandered at will through the village. Add also the dyers emptying their vats of rotting vegetation into the gutters, the horses and bullocks being driven through the streets to the fields, the goose grease that was liberally applied to all things mechanical, and there is only one conclusion. Seventeenth century village life must have been noxious and at times nauseous.

⁷ Jonathan Brown: *Steeped in Tradition: The Malting Industry in England* (1983).