

The History of EDME

When Did It All Begin? The Early Years 1884-1897.

When did it all begin? A fundamental question to ask, especially at the start of a history. Documents tell us that on Thursday 20th February 1896 a Mr. E.M.Lauderdale took the chair at the first board meeting of The English Diastatic Malt Extract Company Ltd; this event, however, is not the start of the story. Other sources indicate that, in 1881, three gentlemen started a business, at Mistley in the county of Essex, to make and sell malt extract. They called their enterprise The Condensed Wort and Brewer's Meal Company, something of a mouthful by any standards. These three, Robert Free, Richard Southby and Thomas Amey had various associations with the brewing and malting trade. Robert Free was a maltster and the founder of Free Daniells a notable malting company, Southby and Amey appear to be consulting chemists and it was the former who supplied the expertise about evaporation, an essential part of the process. In 1884, the name of the business was changed to The English Diastatic Malt Extract Company and it is this date that has always been taken as the founding of the company. Little that was written down about the early struggles of the fledgling company has survived.

With the name and the manufacturing site in place we can read the minutes of that meeting of 1896 in a new light. The meeting was held to amalgamate the English Diastatic Malt Extract and The Condensed Beverage Companies. The shares in this new undertaking were allocated to Robert Free and twelve private shareholders, to Messrs. Free Daniells and to the liquidator of The Condensed Beverage Company.

At that so-called first meeting, in 1896, the Memorandum and Articles of Association were adopted and a company solicitor and secretary were appointed. With the election of J.E.J.Johnson and Stanley Egerton Free as Joint Managing Directors in March of 1896, the newly constituted company was definitely up and running. Having joint managing directors, Johnson was from the Condensed Beverage Company and Free was a nephew of Robert Free, seems to have been a trait of the organisation down the years. Whether this was expediency or weakness is not clear, but the arrangement did not always prove successful.

A notable event occurred in April 1896. The first Annual General Meeting of the new company was called but on the duly appointed day only the Chairman and the Secretary turned up; typical EDME! It is comforting for today's management to know that our Victorian forebears occasionally got it wrong.

At the end of 1896, an attempt was made to merge the business with an unnamed buyer. A shareholder's meeting passed a resolution to this effect but the matter was never pursued and was formally abandoned in January 1897.

The enterprise must have prospered, an interim dividend of 5% was declared on the first half-year's trading. In February 1897, the directors went on the acquisition trail and proposed to pay £1100 for Messrs Carter and Co., £3500 for the Britannia Malt Extract Manufacturing Company and £2000 for Mr. Thomas Murray's business. Clearly they were making a bold move for the share capital of the company was only £15000. A Special General Meeting was called for the 2nd March 1897 which resolved to increase the capital to £65000 by the creation of 5000 shares of £10 each. The directors were empowered to purchase any business "they deemed to be conducive to the interest of the company." Also the name of the company was

changed to EDME Ltd. This must have come as a relief to minute writers and typists for all of the next hundred years. Cash was urgently needed for these purchases and Johnson obtained a loan of £4000 from Barclays Bank.

In the sixteen years between 1881 and 1897, EDME had been renamed, merged, almost sold and acquired three more businesses; so much for Victorian values of prudence and stability. A case could have been made for a period of consolidation. However this was not to be, for along with the Britannia Malt Extract business EDME had acquired a new shareholder, a Mr. H. Mogridge and a depot at Hammersmith. Both were to prove a thorn in the side of the directors.



The factory, up to now quietly making malt extract down in rural Essex, started to experience starvation of its water supplies. Mr. Lovell, the factory manager, complained that the Tendring Hundred Water Company was failing to deliver its agreed volume.

Financial prudence was certainly extended to the staff. A certain Mr. Hook was taken on as a Clerk and Traveller. His work consisted of "keeping the books, making out accounts and general clerk's work, also calling on likely buyers of extract in the counties of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridge and Herts." His salary was to be thirty shillings (£1.50) per week plus expenses!

In the spring of 1897, the London offices were moved to 5 New London St and the telephone was installed.

Depots, Agents and Water Supplies 1897-1909

The Britannia Malt Extract Company leased premises in Hammersmith and it was decided to run this facility as a depot, the products being supplied from Mistley. From the start this proved to be a poor choice. Hammersmith is first reported to be making losses in February 1898 and at the Board meeting of that month the dreaded words, cut costs, appear. The London office, so recently rented, was given up and part of the Hammersmith Depot used for that purpose. Other parts of the depot were sublet. Advertising was cut and the roundsmen's wages were reduced to £1 per week plus commission. In September 1898 the depot manager resigned.

By May 1899, the Board was sick of the unsatisfactory performance of the Hammersmith Depot and accepted an offer of £4500 for the business from Messrs Neale and Pike. The Board also resolved to buy the freehold as soon as possible. The latter deal was soon completed but the sale was to be a nightmare for the next 2 years. The minutes of just about every meeting show some reference to the delays, "frivolous objections" and failure of Neale to come up with the cash. By May 1901 the directors had had enough and despite Mr. Neale being reported as "dangerously ill" a writ was issued for payment of outstanding monies. The threat of legal action had some effect as the sale of the business promptly fell through.

The Board acted quickly to take control at Hammersmith and J.E.J. Johnson was empowered to receive and pay all monies on account of the Hammersmith business. In October 1901 a Mr. Waterer showed interest in buying the concern. The sale never happened but Waterer joined the Board. The Company used the premises for many more years.

The final victim of the curse of the Hammersmith Depot was Mr. J.E.J. Johnson, Joint Managing Director of the Company. He took up the financial reins in August 1901; one year later the first reference to money not being paid to EDME appears. In August 1902 concern was expressed that £400 was owed from the Stratford Depot, also under Johnson's control, and £180 from Hammersmith. Matter rapidly went from bad to worse and the prudence of allowing directors to act as independent agents for the Company must be questioned. In September, the Secretary instructed the depot managers to send all monies to Mistle. By November, the arrears had not been cleared and, with Johnson absent from the meeting, his fellow directors unanimously called for his resignation as Managing Director. At the December meeting he was formally removed.



The depots were not the only problems with which the Board had to contend. Ever since the Britannia take over, one of their ex-employees, a Mr. H. Mogridge had held the agency for a large part of London. As early as June 1897 the Board was complaining that trade did not appear to be increasing. Mogridge also seemed to have a long running dispute about some bonus shares to which he claimed entitlement. The minute book from 1897 to 1903 records the Board's impatience. Trade is never better than satisfactory and, to make matters worse, Mogridge is

constantly behind with payments to EDME. The debt was often as high as £500, a great deal of money in 1900. You have to admire Mogridge's cheek. In 1899 he offered himself for a directorship of the Company at the next A.G.M; mercifully no further action was taken. In 1902 he was actually proposed and seconded for directorship. As the minutes record "after discussion both proposer and seconder withdrew". A certain amount of arm-twisting must be suspected.

Mogridge's terms of trading were changed several times and in April 1901 his purchases were put on a cash with order basis.

Robert Free, one of the original founders of EDME, had effectively disqualified himself from the Board by non-attendance at meetings by late January 1901. He died in February 1902 and J.H.Lehmkuhl was formally made Chairman of the Company. Prior to his appointment the chairmanship had not been fixed. Free or Johnson chaired the Board meeting depending on who was available. It is noticeable that Lehmkühl moved swiftly to put the depot finances on a more businesslike basis.

As has been recorded, Johnson was removed and in April 1903 Mogridge's agency was closed. Writs for non-payment of debts were served on both Johnson and Mogridge in July. Although the terms are not recorded, agreement was reached with Mogridge and Johnson by the end of the year.

Little mention has been made of the syrups factory, but it too was causing the directors sleepless nights. The problem was water supply. Making malt extract is similar in its initial stages to making beer. Barley malt is crushed and mixed with water. At the later evaporation stage, which takes the weak liquid extracted up to thick syrup, much water is needed for steam and for condensing. The EDME Board was under the impression that an agreement had been reached between them and the Tendring Hundreds Water Company for the supply of 24000 gallons of water per 24 hours. Robert Free had brokered this deal, probably in the days of the condensed Wort and Brewers Meal Company. It is also significant that Robert Free had a financial interest in the Water Company. In 1898 the situation became critical. The factory manager, Lovell, complained of excessive overtime and batches of syrup having to be destroyed due to delays caused by water shortage. A new pump and temporary reservoir were installed and an application was made to the Great Eastern Railway to take water from a brook on the site boundary. This appears to have eased the situation somewhat and on 25th May 1899 it is recorded "at last the meter is fixed and working today". The arguments dragged on, with arbitration and threats of court action until the death of Robert Free in 1902. At this point the Water Company purchased his shares and solved the problem by terminating the agreement! Rapid action was taken and a borehole dug. When the pump started there was general delight at both the quality and quantity of the water supply.

Despite the production problems, the products were an essential ingredient of many prize-winning entries at large and small Baker's Exhibitions up and down the land. As early as 1897, bread made with the help of EDME products won 1st Prize at the Willesdon Great Show and EDME was awarded a Gold Medal for the best stand.

There were many more awards for EDME recorded over the years.

At the March 1899 meeting of the Board, a significant appointment was made when H.A. Dowding became a director. Previously he had been a shareholder, now he was to lead the Company's marketing of malt extract to the brewing trade. As was the practice at the time he acted as an agent for the products. Mr. Dowding was a professional brewer and his association with EDME proved to be both long and profitable.

Under Lehmkuhl's chairmanship the affairs of EDME settled down after six troublesome years 1897-1903. The share capital was reduced when the 1500 shares which seem to have been "given" to the then shareholders, but shown as fully paid, were cancelled. Plans were made to build a malting on land at Norman Road, Mistley, which had been purchased in 1901 with that intention in mind.

Of interest is a letter of July 1906 from H.M. Customs and Excise stating that they would raise no objection to malt extract being used in the brewer's mash tun. Dowding had been busily selling the product, to brewers, since 1899; perhaps the veil of silence had better be drawn over these "goings-on".

At the January 1909 Board meeting Lehmkuhl resigned the chair. His 7 years in control had resolved several vexatious issues and brought much needed stability. H.A. Dowding took the chair for what was to be a new chapter for EDME.

Before The War

Henry A. Dowding was a professional brewer and it was natural for him to take more interest in the Syrups Factory at Mistley than his predecessors. What he found cannot have pleased him for he appointed a Mr. W. Duncan to report on quality issues and manufacturing generally. Lovell, the Factory Manager had been struggling on for some years whilst the Board dealt with the many squabbles with agents and arguments amongst themselves. Duncan reported to the Board in February 1909. Lovell's position with the Company was strengthened with a three-year contract. Some friction must have been evident, between him and Duncan, for in March of the following year, Dowding insisted that a Director visit Mistley weekly. He also made Duncan's role clear by appointing him consultant to the Board and instructing Lovell to work with him!

By June of 1910, new plant was being purchased. Orders were placed for a Grain Dryer, a copper pan and an air compressor. Mr. H. Rose's tender for the erection of a new press room was accepted and this is the first mention, in the minutes, of an association with a local builder, which lasts, to the present day.

If Dowding thought he was going to be spared the sort of internal bickering which had dogged the last 15 years, he was to be disappointed. In August 1909 Egerton Stanley Free, who had been Managing Director since the Company reformed in 1896, suddenly resigned. His reasons are not clear. In January of that year he notified the Board of his involvement with "Smyrna Malt Extract" and the Board wrote to him expressing their wishes. This seems to have forced a decision. He was paid his salary up to the end of the financial year but arguments followed, inevitably, about his commission and expenses. The Board lost patience and in early 1910 placed a notice in the public and trade press severing all connection with E.S. Free. The equally inevitable threats of legal action followed but Dowding soon settled matters. The affair must have ended amicably for in May 1910 Free was asking for a job. He was eventually offered an agency for Ireland but, after an

unsuccessful trial, this was discontinued and that particular member of the Free family passes from the story.

Another name that is to be associated with EDME for many years takes to the stage in 1909 when it is recorded that Mr. R. Pountney's pay is to be increased by 6 shillings and 6 pence per week.

It is clear from the records that EDME, in the years up to the First World War, was enjoying a period of prosperity. Dowding's work with the brewing industry was showing good profits and the many agencies were performing well. 1911 saw EDME's only involvement with popular entertainment when the Hammersmith Depot was leased to the Entente Cordiale Co. These "cinematographic people" wanted to convert the premises into one of those new-fangled picture palaces. Some of EDME's efforts down all the years may be like a Charlie Chaplin film but this offer was taken up and lasted for some years. The cinema business ended after the war and Metro-Goldwyn-EDME was never to be.

Work continued at Mistley with the purchase of a Mash Tun in 1912. Concern was still being expressed at the expenditure on coal and it was not until April 1914 that Dowding was able to report to the Board his satisfaction with the Works.

Working conditions for the men were improved in 1913 with Sick Pay being made available. Full pay was to be given for the first 3 days and thereafter 10 shillings per week in addition to money received from any benefit society. All employees were expected to join the Panel as these societies were known. This utopian generosity must have caused an epidemic in Mistley for one year later the scheme was amended and the workers got nothing for the first 3 days! EDME did however sponsor the annual beano to the tune of £10. Economies were clearly going to people's heads when poor Mr. Lovell was formally instructed to "issue mops and buckets between 12noon and 1pm on Saturdays and only then on production of the worn out articles". Those were the good old days, we keep being told!

The Great War 1914-18

The minute books for the war years are hardly the best source of information about the human tragedy that occurred for the next four years. However, filled as they are with financial figures and decisions recorded, it is possible to read between the lines. It was going to be a tough time for EDME.

From late 1914 onwards, every Board meeting discussed costs and stocks at the Factory. As the war continued difficulties in obtaining barley and coal become major issues. In August 1914, at Dowding's suggestion, a contribution was made to the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund.

It was not until 1915 that the effects of the war become noticeable. In March the men at Mistley were allowed to buy coal from the Company's stock. On a more personal note Francis Henry Lehmkuhl, Director and past Chairman, found it necessary to change his surname to Carleton. In the extreme jingoism of the time a Germanic sounding name was not an asset. The Board felt it necessary to "post a notice in the Factory, contradicting the reported statement of antipatriotism and stating that the Directors will do everything to assist their employees to enlist".

By August 1915 serious decreases in extract sales were being recorded as well as difficulties in buying new drums. It was also proving impossible to get used drums returned. This situation became so bad that the salesmen were ordered to refuse to take orders unless the drums were returned. In October Free Rodwell, the Mistley maltsters, were contracted to malt barley at 5 shillings and 3 pence per quarter "if war conditions permit". Wages were increased by one shilling per week due to the effect of the war on the cost of living. Stour House, once the residence of the Free family, now owned by EDME, was taken over by the War Office as an Ambulance Hospital. An extra 2 shillings per week and bonuses were paid in 1916 and the Company offered to make up the pay of men "called to the colours" to the amount they had hitherto been receiving. There are several votes of condolence as EDME people lost their loved ones. In 1916 Lt. Colonel Berkeley, brother of one of the Directors, was killed in action.

Government restriction began to bite in 1917. Permits to Manufacture and Sell were introduced and the Food Controller's Department impounded 700 quarters of barley for other uses. Dowding did his best and used other starch sources such as potatoes. He patented "Potatoex" in 1918; things were really getting desperate.

The First World War saw the start of EDME's involvement with the manufacture of Cod Liver Oil and Malt. Whether this concoction improved the nation's health is a matter for conjecture. What is certain is the fact that it tasted revolting, as many that were children during the 1939-45 conflict can testify.

Strangely the Board meeting of 12th November 1918 does not record that at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month; the Armistice brought the slaughter to an end. It was only the day before! In fairness, the end of hostilities must have been on the Board's mind for they recorded a card from one A.E. Crisell thanking them for their help whilst he had been a prisoner of war. They also agreed, at that meeting, to contribute £100 to the erection of the Mistley war memorial. There were to be the names of 69 Mistley men on that memorial.

Rebuilding

There was much work to be done after the war. Raw materials and fuel were in short supply and men returning from active service had to be re-integrated into their old jobs. During 1919, Carleton took up the reins of Chairman again, allowing Dowding to become Managing Director and concentrate on rebuilding of trade with the brewers. Richard Free joined the Board that year but despite his family's shareholding he did not stay long, resigning in April 1920. It is interesting that in 1921, Free Rodwell, with Richard Free acting as intermediary, tried to buy EDME.

When Free departed after his short stay, F.J. Bearman was co-opted as a Director. So began an association which was to last for over 40 years and prove to be crucial to the development of the Company.

In May 1920, the Company reformed its share structure. The old Company, EDME (1895) went into voluntary liquidation. Shares were allocated to the existing shareholders giving the new Company, EDME (1920), an authorised capital of 55000 shares of £1 each. Barclays Bank held 14% of the shares and most of the Directors were major shareholders. In fact, by the end of 1920, the Directors had bought most of Barclays' shareholding for themselves or their families. Down at Mistley,

Mr. H. Rose was given a pig, value £5, as a gift for only charging £2 for valuing the Factory buildings.

Kenya Breweries

In July 1922, a proposal was received to invest in the building of a brewery at Nairobi, Kenya. This was to use malt extract as the main raw material for making wort. By August, Kenya Breweries had been formed with EDME taking 2000 of the 6000 authorised shares. It was decided that Dowding would go to Kenya for 6 months to assist with the building and commissioning of the plant. Mr. Hilton Brooks was co-opted as an alternate Director to act in Dowding's absence. Bearman became Managing Director and Dowding was elected to the Chairmanship of EDME and was soon nominated as a Director of Kenya Breweries. In December 1922, Dowding left for Africa and was absent for the next 6 months.

If Henry Dowding thought, when he returned in June 1923, that he had seen the last of Nairobi, he was to be disappointed. By November he was being asked to go back and he finally agreed to another six months stay and left in January 1924. What the problems were in Kenya are not recorded in detail in the minute book. Lack of initial capital would seem to have caused some concern, with offers of further shares and cash loans being requested. Some further shares were taken up. Dowding returned in June of 1924 but it was not until July 1925 that Kenya Breweries finally began to make a profit. Even then the EDME Board could not sit back and enjoy a flow of profits from Nairobi. Despite appointing an agent to look after their interests, in October 1926, Dowding had to make his third visit. The right of EDME to appoint a Director to the Kenya Breweries board was established and the enterprise continued to flourish. Trade for the supply of malt extract continued for many more years.

The Pontefract Venture

During Dowding's absence, Bearman took the opportunity to make improvements to Mistley, the depots and indeed the whole structure of the company. In these ventures Dowding must have assisted when he was available. A new vacuum pan was purchased, for Mistley in 1923. It is amazing to record that this same pan was still working in 1999. In 1924 a new Mash Tun was added at Mistley. In the next year, 1925, Bearman turned his attention to the depots. He was empowered by the Board to issue an ultimatum to the depot managers, that efficiency improved and sales increased, or else! This approach had the desired effect although it obviously upset a fellow Board member, Mr. Waterer, who was responsible for the depots. He was forced to apologise to Bearman for being rude at the previous meeting.

The major venture of this period was the merger with W.J. Robson of Pontefract. This move required an increase in the share capital to 65000 shares of £1 each. Mr Fred W. Clarke of Robsons joined the EDME Board and was to serve with distinction for many years.

It rapidly became obvious that the Robson factory, at Pontefract, was in need of capital expenditure for both the quality and quantity of the malt extract were unsatisfactory. Bearman, by now appointed Managing Director for the next 5 years, was empowered to have a new borehole dug and to look out for a Mash Tun.

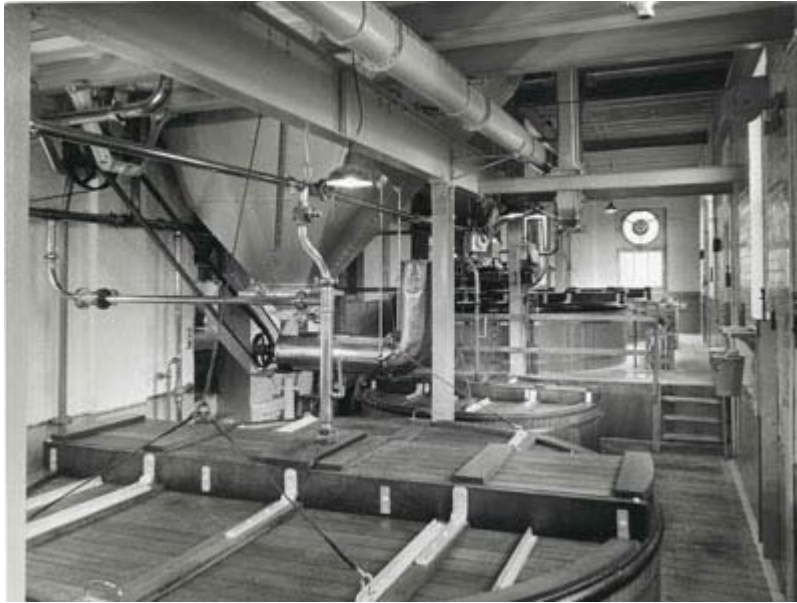


Electricity was installed at Pontefract in 1926 but its benefits and cost savings were to be short lived. On the evening of 24th August 1926, there was a disastrous fire, which gutted the Pontefract premises. Despite some early optimism as to what could be saved, one month later the decision was made to accept the insurance compensation and develop the Mistley site to meet production needs. It was also proposed to build a new factory in the north of England but, despite several sites being inspected, EDME never acquired a northern factory.

The proposed output of Mistley was to be 80 tons per week and that volume is not far short of the production of the 1990s. The Robson's site was eventually sold and the Pontefract venture came to an end.

Prosperous Times

There is no doubt that the late 1920s and the 1930s were the most profitable times that EDME experienced. With Dowding's experience and contacts allied to Bearman's drive and enthusiasm, trade with the brewers flourished. The addition of diastatic (enzyme rich) extract to the mash tun was becoming the norm rather than the exception in many breweries. The barley being grown was mostly of poor quality for malting. The widespread use of artificial fertilizers was not practised, the resulting malts were often of low nitrogen content and thus of low enzyme activity. This gave brewers problems with fermentation, beer clarity and risk of bacterial infection. The high enzyme content of EDME extracts appeared to solve the problem. In breweries the name EDME became synonymous for malt extract and the pipe bringing the malt extract from the sugar room to the mash tun was often known as the "EDME Main". Trade continued steadily with the bakery industry and, possibly caused by its popularity in the First World War, the cod liver oil and malt sales flourished. In fact, the oil and malt business boomed to the extent that a new department was built in the mid 1930s.



In 1929 the Board required some new blood. C.H. Waterer retired after almost 30 years service and was replaced by two new directors. Frederick John Bearman (son of Frederick Jacob the Managing Director) and R.T. Newman joined the Board. Pountney was elected a full director at this time. Throughout this period there are references to various items of plant being purchased and buildings being erected. The factory was not being neglected. Some changes were made in London. The Leytonstone and Barnes depots were closed and extra space was hired at Bishopsgate station so that operations could be centralised. Premises were leased in Regent St for the Head Office. EDME was to have a London office in Regent St. until the late 1960s.



EDME had been doing business with Crisp Malting for many years and in 1933 costs were once again under review. The minute book records " the high price of Messrs. Crisp's malt was discussed.....it was pointed out that severe competition required a very cheap malt indeed, say 30/- per quarter, in order to compete in certain

trades, notably Italian malt flour". Those words are just as relevant today as they were 60 years ago.

The great depression of the 1930s obviously had some effect on EDME, most notably on the brewing trade.

Business was slower but was always reported as satisfactory. Other trade areas must have increased sales considerably for plans were drawn up for a new Packing Department to cope with the Oil and Malt production. The building stands to this day, albeit much modernized so that only the steel framework survives. It now serves as EDME's Milling Department.

During 1935 the question of EDME carrying out their own malting was given serious consideration. Up to now malt had always been purchased from sales maltsters, of whom there were plenty locally. Rising costs forced the Board to think again. Offers were made to F. Branwhite and Sons for the purchase of their Sudbury Malting and to Free Rodwell for their Manningtree plant. The deal for the Sudbury facility fell through but the Manningtree maltings was bought in September. One year later a lease was taken out on a malting at Sudbury owned by Free Rodwell.

Despite the worldwide depression, by 1937 John Bearman was warning the Board that demand was exceeding the capacity of the factory. The new Malt and Oil Department helped to meet the shortfall and an order was placed for a new evaporator. The final significant decision of the 1930s was to pull out of the yeast business. This trade had become something of a sideline to the company's core business, requiring rapid turnover of stock and frequent customer deliveries. The business was sold to United Yeast and the depot at Kings Cross closed.

The workforce at Mistley was not ignored during this period of development. Workers houses were built in Lawford and Mistley and, due to trade union activity in the area, wages were increased to a minimum of 45 shillings for a 52-hour week. The "good old days" were evident.



The Second World War

Whether it was the outbreak of hostilities in the autumn or the onset of ill health, Henry Dowding decided to retire in December 1939. Perhaps he could not face guiding EDME through another mighty conflict. He can truly claim to be the Father of the Company. A shareholder at the beginning in 1896 and a Director from 1899 he was Chairman from 1909. With a few gaps when in Kenya, he remained at the helm for 30 years seeing EDME grow in size and reputation. His retirement was to be short-lived for he died in August 1941.

With the outbreak of war and Dowding's retirement, some changes were made to the senior management of the Company. Frederick Jacob Bearman became Chairman and Managing Director and R.P. Pountney relinquished his role as Company Secretary to become Assistant Managing Director with responsibility for the London office. Another Pountney (Wolverton Robert) became Company Secretary and Harold Heron, a consulting chemist to the brewing trade, joined the Board. W.R. Pountney was not to enjoy his new position for long, within a few weeks he was called up on active service. John Bearman continued to have responsibility for the factory and was resident at Mistley; it was his job to decide which of the workers could be considered in a reserve occupation. He also recommended an allowance for those called up of 7 shillings and 6 pence per week for single men and 12 shillings and 6 pence for those who were married.

The disruptions caused by the war are not documented in the minute books but they must have been considerable. Mistley was an industrial area and with a dock and a mine depot at Wrabness, the threat of bombing must have been ever present. The factory was never hit but air raids were not unknown. The air raid shelter, built in the basement of the Oil and Malt Department, exists to this day.

The supply of fuel and raw materials, obviously enough, were the biggest problems for the management at Mistley. In early 1942, John Bearman was reporting that "we could sell more to the brewers than we can make. They too must have been trying to bridge the raw materials gap with malt extract. It proved impossible to purchase new plant and equipment with engineering manufacturers on a war footing. In February 1942 a Deferred Repair Reserve was set up in the accounts. The Oil and Malt Department must have boomed, as anyone who was a child during or just after the war will tell you. The very words Cod Liver Oil and Malt can still bring a shudder to people of a certain age.

Malt supply was uncertain and EDME were determined to be self-sufficient. The first of two significant moves was made in October 1941 when the No 2 malting at Mistley was hired from Free Rodwell. This building was one of the many malthouses operated by that company and was practically part of the EDME site. In July 1943 the malting at Sudbury, previously leased, was bought from Free Rodwell. EDME was now malting on three sites Sudbury, Manningtree and Mistley, but only the latter could be said to be on-site.

In October 1945, W.R. Pountney returned from his military duties and the war could be said to be over. In the same month Sid Osborne was made factory foreman and his name will feature significantly in the future. EDME emerged from the Second World War in good shape. Like most businesses in need of repair and refurbishment, tired by the six years of conflict but with a solid base of good sales and an excellent reputation.

Post War Rebuilding

Anyone who thought that a rapid rebuilding programme was going to be launched was in for a rude awakening. Great Britain was almost bankrupt from six years of war, building materials were rigidly licensed and a newly elected Labour government was committed to a policy of social change. The replacement of equipment worn out by the war years was urgently needed but, clearly, was not going to happen quickly.

Had the Board realised it at the time, there was also an urgent need for some new ideas. In June 1948 a significant minute appears, recording a sharp decline in trade to brewers. This downturn continues to be reported over the next few years. Perhaps it was in response to this worrying situation that the Board appointed Mr. Bob Pritchard as Brewing Trade Representative for the south of England, in October 1948. Bob Pritchard was a professional brewer and was to bring much needed technical expertise to EDME.

Disquiet was being experienced from the shareholders. The families of some of the founding fathers, such as Dowding and Carleton found that transferring or selling shares in a private company was difficult. There was support for floating the company on the stock exchange. The Board acted to ease the problem of transferring shares and William Walter Dowding joined the Board. The vacancy he filled was that of R.P. Pountney who was forced by worsening health to resign after 43 years service. His services were retained as a consultant until his death in 1951. The 1940s drew to a close with the Board starting to dispose of the shares in East African Breweries.

In July 1950 the Board initiated a project which was to lead to the construction of modern malting facilities on the Mistley site. The plant was to be situated behind Abbey House and the system chosen was, for its day, very modern. Despite being referred to in the minutes, with some obstinacy, as Abbey Maltings, everyone at EDME knows the plant as "The Auto", a reference to the degree of mechanisation. The new system with its conveyors, malting drums and pneumatics must have seemed a step in the right direction to those used to shovels and wheelbarrows.



The reserve in the accounts called "The Deferred Repairs and Depreciation Provision" was capitalised and distributed as bonus shares in 1951. Throughout the 1950s there was to be much share dealing but, apart from The Auto very little real capital investment. Some worn out plant was replaced but there was no investment

in radical cost reduction or Research and Development. The later deficiency was to have profound effects on future profitability.

Before the war, most brewers were trained by way of a system called "pupilage". This was similar to an apprenticeship, except that the trainee was unpaid. In fact the Head Brewer usually charged a fee to carry out the training. Most young brewers were "of the family" and often of private means. When trained they were excellent at the hands-on aspects of the job but perhaps less aware of the biochemistry. After the war things began to change. The two universities offering academic courses in brewing and malting science were turning out graduates with good technical training and they started to question why malt extract was needed. Better malting barleys were being grown with more than enough enzyme activity, which rendered extract addition superfluous. At the Brewer's Exhibition of 1957, a booklet was published "giving details of research into the advantages of using malt extract". It appears to have done little to stop the rot.

Reports on the brewing trade all through the 1950s are pessimistic. In 1952 John Bearman had to report that he was not buying barley and was delaying malt deliveries. The activities of Bob Pritchard and later Jim Maltman in keeping as much brewery business alive as possible cannot be overpraised. It is amusing to note that, in 1957, the Christmas present given to Head Brewers was a bone china morning tea set. Junior Brewers received a pair of pliers and a tool kit; a comment on their differing roles in the brewery scheme of things perhaps.

At the January A.G.M of 1954 F.J. Bearman announced his retirement as Managing Director. He remained Chairman and was made a Consultant Advisor for life. He was 82 years old at the time! It was decided to make John Bearman and Walter Robert Pountney Joint Managing Directors. Miss Phyllis Peskett was asked to take on the duties of Company Secretary a role she was to fill for the next 25 years. Giving up the day to day duties of Managing Director must have given old Mr. Bearman time to take up the chairmanship of Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. The boardroom at Whiteheart Lane must have seemed like an EDME office as John Bearman and W.R. Pountney were also directors of the club.

Although during the 1950s there were some improvements such as better coal handling, grain drying and various replacements, there appears to have been little major investment to reduce costs. Ultimately one could say EDME just seemed to run out of new ideas.

The 1960s and Crisis

The connections with East African Breweries started to run down in 1961, when F.J. Bearman was asked to resign from their board "for political reasons". At the age of 90 years it was unlikely that he could have faced the journey to Kenya. A decision was made to dispose of the remaining shareholding and by July 1963 all shares in East African Breweries had been sold and so ended a long and profitable association.

The indisposition of F.J. Bearman and his entry into a nursing home in 1962, the year in which he reached his 90th birthday, caused the Board to elect Pountney as Chairman. Two more appointments of significance were made in 1962. Sid Osborne was promoted to Factory Manager and Ron Noyce to Malting Manager; both were to play leading roles in the survival and development of the Company.

Sales of malt flour to the bakery industry had been an important part of the company's profits since its foundation but they could never make up for the loss of trade being experienced in the brewing sector. Had the Company realised it in 1963, they were being thrown a significant lifeline. Reginald Maudling, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, removed the restrictions on home brewing. This opportunity is not mentioned in the minutes until 1965 and then it is only the report of a complaint.



In April 1964 the death of Frederick Jacob Bearman was announced. His contribution to the Company cannot be overestimated and if Henry Dowding could be said to be the "Father of EDME", Fred Bearman was the "Driving Force". He was a Director of the business from 1920 to 1964 and for much of the time Chairman and Managing Director.

The Board elected Phyllis Peskett, the company secretary, as a director in 1964 and seemed to be grasping the serious situation that was developing. In October 1964, plans were laid before the Board to double the sales to the bakery and food trades. Fred Ashard was given responsibility for the newly completed test bakery and two trainee salesmen were to be recruited. Further impetus to develop new ideas was given urgent priority when Charringtons Brewery suddenly stopped using malt extract. The factory was now put on a four-day week as a result of the loss of this large customer.

John Heron, who had replaced Harold Heron as a Board member, suggested a Research and Development Committee and this was set up in 1966. John Bearman, who had announced his intention to resign as Joint Managing Director when he reached the age of 70, was warning that the Company should tool up or face the consequent costs. By this he meant that modernisation was vital to survival. Three questions that were considered at this time were, installing equipment to make dry malt extract, the manufacture of barley syrup and oil firing the boilers. All were rejected or put in abeyance at the time.

It could be said that 1967 was the year when the profitability crisis hit home. In May the half-year figures showed a profit that would only just cover the preference share dividend and it was obvious that a price war was developing. A move to smaller premises for the London office was put in hand. John Heron suggested that the whole operation be moved to Mistley. By October the use of

consultants was being suggested. The final accounts for the year to the end of September 1967 showed a small profit but it was not possible to pay a dividend on the ordinary shares. Consultants were appointed in January 1968.

Associated Industrial Consultants reported in March 1968. Their recommendations were an immediate move of the London office to Mistley, reductions in manning and overtime and that Pountney became sole Managing Director and also moved to Mistley. Longer term they suggested that barley syrup production should be researched, greater emphasis put on new ideas and products in the food trade and home brew should be given more attention. They strongly recommended the appointment of a sales manager to have overall control of all selling efforts.

Some of the proposals were not popular. The London office staff had recently moved to smaller premises in Oxford St, the prospect of a move to darkest rural Essex appalled some senior staff.

As a result of visiting the German manufacturer, Steinecker, John Bearman was in favour of purchasing a wet mill. This process would give greater efficiency and yield and, in addition, facilitate the production of barley syrup. John Heron did not agree and felt that the considerable expenditure would be better used to re-equip a wider spectrum of the antiquated plant. The Board decided not to purchase the wet mill immediately but Heron felt that his views were out of step with those of John Bearman and he resigned.

Some new appointments were called for and W. Langford, representing a group of trustees, and Sid Osborne, the factory manager, were invited to sit on the Board. Langford agreed to join on a temporary basis but surprisingly Osborne refused. In December 1968 no dividend was possible on the ordinary shares. 1969 started as badly as the previous year had ended; in January Watney, Combe and Reid decided to end the use of malt extract. Most of the Board bowed to the inevitable when Phyllis Peskett proposed that the head office be moved to Mistley. Surprisingly, Pountney stood out against the move. By April a Board vote forced him to accept but he asked to be allowed to resign as soon as the transfer was completed. This left the Board with something of a dilemma; John Bearman wished to retire at the end of the year and this would leave no Chairman or Managing Director. Pountney agreed to leave in July and Bearman consented to delay his retirement and continue as Managing Director. Langford was appointed to the Chair on a temporary basis and Bob Pritchard was co-opted as Sales Director. By December 1969 EDME was back in the "ship with two captains" situation with John Bearman as Chairman and Joint Managing Director and Bob Pritchard given accelerated promotion to the other Joint Managing Director position. Langford, before he resigned as agreed, expressed his concern at the "joint" control, especially as the management consultants had recommended that Pountney should be given total command.

The 1960s ended with the London Head Office closed and rationalised at Mistley, some savings made and new ideas on the drawing board. Unfortunately, EDME was still making insufficient profits in an out of date plant.

The 1970s and Merger

The management team, now down at Mistley, felt that EDME's days of independence were numbered and serious consideration was given to take-over or joint venture. Several companies were approached including Crisp, Munton and

Fison, Bairds and R.W. Paul. Outside the malting industry, overtures were made to Tate and Lyle and Watney Mann. By the end of 1970, only Muntton and Fison and Tate and Lyle showed continuing interest. Some items of the plant required to produce barley syrup were being commissioned in early 1971 and Tate and Lyle were showing definite interest in a joint venture and possible buy-out of EDME.

Bob Pritchard proposed that a complete home brewing kit be produced, based on hopped malt extract and with a sachet of yeast. Sid Osborne was asked, for a second time, to join the Board and this time he accepted. However a flow of profit from the developments was longer term and EDME was now in a loss making position.

At the AGM in March 1972 there was criticism from certain shareholders about lack of information. John Bearman promised to improve matters with a newsletter. In June he was forced to report that Tate and Lyle had pulled out of both purchase of the company and any joint venture for the production of barley syrup. He hinted that another public company was showing interest but who this might have been was never revealed.

An Extraordinary General Meeting was called for July 1972 and John Bearman relinquished the chair to Mr. J. Proctor who had been elected to the Board the previous year to represent the shareholders. Proctor announced that the unnamed public company was no longer interested and that he had expected to be recommending action to protect the shareholder's interests. One can only assume that he meant liquidation. He was spared this drastic step by an offer to purchase the shares of the company from the maltsters F and G Smith.

Under New Management

F and G Smith, with their associated company Crisp Malting Ltd, moved quickly and by December 1972 John Crisp was in the chair at the first meeting of the EDME Management Committee. Dennis Merriweather, already installed as Joint Managing Director, was reporting several new projects. Crisp Malting had a barley syrup plant at their Great Ryburgh site. This venture had not been a total success, difficulties being experienced with the separation of sweet wort from the spent grains. Most of the equipment was to be moved to Mistlely, including a modern evaporator and, perhaps more important, some useful sales contracts. New oil tanks for the boilers, increasing steam raising capacity and the sale of the considerable property holdings were being negotiated. Most of the property was housing and this was to be sold to the sitting tenants. The committee was larger than the "old" EDME directorate; Pritchard, Noyce, Peskett and Osborne together with Merriweather formed the executive members. John Crisp was in the chair and of the other F and G Smith people who attended, mention must be made of Bob Turner-Cain who was often to chair meetings and give wise counsel.



Throughout 1973, the minutes record capital projects in the factory and malting. Most of these were designed to utilise the existing equipment more efficiently and thus cut costs. A major rebuild was not envisaged whilst the profit and loss account was in such a parlous state. This strategy bore fruit, for in April 1974, Merriweather was able to report that EDME was back in profit. On the sales front greater attention was being paid to both home brew and the general food trade. At last EDME seemed to have grasped the fact that trade to the brewing industry was dying, albeit slowly and that that section of the business would have to be replaced by new products and new ideas.

A new face was added to the team when Maurice Wooding joined EDME from Crisp Maltings. Initially he was assistant manager to both Sid Osborne, who was nearing retirement, and to Ron Noyce. Maurice had managed the Brewmalt plant at Great Ryburgh and was well experienced in the mysteries of making barley syrup.

In 1975 Allied Breweries, who had taken over the business of Free Rodwell, the largest of the Mistley maltsters, offered to sell their No. 2 malthouse. This was obviously of interest to EDME as it could be said to form part of the factory site. In fact EDME had leased the malting for a time during the 1940s. Negotiation dragged on until June 1976 when Dennis Merriweather completed the sale. Initially the kiln house was refurbished and green malt conveyed across the main yard for drying, releasing more drums in the "auto maltings" for germination. Much later the first

flaking plant was to be installed on the floors and one of the oldest buildings on the site became the home of one of EDME's great success stories.

The Management Committee now had to consider further succession planning. Sid Osborne was due to retire and both Bob Pritchard and Fred Ashard were over 60. To add to the problems, the Chief Engineer was unable to work, due to illness. The engineering position was quickly filled by the appointment of Frank Page who was to have the sometimes thankless task of keeping EDME operating for the next 20 years. Merriweather's next two appointments strengthened the company's technical skills. Brian Hill, a brewer, took on the role of Works Manager and John Haynes, a baker, joined the sales force.

In early 1977, the need for more modern evaporation equipment was becoming critical. Most of the evaporation pans had seen many years of service; one had been in use since 1923. The purchase of a "falling film" type evaporator was made in May of that year and it was in operation by October.

The acquisition of property was not over for in May 1977 negotiations opened for the purchase of the Brooks feed mill which was situated immediately opposite the EDME site, on the other side of the High Street. Its usefulness to the company was obvious. Initially it could be used for warehousing and later, with some modification, for manufacture. As usual the purchase took a little time but by early 1978 EDME owned a large part of the premises. Mistletoe Quay and Forwarding Company jointly bought part of the building. The Thorn Quay building, as it came to be called, like No. 2 Malting was to have many uses over the next 20 years.

1977 must go down as one of the momentous years in EDME's history. New people, new evaporation technology, new buildings acquired and Merriweather no doubt saying, "You ain't seen nothing yet". Before the year ended we were in negotiations to buy the Malga Vita range of products from Craigmillar Ltd and the EDME Sports and Social Club had been set up. It probably didn't seem significant at the time but 1977 was the year of EDME's first faltering steps into home brewing equipment. A new company was set up called Bar-Made Ltd.

The objective was to make a home brewery. After much experimentation, the choice of the Bag-Boy fermenting system was made and it was launched onto the market in September 1977. Other events in 1977, which should be noted, were inspections by both Boots and Marks and Spencer. These visits were the first customer audits that EDME had suffered and some deficiencies were noted. Housekeeping joined the lengthening list of items for regular debate at the Management Meetings. One can imagine that after some years of neglect and inactivity with the paintbrush, these debates got quite lively. If EDME wished to compete in the food market place, audits were going to become a fact of life, whether they liked it or not.

As the 1970s drew to a close, the deal with Craigmillar was finalised. A small Pin Mill and two Stone Mills were installed in No. 2 Malting and a range of new products were produced. Most of these proved highly successful and formed the foundation of an ever-increasing trade to the bakers.

In March 1978, Sid Osborne retired. He had served the company for 47 years as an operator, foreman, manager and director. His contribution cannot be overestimated particularly in the difficult years from 1965 to 1972. It is not easy to

manage a factory when times are good, when profits slump the task becomes Herculean.

Another member of the senior management team left before the decade was out when Freddie Ashard retired. Over 31 years of service he had become "Mr. EDME" to the bakery trade.

Change Continues in the Early 1980s

A new decade opened with further changes to the staff as both Bob Pritchard and Phyllis Peskett reached retirement age in 1980. Bob could, quite justifiably, be said to be the "Mr. EDME" to the brewing trade. It was due to his efforts that that section of sales lasted as long as it did. He saw the importance of developing the home brew business as a new avenue for syrup sales, although his views were sometimes frustrated by more conservative elements within the company. In retirement, he took up the pen and wrote a book about home brewing and many articles for trade magazines. Richard Holt joined, as Sales Director, bringing considerable experience to the team in brewery and general food trade sales.

Phyllis Peskett joined EDME in 1939, as a secretary on the salary of 35 shillings per week. Forty years later she retired as Company Secretary and a director. Her devotion to the company, both at Regent St. and later at Mistley, was enormous.

The departure of some of the longest serving EDME people was not the only happening in 1980. With the benefit of hindsight, 1980 was destined to become one of the most momentous years in the history of EDME for two highly significant ventures had their beginnings. EDME had been trading with the Sparklets Division of the British Oxygen Company for some time. This division manufactured soda syphons and had branched out into the home brewing market with a range of 5 gallon barrels, carbon dioxide injectors and beer taps. When they decided, for internal reasons, to rationalise their business, EDME were approached to purchase the home brew trade. This offer could not have come at a more appropriate moment. Sales and technical problems with the Bag- Boy were disappointing and if EDME were to continue their policy of becoming major players in the market, this was just too good an opportunity to miss. It took a lot of courage from both Dennis Merriweather and his managers to venture into unknown territory. After all what do maltsters and brewers know about plastic injection moulding? Despite the steepness of the learning curve, by March 1981 EDME was assembling barrels and injectors by the thousand in a workshop converted from part of the Thorn Quay building. Doug Stone was promoted from the Maintenance Department to manage a new subsidiary called Brewcraft Ltd.

For some time Ron Noyce had been experimenting with wheat malt manufacture and in 1980, the year of change, the decision was made to try making malted wheat flakes. The developing bakery side of the business, for nearly 100 years under the shadow of malt extract, became a department in its own right. Ivan Leggett was promoted to Mill Foreman and within a short time Mill Manager as trade boomed for flours and bakery mixes. Experiments with the malted wheat flakes proved successful and a small production line was built in No. 2 Malting. Allied Mills started to buy these flakes and by August 1981 were taking 10 tonnes per week.

The sales of home brewing kits were very buoyant and demand was far outstripping EDME's ability to supply. In late 1981 the decision was made to build a modernised canning line in what had been the old milling area. This was Brian Hill's last major decision at EDME, he resigned in late 1981 and was replaced by Tony Lansdown who came with a background in brewing and hops marketing.

Despite replacing a "jug and bottle" system with something a little more modern, cans of home brew syrup were still in short supply in the summer of 1982 when making beer at home hit its peak. In anticipation of the Christmas trade, a second shift was started on the new canning line in the autumn of 1982.

The success of malted wheat flakes continued. The first production line began to work round the clock in 1983 and was soon followed by another line also being worked on shifts. Before long demand outstripped capacity again and in 1985 another line in Thorn Quay was needed. The malting was producing all of EDME's wheat malt and the Group was supplying the syrup factory needs for barley malt.

Tom Caxton

EDME had been supplying Reckitt and Coleman of Norwich with syrup for their Tom Caxton home brewing kits for some time. Due to a need for space on their site, they decided to sell the brand and Dennis Merriweather acted quickly to make the purchase. This acquisition more than doubled the sales of home brew cans. As Colemans needed a quick clearance, space was rented from Albrew Maltsters in some unused buildings on their Mistley malting and by September 1984 lorry loads of cans were arriving at the site. Ivan Leggett agreed to oversee the operation and the conversion of tonnes of "work in progress" into saleable goods



began.

Meanwhile on the EDME premises, a major conversion of the canning line was taking shape.

The basic idea was to utilise the Thorn Quay building which is on the other side of Mistley High Street. The solution was a tunnel. Cans were filled on one side of the road, adjacent to the extract handling plant; the last thing wanted is pumping high viscosity syrup long distances. Conveyors then transported the filled cans under the

road to the labeling and wrapping area. Thorn Quay now became the home brew department as it already housed the Brewcraft operation. Both operations were brought under one manager, Brian Norton; Doug Stone was given the job of EDME's first Research and Development Manager.

In early 1985 the work was complete and Tom Caxton was produced, along with EDME's home brew brands, on the new line. Ivan Leggett, no doubt, breathed a sigh of relief when the makeshift operation at Albrew Maltsters finally closed. Profit margins were better on the canned products than on sales to the other manufacturing sectors of the market and marketing expertise was needed. David Bevan joined the team, initially as Marketing Manager for home brew.

The Late 1980s

Dennis Merriweather's bold acquisition of Tom Caxton boosted sales of malt extract and barley syrup and bought time, for as the 1980s drew to a close it was obvious that history was repeating itself. In the 1960s, the decline in sales of malt extract to breweries and the company's failure to develop new markets led to near disaster. By 1987, the national sales for home beer making products were showing the first signs of decline.

David Bevan, now installed as General Manager, put in hand experiments to produce high diastatic syrups and dark malt extracts using ultrafiltration as the means of concentration. A new range of Tom Caxton products was launched with much-improved yeast. The products were called Supersystem and after a few teething troubles with the new yeast they proved highly successful.

Unlike the stagnation of the 1960s, the EDME management was determined not to allow lack of innovation to bring the Company to its knees. New Brewcraft products were not confined to beer making although there were plenty of taps, barrels and even coolers produced. The use of carbon dioxide to power a variety of devices was investigated. Some of the more bizarre were bicycle pumps and insect stun guns.

On the food products side of the business, malted wheat flakes had become a flagship brand. Public taste was moving away from convenience food and new interest was being generated in healthy eating, cooking and nutrition. EDME's wide range of flours, mixes and flakes were well positioned to benefit from this development in the baked goods market. Malt extract sales were steady and being mostly to food trade customers, the threat of losing business such as happened when brewers discontinued its use was small. Dennis Merriweather had been running the affairs of the whole group of companies for some time and now passed the job of being EDME's Managing Director to David Bevan.

Redevelopment in the 1990s

To anyone taking stock of EDME's situation in 1990, one major threat to the business was obvious; the very fabric of the factory. For decades money was spent on modifications to reduce costs or meet demand shortfalls. The result was new and old, in some cases very old, equipment crammed into delapidated buildings; the factory was not meeting the standards of hygiene required by the customers. One by one, over many years, each of the major disciplines of management tends to become predominant. In the 1990s it was the turn of Quality. Expectations became enshrined as policies and in a few cases as systems came in the door,

common sense went out of the window. EDME's customers were going to demand more and more say in every aspect of any activity that could affect the safety and quality of their products.

Mindful of his customer's expectations, David Bevan put plans in place for the first major rebuild in many years. There were three main areas of concern, the syrups factory, the mill building and the need for a modern warehouse. This did not complete EDME's wish list, for new legislation was about to make the discharge of effluent into the adjacent River Stour illegal. Since the factory first started up in 1881, both EDME and indeed all the other maltings in the area had discharged steep water and other effluent in this way. In fact, the flourishing population of mute swans was dependent on the grain particles washed into the tidal waters. The source of some of EDME's effluent load, the rather elderly drum malting was also reaching the end of its useful life.

Whatever capital expenditure was going to be made, it would be without the knowledge and experience of Frank Page, the Chief Engineer. When he retired in 1992 it was the end of a long and sometimes difficult period of "keeping EDME operating". Everyone who worked with Frank will remember the good-humoured way he dealt with the all too frequent question; "can you keep it running for another year?" Tony Smith, whose previous experience at Cameron's Brewery was to prove invaluable, replaced Frank as Chief Engineer.

The proposed level of capital expenditure could not be financed all at once and the extract factory was given first priority. An ultrafiltration plant was installed and handed over to production in January 1993. The rebuild of the malt extract plant was planned in three phases, the first of these being a new wort production facility.

When the brewers Bass decided to close their huge Preston Brook brewery, near Liverpool, it was a wonderful opportunity to buy some of their equipment and move it to Mistley. By late 1993 most of the wort production plant was in place although there was still much pipework and electrical cabling to be done.

Disaster in 1994

The minutes of December 1993 record that trials with a Luwa scraped surface evaporator were to commence in January 1994. This type of evaporator was to be used in Phase 2 of the new factory development. Those attending that meeting would have had a miserable Christmas had they known what was to happen in the New Year. On the night of January 24th 1994 there was a catastrophic fire in the old part of the syrups factory. It is thought that an electrical fault started a blaze that gutted the whole of the two upper floors. Within the space of a few hours EDME's ability to produce malt extract and other syrups was destroyed.



The management team made an initial assessment. The extract storage and blending facilities were relatively unscathed and were back in use quickly. Our competitors were very helpful and allowed us to buy extract.

Every effort was made to get parts of the damaged factory repaired as soon as possible. By March, two of the mash tuns and two of the evaporation pans were in operation. Ironically one of these pans was the original 1923 installation; you don't kill the "old'uns" off that quickly, not in Mistley! The wet milling system that was intended for Phase 1 of the new factory was used to produce the mash, which was pumped a long distance to the old mash tuns. This was certainly one of the longest mash pumpings ever attempted in the history of brewing. It is not easy to judge the required thickness of the mash when the end of the pipe is 300 metres away. Some spectacular errors were made!

The Board of the parent company, Anglia Maltings, showed great faith in the time of crisis and sanctioned the continuation of the project. Thus by June 1994 the new wort production plant was supplying the pans in the old factory for evaporation. The building of Phase 2, the new evaporation and blending facility, was proceeding as quickly as possible but even with these emergency measures enough malt extract could not be produced. Time was not on EDME's side, our competitors were supplying a lot of product but they would soon need this spare capacity for themselves. The repair of another of the old factory evaporators boosted production, which was installed in the new plant.

Little by little as the new plant came on stream, the old factory was converted for the manufacture of diastatic malt extract and speciality syrups such as Clarimalt, the ultrafiltered black malt extract.

1994 Not All Doom And Gloom

The crisis caused by the fire was not the only problem facing EDME Ltd during 1994. As has been mentioned, there was an urgent need to solve the effluent problem, the maltings was worn out and warehousing was both inadequate and unacceptable to customers.

The effluent problem was solved by a joint venture, known as Mistley Waterworks, between EDME and Carlsberg-Tetley Maltsters. The treatment plant was built on

EDME's land and processed the steep water and effluent from both factories. The new equipment was started up in December 1994.

A new warehouse was planned and built during 1994 and was handed over in February 1995. It was a considerable relief to be able to store flours, flakes and other bakery products in modern, custom designed premises.

The EDME malting was built in the 1950s and had undergone much modification but little real refurbishment since its installation. Many of the malting drums were showing their age and a rebuild was the only answer. However there was spare capacity elsewhere in the Group and the decision was made to transfer malt production to Great Ryburgh. Making EDME's highly distinctive wheat malt at other Group maltings had been tried before; it is fair to say with mixed success. When a piece of wheat malt goes wrong, the result is inevitably a "digging party", so it was with caution and concern that the change over was approached. By the end of 1994, all involved were confident enough to recommend a phased shutdown of the old EDME malting.

The end of an era, which had begun in 1941 when No 2 Malting was hired from Free Rodwell, came about in 1995 and all malt manufacture ended.

The company received the best possible boost in the momentous year of 1994 when EDME received the Queen's Award for Export Achievement. When the Lord Lieutenant of Essex presented the award and Tony Newton M.P. opened the completed new factory; it was time for a party.

The Late 1990s

A new picture emerged as the period of intense change experienced for the last two years ended. As in the 1960s the market for malt extract was falling. The trade with brewers was long gone and business in the food sector was highly competitive. Despite now having a much more efficient extract factory with extra capacity it was a case of too many malt extractors chasing too few customers. To make matters worse, the home brewing market was, at best, mature and in the U.K. could only be described as dying. The canning and equipment departments had been amalgamated for some time; now they took on other light assembly work to fill up capacity. New staff were employed to market and sell all aspects of home beer making and there were increased efforts to export more. Many new product and different ideas were tried; it was only possible to retain market share but in a declining market.

Richard Holt retired at the end of 1995 and Jess Anderson took his place. In 1997 David Bevan moved on to a new role within the Anglia Maltings Group and Dave Egar, the Group Operation Manager took on responsibility for EDME. This was not the only change, Tony Smith retired after six years of almost continuous technical change and was succeeded by David Naman as Chief Engineer. David Amos took on responsibility for Production and Distribution as Operations Manager and Tony Lansdown moved to the position of Technical Manager. These changes reflected the need to develop business in the food trade with its emphasis on innovation, food safety and quality.

Despite all these efforts the extract and home brewing sales were struggling to generate enough profit to sustain the cost of production. However, the sales of dry

goods, EDME's flours, flakes and mixes were increasing every year. Clearly it was time for some hard decisions. This time there was to be none of the inaction, which had contributed to the near disaster of the late 1960s.

In 1999, David Amos, now promoted to Managing Director, decided that EDME Ltd could remain in malt extract manufacture no longer. The business and brands were sold to Novartis plc and after 115 years EDME ceased the manufacture of malt extract.

2000 and Beyond

From the earliest days, EDME supplied the bakery trade with malt flours. Reading the written records from the copperplate handwriting of 1896 to the word processor of 2000, it is surprising how little reference there is to this sector of the business. Despite winning medals and prizes the "dry goods" always seemed to be the Cinderella of the product portfolio. Whilst the Company had been almost obsessed with brewery sales, flours, flakes and bakery mixes were quietly growing year on year. Now that the management team concentrated their efforts on one section of trade, the business came of age.

Having halved the size of the business, in 1999, the opportunity came about in 2001 to double the size. A rival company, John Hare Corporation, was taken over and their business absorbed into the Mistley operation within 6 months. As a new century unfolded, EDME could look back on 125 years of trading with some of the inevitable crises and problems along the way.

Epilogue 2009

True to the dynamic nature of EDME's past, major change once again visited the company in 2005 when Ragleth Ltd purchased Anglia Maltings (Holdings) Ltd, EDME's parent company, from longstanding owners, the Crisp family. However, EDME still remains vibrant in this present incarnation.

The company and its people had to come to terms very quickly with the demands of life in the 21st century and assimilate new ideas that the new ownership has brought with it. Encouragingly, significant effort is being invested in securing the future through modernization and innovation. EDME is again adapting to the challenges it faces and remains a market leader.

The story continues.....