Joachim Laue

LNG on a Bookbinder's Hat?

The world has been shaken up for some time – currently by a war in Europe, which also raises fears of energy shortages. That's where LNG comes in as a solution. What is meant here is liquefied natural gas (LNG). But what's LNG got to do with a bookbinder's hat?

Natural gas is an important fossil fuel that provides heat, is used to generate electricity and can also be used as a fuel. If natural gas is refined, i.e. purified of carbon dioxide, nitrogen and sulfur, and cooled at minus 162 degrees Celsius, the result is liquefied natural gas. A very decisive effect of this process is the shrinking of the volume: 600 cubic meters of natural gas become one cubic meter of LNG and can thus be stored and transported more easily.

From producing to consuming country

Countries such as the USA, Qatar and Australia produce natural gas and export it to consumer countries. This requires a corresponding infrastructure – namely LNG terminals for both export and import. On the one hand, the liquefied gas has to be pumped into gas tankers for transport to Europe, and on the other hand, it has to be pumped out again. At the import terminals, LNG can be transferred into smaller tanks for further transport by rail, road and sea.

Through heating, which does not occur without energy consumption, the LNG is reprocessed as natural gas. In this way, the gas can be fed into standard gas networks. Almost 20 years ago, for example, the Hamburg shipping company F. Laeisz was already using LNG tankers on the world's oceans.

From bookbinder to shipowner

This is remarkable because the foundation of this shipping company goes back to the silk hat manufacturing business from 1824 by Ferdinand Laeisz (1801–1887), a skilled bookbinder. Laeisz had learned bookbinding in Hamburg and hat making in Berlin. Returning to Hamburg, he began making exclusive silky top hats himself. Every bookbinder learns how to make slipcases. In a figurative sense, after all, a top hat is something similar. He made a fortune from the manufacture and trade of the headgear, which he was able to export to Buenos Aires from 1825.

Around 1840 he had a wooden brig built and became a shipowner, taking a major stake in the Hamburg-Amerikanische Paketfahrt-Aktiengesellschaft HAPAG, founded in 1847. From 1852, he ran his own shipping company together with his son Carl Heinrich Laeisz (1828–1901), both very imaginative entrepreneurs. The steel and fast four-masted barques, whose names all began with P, marked the beginning of the shipping company's boom. The freighters of the „Flying-P-Liner" transported European products from Hamburg and Antwerp to South America as general cargo and returned with saltpeter as bagged cargo.

Natural saltpeter, i.e. deposited, weathered bird droppings of the guanos, from which sodium nitrate was extracted, was for a long time a substance in demand for the production of fertilizers and glass as well as for gunpowder and explosives. With the invention for the production of synthetic sodium nitrate, the import of saltpeter from Chile became less important.

New business ideas implemented again and again

After forced breaks of the own fleet in the First and Second World War, the following difficult new beginnings and the end of the sailing freight with the sinking of the „Pamir" in September 1957, new lucrative business ideas were always found, so that the flag of the shipping company F. Laeisz, founded by a bookbinder almost 200 years ago, still flies in the wind.

In global trade across the world's oceans, special ships are needed to transport motor vehicles, containers and liquid gas. The shipping company F. Laeisz has such a fleet and has, so to speak, LNG on its founder's hat. The „fleet" also includes the German research vessel „Polarstern," which has been setting sail for Arctic waters from time to time for 40 years.

Graphic professions with potential

This is just one example of how an apprenticeship in the trades or in industry, in the past as well as today, offers the potential to turn apprentices into masters of their trade. Regardless of whether apprenticeships as bookbinders, bookbinding technicians, bookbinding technologists, printing equipment suppliers, media technologists for print processing or postpress technologists are offered to all genders in the three German-speaking countries of Germany, Austria and Switzerland today – what counts in the end is what the apprentices in the trades and industry make of it. Some focus on their artistic vein, others are technology freaks through and through, or business gets the upper hand – even in another business field.

So be it, the basis remains the basis. „You shouldn't want to foresee the future, but make it possible." This quote comes from „The City in the Desert" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944), the cult author of „The Little Prince" – a book that has sold over 140 million copies. With modern machines for print finishing, even for single copies and short runs, it is possible to tackle the future. Muller Martini makes this possible with its modern Finishing 4.0 systems.

Yours,
Hans Joachim Laue,

Retired trade journalist and editor of „Tagebuch der Buchbinderei und Druckweiterverarbeitung“. In 2021, Volumes 1–3, 16th–18th centuries, have been published, in February 2022 Volume 4 19th century, 240 pages, 175 illustrations. Volume 5 will highlight the 20th century. Available from Muller Martini customer BoD Book on Demand, Norderstedt (Germany), or through any bookstore (brick-and-mortar or online).

Also read these two interesting blogs on bookbinding history by Hans Laue:
What Times (Part I) / What Times (Part II)

Image: Examples of top hats in the first half of the 19th century (Source: Nordic Museum, Stockholm), © Image Archive H. J. Laue (Wikimedia Commons)