

Dank foundations
Where SaltPans people
Made their homes.

Every age has certainties
And needing salt is one
For there are few myths
Few dreams about salt –
It is a fundament –
The simple truth
Of a salt crystal.
Humanity is a
Multitude of arms
Stretching out for salt
And the workfolk of the Pans –
Low cheated
On the scale of life's rewards -
Saw no beauty
In the sparkling crust
Left like a necklace
Under a full moon
Round muckle iron pans
Where salt for the farmers
The monks and the fishermen
Boiled out
Over plentiful coals.

Who keeps the memory
Of this boiling brine?
Not the oyster-catchers who sawed the waves
With their song
Nor the miners with their black gold.

A salute, then,
To the Salt-Panners of old
Here/gone in a
Blink of time
But their hearts unbroken
By the gales' wild marches
Along the slippery shore.

John Lindsay, Poet Laureate



PRESTONPANS SALT Coy. Ltd.

Making Salt Again in The Pans

20th June 2009

It was with great delight that the Prestoungrange Arts Festival and the Prestoungrange Gothenburg learnt that Newbattle Abbey College wanted to walk to The Pans and collect a traditional 'salt tithe'. Their 'Walk' has followed Salters' Way, the route taken by the Cistercian Monks from their Abbey at Newbattle to Salt Prestoun from 1198 when the baronial lands of Prestoungrange were granted to them. Those monks came year after year until their abbey was dissolved in 1560. They used the readily available coal to boil the sea water typically using 2 tons of coal to produce 2 tons of salt.

Salt continued to be produced in The Pans right through until the 1970s although the traditional sea water pans on the foreshore were supplemented for the final century with rock salt imported from Germany through Morrison's Haven. The last company to trade in Prestonpans was the Scottish Salt Coy. Ltd. owned by the MacLeod family and their son Sinclair and daughter Fiona have shared the history of salt making and photographs with the Arts Festival. In the middle of the 19th century the works were owned by the family of General Thomas Alexander, founding Surgeon General of the British Army, whose statue stands north of Prestongrange Church looking across the Forth.

When the MacLeods finally ceased salt production in 1974 strenuous efforts were made to preserve their premises creating a craft museum and some housing – led by Alexander Hamilton. But such notions were swept aside and they were demolished just as the Auld Fowler's Brewery HQ was to universal dismay on April 24th 2009. Today East Lothian Council's offices in 'Aldhammer House' stand on the site of the McLeod's old salt works. Two interpretation boards are to be seen in the car park at the rear. Only an old archway to the seashore remains of what once was.

Alexander Hamilton wrote a short booklet, *Salt Pans*, describing the history and processes of the industry over the preceding 8 centuries to help ensure the town's salt industry heritage was conserved. His participation now 25 years later with those coming along Salters' Way from Newbattle Abbey on June 20th 2009 gives us all very great pleasure.

Making Salt until 1974

The water in the Firth of Forth has about 3% of salt in it. Quite simply, sea water is collected and boiled until all the water has evaporated leaving the salt and such other materials as were present in the water which need to be removed. Precisely the same procedure was followed when German rock salt was imported but it was added to the sea water to raise its initial salinity to 37% before boiling. The pans used for boiling measured 16ft x 27ft and 1ft deep, which produced some 4 tons of salt.

For centuries, to get good quality white salt fresh sea water was added and it was boiled a second time. Then by chance it was discovered that if ox blood was added to the mixture as it was boiled the blood and the discolouring material rose to the top and could be skimmed off. Once the salt crystals had formed they were shovelled into a



girnelt to drain, then bagged and taken to the drying room where hot air from the boiling process was ducted to achieve the result. It dried as a solid lump in each bag and was then broken with beetles, wooden mallets, and packed ready for the retail customer.

Prestonpans produced some of the finest food salt with a brand of *Fodo Salt* emerging after an accidental misspelling. *Oil of Salt* was also produced and *Saladine*, an expensive salt based ointment.

Making Salt in 2009

The welcome news that Newbattle Abbey College were planning their Walk did not find the Arts Festival, The Prestoungrange Gothenburg or Preston Lodge School scientifically unaware. Since 2003 attempts had been made to explore the possibility of re-establishing salt making in Prestonpans for the 'boutique' market that now exists. Welsh sea salt is already being made on Anglesey. However, the initial capital investment was too daunting for what would be a high risk market entry. Nonetheless test samples were made in 2005 and analysed as satisfactory, so the challenge could be met.

By June 20th 2009 the Arts Festival pledged to create Prestonpans Salt again so that each Walker could have the real thing as their souvenir. [N.B. We say souvenir because although tests show our salt is good it has not been specifically tested and approved as a food. So, it is not for consumption. It's a souvenir.]

Prestoungrange Gothenburg Chef Andrew Laurie was tasked to wade out into the Forth and boil the sea water he collected in his kitchens. No ox blood was added. He then passed the salt he derived to the Chemistry Club and a Duke of Edinburgh Award cohort at Preston Lodge School led by Gareth Evans and Brian Frost where it was re-dissolved, filtered and re-crystallised to give it its whitened purity. In so doing, the students were able to see that the speed of evaporation affected the crystal formation and that slow evaporation could produce the large crystals much favoured by celebrity chefs today.

The Arts Festival took responsibility for creating the packaging in which the 2009 Vintage of Prestonpans Salt is packed, under the name of our local company established in 2003. The Arts Festival, under Ros Parkyn and Gillian Hart's leadership also took responsibility for making replica Cistercian monks habits to ensure that the re-enactment could be as powerful a reminder of the town's heritage as possible. Finally, John Lindsay, Poet Laureate to the Arts Festival, penned *White Gold*, published here.

Salt Makers of Prestonpans: 2009

Many members of the Arts Festival have assisted in making this project a success and we want to name those who played particular leadership and operational roles:

Original Idea – Heritage Officer at Newbattle Abbey College: Rae McGhee

Tutors & Chemistry Club and Associates @ Preston Lodge School: Gareth Evans [Head of Science]; Brian Frost [Senior Technician and Duke of Edinburgh Group Leader]; Matthew Blabey, Kyle Davidson, Robbie Gray, Melissa McCann, Vanessa Stewart, Sean Welsh [Students].

Chef @ The Prestoungrange Gothenburg: Andrew Laurie

Prestoungrange Arts Festival Co-ordination: Ros Parkyn, Gillian Hart, Kristine Cunningham, Sylvia Burgess & Gordon Prestoungrange.

WHITE GOLD

I speak not
Of the bright white sea salt
That gave this place its name
But of the folk who laboured here,
Wet as dishcloths
For centuries
On the Pans' shore.

Salt pans – salt people –
Bare legged or lucky
In canvas waders
Passed the pail
From hand to hand
From father to son
'til the flames went out.

In a hopelessness
Denser than the coal pit's blackness
They stumbled, paddled and scraped,
Eyes reddened without grief
Inhaling the vapours of despair
When the devilish winter weighed
On sodden woollen coats.

But I have no sense
Of spirits broken
On the Pans' shore
Where sons of men
Their sea-streaked faces
Etched with toil
Were thirled
To a living chain of sea-buckets.

Aye! – There IS nothing romantic
About salt
Distilled from the sea's tears
Under a teetering seafront
Where daggers of cold spray
Splashed across
The beach-thrown wrack
And seeped through