



# SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW

EDITION 1

SPRING 1994

## ????????ANSWERS????????

**"How am I supposed to drink Malt Whisky?"** is the most common question asked in our tasting room at Loch Lomond. My stock reply is to explain that you can drink it any way you like as long as you buy it from me! I cite this as an example of what we hope to achieve with this journal.

In the first instance we want you to buy some whisky from us. In this way we will be able to produce more *Scotch Whisky Reviews* rather than going out of business. Secondly, we want this review to amuse, inform and to answer some of your questions about whisky thus encouraging you to help us achieve objective number one.

Within these humble four pages, apart from suggestions on how to drink your malts, we have contributions from some of our friends in the industry.

Blenders are conductors of the symphony that is blended Scotch. Ian Grieve is the Master Blender for United Distillers and is unique in that he is a *composer*, the creator of Bell's Islander, one of the few genuinely-new mass-market blends produced since the war. Ian describes his role and typical working day with UD, (owners of Bell's, Johnnie Walker and 40% of Scotland's distilling capacity).

MacDuff International is a new company licensing and marketing many brands including Islay Mist. Founder/director Ted Thompson considers the importance of a name. In future we will hear of Ted's Latin-American sales drive.

We feature Clynelish, the peatiest of mainland whiskies, and begin regular reviews. In future our reviews will consider not just malts but also blends, liqueurs, books and anything else we feel you may be interested in. But for this launch issue space is devoted to some explaining on our behalf.

We hope our inaugural four pages will be worthwhile; your feedback is most welcome. It is hoped that the next edition will be eight or twelve pages, but that depends on you, dear customer.

**LOCH FYNE WHISKIES** is a specialist whisky retailer based in the much-visited village of Inveraray on the west coast of the Scottish Highlands.

**Established in 1993, it is owned and managed by Richard Joynson and Lyndsay Shearer. It is one of only two known retail businesses wholly dependant on the sale of whisky and whisky goods. We also operate a seasonal Tasting Room within The Lodge on Loch Lomond Hotel at Luss, thirty miles north-west of Glasgow.**

## NOTES FROM

### THE TASTING TRAY

*A series of comments from our Tasting Room at Luss. Initially we feature our own comments, in future those of participants.*

### INCHMURRIN 10 years old (10yo)

The highland malt with the lowland character.

Smooth, delicate, flavoured, slight smokiness, flowery like an expensive soap. Suggestions of Butterscotch or eucalyptus.

Little known example of a lowland style.

### HALF BOTTLE COLLECTORS

We are seeing a growing number of buyers and collectors of half bottle size single malt whiskies. With the increasing availability of malts in 35cl sizes it is relatively gentle on the purse to keep up with new releases. Recently, new halves of Aberlour and G&M's Cask whiskies have come onto the market and Loch Fyne Whiskies stocks a comprehensive selection of half bottles.

**SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW is free to all bona fide mail order customers. If you have not bought by mail order from the last (Autumn) catalogue and do not buy from the accompanying (Spring) list then we will not be troubling you again.**

## TOP OF THE TOTS

1994 price

1	Springbank 15yo*	£28.70
2	Talisker 10yo	£23.90
3	Inchmurrin 10yo*	£19.90
4	Glen Moray 12yo*	£20.60
5	Lagavulin 16yo	£24.60
6	Port Ellen CC 1977	£26.90
7	Cragganmore 12yo	£22.60
8	Edradour 10yo	£25.50
9	Bowmore Legend	£17.30
10	Oban 14yo	£23.70

\* Features on the original tasting tray.

### Other Notable sellers:

Athol Brose Liqueur	£17.90
Classic 6 Miniature Packs	£15.30
Collins Gem Whisky Book	£3.50
Malt Whisky Companion Book	£10.99
Small Thistle Glass (2)	£27.00
Tippling Stick	£10.90

## "WHAT'S A TASTING ROOM?"

Not sure, we only know of two. In Aviemore you can pay an admission charge and have Frank Clark pour whisky at you. Our operation at *The Lodge on Loch Lomond Hotel* at Luss, on the road from Glasgow to Inveraray is similar but there is no admission charge. The Original Tasting Tray of three tastes costs £2.35. New this year is a range of over 30 more malts to sample with our tasting notes. It's great fun and everyone appreciates it. Open from Easter to October 31st, noon to 6 pm. See you there!

## OVERSEAS NEWS

We have been despatching worldwide and to our knowledge only a single miniature has gone astray. Overseas customers can feel increasingly confident that their goods will arrive. It seems that Customs within the EC are not intercepting parcels. Outside the EC please check with your local Customs/Excise offices if any special requirements are necessary. Our new overseas order form gives mailing charges.

## THE ROLE AND WORKING DAY OF A MASTER BLENDER

Ian Grieve, Master Blender, United Distillers

**Much is written about the whisky makers art. How the barley is malted; the skills of the mashman and stillman and how the whisky is locked away in dark warehouses for a great many years until its individual character is formed. But travel to any distillery and ask the mashman and stillman, in fact anyone who makes Scotch Whisky, where they think the hardest task lies and the answer will in general be the same; in the blending.**

The international reputation and popularity of Scotch Whisky has been built on blended whisky. Indeed, if the practice of blending had not started, the whisky industry of Scotland as we know it today would not have developed beyond a cottage industry.

Prior to the mid 1800's, grain and malt whiskies were drunk singly with limited appeal. It was in the 1860's that Andrew Usher discovered that by blending various grains and malts together, he created a blend of whiskies which had much greater popular appeal.

Skill and experience is required to produce a good blend of Scotch, often containing up to 40 single malt and grain whiskies each with their own characteristics. When selecting whiskies for a blend it is very much like selecting guests for a dinner party, you must strike the correct balance of personalities. Some malts have very little appeal on their own but blended together with others they balance beautifully.

Blending is the art of combining whiskies from different distilleries, both malts and grains, each with its own character, to compliment and enhance their respective flavours. Thus blending is in no sense a dilution but the combining of like with like to produce a whisky that brings out the best qualities of each of its constituent parts.

The objective of the blender is first to produce a whisky of a definite and recognisable character. His second objective is to achieve consistency. It is of the greatest importance that his blend should never vary from this standard which customers all over the world have come to expect.

From a predetermined formula, the various single whiskies are allocated as a blend and as a result planning and stock holding play an important role in ensuring that the Blender's criteria can be consistently maintained to ensure the quality and consistency of the product. Whisky Blenders work by their sense of smell alone. A little whisky from the cask is poured into a tulip shaped glass, water is added and the glass shaken

before the whisky is nosed. The addition of the water releases the full aroma of the whisky and reduces it to the correct strength for sampling. Providing that his nose tells him that everything is alright, the Blender can accept the sample.

In Bell's, following the blending of the whiskies, they are filled back into cask for the marrying period of several months commonly known as the "Honeymoon Period". The object of this is to allow the different whiskies each with their individual characteristics to "marry" and to become intimately mixed. This is a very expensive process but experience has shown that it is essential if a blended whisky of quality is to be produced.

While the traditional role of the Master Blender remains, I also frequently support the Company's Marketing and Sales activities giving presentations to key customers and opinion forming groups to reinforce the high qualities and differing styles of Company products. My day can be varied. It can involve catching the "red eye", followed by meetings and presentations to key accounts, supporting the sales force, and then travelling to give a tutored nosing and tasting elsewhere in the UK during the evening.

In the late 1980's, I was responsible for the creation of Bell's Islander. It is very difficult to create a new blend when you consider how many different blends are marketed. It helps if you are given some guidance by the Marketeers as to its positioning in the Market Place. My brief was to create a blend of the highest quality positioned between Premium whiskies such as Bell's and deluxes (Dimple) and malts. It was to be targeted at the discerning whisky drinker who was looking for something special but not so special as deluxes and malts.

To develop the blend, I examined over 70 whiskies, seeking individual characteristics that could be blended together to create a unique nose and taste that would appeal to the discerning whisky drinker. This was largely done by trial and error and based on my experience of blending Bell's—it is important to ensure no one whisky dominates.

Finally I settled on 40 grains and malts with a strong bias towards malts from the Islands, hence the name "Bell's Islander". In essence creating this new blend could be compared to composing a piece of music to be played by a forty piece orchestra.

I feel the industry should continue to promote the quality and heritage values of its wonderful products to the consumer, who also should be encouraged to try drinking blends with various mixers and in different forms, (and single malts with the addition of water). Undoubtedly this will be to the long term benefit of the industry and all those who work in it.

After all, the Scotch Whisky industry plays a very important role in our economy.



### 500 YEARS OF SCOTCH

In 1494, the Scottish Exchequer Roll listed, "Delivery of eight bolls of malt to Friar John Col wherewith to make aquavita". This, the first recorded mention of any distillation in Scotland, is being celebrated by the Scotch whisky industry. Today's *water of life* gets its name from the Gaelic direct translation of aquavita, 'uisge beatha', pronounced ooshkubeha (ooshku, whence whisky). Eight bolls is over a tonne, sufficient malt to make over 1,400 bottles so we can assume the good friar and his pals had been at it for some time before 1494. Personal use only, of course!

There are many ideas as to the origins of whisky. It's known that the Egyptians were able to boil beer and collect the steam distillate as early as 800 BC. One likely suggestion regarding the introduction of distillation into Scotland is by Irish monks as early as the 5th century. The use of malted barley developed about 1200 but it was not until the 1700's that the product could be considered to be drinkable or indeed safe.

It is very possible that the Scots have been distilling for over a thousand years. This heritage is reflected in the high quality of today's product which, unlike most others, has not been compromised, only continuously improved since Friar John Cor's historic delivery.

### LETTER(S?)

I look forward to your first newsletter. Hey, can I write some smart-assy letter-to-the-editor for your first issue? I always wonder when I read first issues of magazines and see letters-to-the-editor... Were they written by psychics??

Sean Cavanaugh, California

### NOTES FROM

#### THE TASTING TRAY

##### SPRINGBANK 15yo

A smell of saltiness. A nose that is briny, fresh, sweet and savoury with a musty old books, nutty character; fruity with a smell of leather. Medium sherried with a full lingering finish.

Springbank certainly is a complex whisky!

Scotch Whisky is Britain's fifth largest export earner.

.....WELL I NEVER!

## FEATURED DISTILLERY

# C L Y N E L I S H

Located on the North-East coast of Sutherland, midway between Inverness and John O'Groats, in the town of Brora, the original distillery at Clynelish was purpose-built to serve the new farms being established on the fertile land of Sutherland's North Sea coastal strip. The distillery was built for £750 in 1819 by the future Duke of Sutherland to provide a ready market for the grain grown by his tenant farmers on improved coastal land. The Duke, most noted for his clearances of 15,000 people to make way for sheep, married into the estate via the Countess of Sutherland, developed a coastal community with those people who did not emigrate. Brora was built as an industrial town with a fishing harbour, coal pit, and distillery. Further, it was hoped that by providing a steady market for grain, farmers would no longer support the illicit distillers whose existence, according to a contemporary report, had "nursed the people in deceit and vice". Clynelish Distillery was a model design: spent grains, the by-products of distilling, were used in an adjoining piggery, and part of Brora Moor was

reclaimed using the manure the herd produced to grow more barley to supply the distillery; coal from the mine at Brora fuelled the fires beneath the stills. The farm at Clynelish was leased to James Harper, originally from Midlothian, who started the distillery with one wash still and one spirit still, producing 10,015 gallons (45,527 litres) in 1821-22.

The distillery and farm thrived, unlike the coal pit which yielded inferior coal and quickly closed. Highland cattle from Clynelish won the first prize in their class, and sheep gained other awards, at the Smithfield Show in 1894.

The quality of Clynelish whisky was so prized at that time that only private customers were supplied, not only "all over the Kingdom" but abroad as well, commanding "very valuable exports", and "trade orders were refused".

When the Leith whisky blenders, Ainslie & Co, bought over the distillery in 1896 they enlarged the premises for both production and warehousing to satisfy the demand from wholesalers as well as from private customers.

In 1912 the distillery became the property of The Distillers Company Limited and in 1930 Scottish Malt Distillers Ltd.

In March 1931 the economic recession forced Clynelish to close. Production

restarted in September 1938, only to shut down from May 1941 until November 1945 because of restrictions on the supply of barley to distillers during the Second World War.

In the 1960's Clynelish was again brought up to date when electricity was installed and the stills which had been heated by a hand-fired coal burning furnace were converted to internal steam heating.

Clynelish was replaced by a new distillery built on an adjacent site in 1967-8. The six stills in the new distillery were run on the most up to date lines, while retaining the traditional still shape and the original water supplies from the Clynemilton Burn ensured that the sought after quality of Clynelish whisky remained unchanged.

The original distillery was closed for a short time but reopened as "Brora Distillery" from April 1975 until May 1983 when it closed for the last time.

The modern distillery produces a marine influenced malt, often described as being of an island character. It is not as fully peated as any of the Islay malts but the sea, iodine and peat are discernable while not overpowering. Most of the production is used for blending although the single malt is available in the bottlings reviewed below.

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**Alfred Barnard, 1887—*"It is sent out duty paid to private customers all over the kingdom, and the demand for it in this way has become so great that the firm have for some years been obliged to refuse trade orders."***

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# C L Y N E L I S H

## FIVE BOTTLINGS AVAILABLE

**MARKET HOUSE**—14yo, 43%, £28.40. One of United Distillers boxed 'fauna and flora' series. Presentation: high quality wooden box; elegant, tapered clear bottle; black and amber print on beige label featuring wildcat and description and history of distillery and character of whisky (*fruity, slightly smoky single malt scotch whisky much appreciated by connoisseurs*).

Clear, fruity nose with a hint of the seaside, very faint peat and sherry sweetness.

Dry, malty, smoky taste with a teasing peatiness.

Finish is delightfully light and long.

**CADENHEAD** — 11yo, 66.7%, £35.20. Authentic cask bottling, new presentation—gold and white lettering onto green glass with small label giving details of contents.

Nose— like a new tin of Quality Street! Grass and Chocolate.

Taste—citric, pepper, sweet and full, clings to the tongue.

Finish—Medium, spicy.

**G & M**—12yo, 57%, £30.90.

Standard bottle, screw cap, two tone label with line drawing of distillery.

Nose—smoke, peat, sherry, sea, less chocolate than Cadenhead.

Taste—malt, slight smoke and faint but distinct peat (Brora style).

Long lingering 'sticky' finish. Good stuff!

**SIGNATORY**—28yo, 50.7%, £53.90.

Dumpy bottle with buff label, attractive, black leatherette presentation case with perspex panel. (Vintage 1965).

Nose of sweetness, peat and iodine. Slight citrusness.

A thick tongue-coating, smooth, tame-medicinal whisky with a long finish.

A good example of the benefits of further maturation.

From the old distillery, **BRORA**, 19yo, 1972, 40%, £33.30.

Connoisseurs Choice presentation.

Nose—peat, very similar to Laphroaig, —quite astonishing in fact.

Taste is a mix of Laphroaig and Lagavulin, a massive burst of smoke then pepper, aniseed, and dryness.

Finish long and dry, recommended for Laphroaig drinkers.



## RECOMMENDATIONS?

Difficult.

Professor George Saintsbury in his "Notes on a Cellar Book" (1920) stated that "some mixed Clyne Lish and Glenlivet to be the best whisky he had ever drunk". If we assume that he was mixing the peaty product now available as Brora with a good Speysider then the Market House bottling must be a good imitation of Prof. Saintsbury's delight.

As a present, I'd like the Signatory. If I were to buy one I'd be happy with the MH 14yo (or maybe the G&M). If I had to drop one it would be the Cadenhead but I would be sorry. A Kildalton (south coast, heavy peat) Islay fan will love the Brora which is a treat as there is very little left.



## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Ted Thompson, MacDuff International

Having been with White Horse for over 17 years, Whyte & Mackay for 5 years and now a partner of a new independent company, MacDuff International, I have had my eyes opened regarding how names of whiskies or other liquor products are developed.

Most of the single malts available bear the name of the distillery where they were 'born', and when blended whiskies were introduced in the mid-19th century they were normally named after the founder of the brand—Johnnie Walker, John Haig, Dewar's etc. This was the guarantee of quality and dependability because no 'whisky baron' would lend his name to a whisky that was inferior or which could damage his reputation.

The normal practice when adding a new or aged product to your portfolio was to maintain the original name and just add the age of the blend; this is called 'line extension'. Over the years this has proved to be unsuccessful for a number of companies who have been brand leaders in the certain markets, with the exception of Johnnie Walker, who successfully introduced Red and Black label. In reverse, Seagrams have been very successful with Chivas Regal 12 year old, but so far have not managed to produce a standard brand.

Major companies who identified the need for aged products searched their archives to find a traditional name that would be suitable and unregistered.

Today there are over 4,000 registered brands of Scotch whisky, increasing annually as companies enter the private label arena for select companies.

In my two years with our new company we have, or will be introducing, four new labels primarily for the international market. Two of the labels were specifically designed at the request of a customer. The first, *Cumbræ Castle*, was derived from a small island (Cumbræ) in the Firth of Clyde, and

thumbing through the library we discovered that a clipper ship named "*Cumbræ Castle*" carried emigrants and pioneers from Scotland to the New World. In the case of *Strathbeg* we scanned the gazetteer and found a loch in the Highlands which had some history and we thought the name was attractive.

In some cases we have been requested to develop a brand by a major overseas customer who selects the name and is part of the development of the label. This can be both challenging and frustrating trying to meet the various demands of designers, printers, production and finally the customer, but if it is worth it—we do it!

It is interesting to note how the major conglomerates of our industry are introducing brands closely associated with a successful well-recognised brand. J&B have launched a brand called *J&B Jet*, Ballantine - *Founder's Choice*, and Seagrams - *Chivas Imperial*—all principally designed for the lucrative Far East and International Duty Free markets.

One of the most important elements in naming a product is selecting a name which portrays confidence, possibly can be translated into other languages, and has some association with the industry and its traditions.

Scotch whisky is very popular with those who cannot read English or even pronounce the names of some brands. The producer tackles that situation by applying some easy identifiable symbol which the consumer can translate into their own language or just point to the object. For many years in Japan the Johnnie Walker man was the symbol which simply meant Scotch whisky. I recall, sometime ago in my Duty Free days, a Japanese ship ordering liquor describing a brand as 'Grants Standfast Johnnie Walker whisky'!

*(Perhaps our customers have some good ideas for future international best-sellers? Answers on a postcard...)*

## MY MEMORABLE DRAM

If any dram stays in my mind it is the one I never had—vinegar!

To explain, in 1970 we bottled the oldest Springbank we have ever produced, a fifty year old that we named '1919', after the year of distillation. Only twenty four bottles were produced and the retail price today is £7,500 each making it the most expensive whisky in the world.

Very occasionally we make available to selected outlets, such as Loch Fyne Whiskies, a dummy for display purposes, identical in every respect except

Gordon Wright, Springbank Distillery

filled with malt vinegar as this best reflects the appearance of the genuine article.

Recently one such vinegar substitute was stolen from a world-renowned London store. The press, quick to see the humour of this, asked me for my comments.

My response was reported worldwide; "A bottle of 50-year old Springbank whisky would accompany the finest state banquet anywhere in the world. This thief has something to go perfectly with his fish and chips."

Scotch Whisky must be bottled at least 40% alcohol by volume, (ABV). Any weaker and the age of the whisky can not be assessed by the regulatory laboratories.

.....WELL I NEVER!

## HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO DRINK MALT WHISKY?

As promised on page one the ultimate answer to the ultimate question; you can drink it any way you like as long as you buy it from me!

I would be foolish to tell anyone how to drink their malt but some people do appreciate me telling them how I drink my dram. If I wish to assess a whisky, I will spend up to 40 minutes occasionally nosing, teasing myself as to what to expect, then a small sip and some further consideration. About a third tap water is added (Scotland being blessed with good water—ours is not noticeably chlorinated) and the teasing process is repeated for a further half hour or so. Finally I get to drink it in small mouthfuls.

Particularly enjoyable is a head-to-head of three drams comparing each by nose, then neat, then with water. This is the basis of our Tasting Room.

Some insist that a whisky should be taken neat; I consider this to be a shame as water reveals so much more.

Some take it neat with a glass of water to one side either for 'flushing' or in many cases for mixing or 'shuggling' in the mouth whilst slurping air over the top of the mix.

One thing is certain. You should drink it the way that pleases you.

**Space prevents** our proposed review of Islay Mist, (lots of Laphroaig in this connoisseurs blend); the Illustrated History book, excellent but why so expensive?; information for collectors of limited editions (we have Bowmore Black, Glenmorangie 150 anniversary, Argyll & Sutherland Commemoratives and more) and miniatures; articles on labels, international whiskies and more hard selling. We'll try for eight or twelve pages next. Feedback and contributions welcome.

Richard & Lyndsay

## BORING ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

We would like to record our gratitude for the support, assistance and confidence of: Frank Clark, Steve Webb and Ian Grieve, Gordon Wright, David Urquhart, Douglas Hendry, our Mums, Dads & Dogs, supporters of our second and third presentations to the Mid-Argyll licensing board and the owners and Directors of Atlantic Freshwater plc.

## PLEASE TELL YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT US!