



# SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW

EDITION 5

SPRING 1996

## A CURE FOR WAMBLING

**Blended Scotch Whisky—Spey Cast, Black Label and of course a wee *Loch Fyne*.** This is the answer to one of our most frequent questions: Which is your favourite? After a long period of enjoying single malt whiskies I am 'coming out.' I prefer blends.

Looking over the past year and the stocks at home I confess that the small collection of malts remains for very occasional use or to entertain house guests. It is the blends that go down at a rate of a dram each night. As Ronnie Martin says in this edition's interview, 'blends go down more easily' and I appreciate the prevention of snafflying, impossible with a big cloying sherrywood malt. I also look forward to the reduced risk of whyrling and crumpling in later life. (Madness—maybe, but see page 8 for an explanation).

These has never been a better time to buy malt whiskies, nor will there ever be again. For example just recently G&M's stocks of Kinclaith became exhausted and it can no longer be assumed that malt from Kinclaith distillery will be available except as an occasional single cask bottling. Stocks of other 'lost' distilleries are diminishing fast. Furthermore producers are determined that prices are to go up after a long freeze and the increase in demand for malts makes this realistic in the near future. Buy now while stocks last...

The Scotch Whisky Association must be congratulated for leading the duty lobby on the Government and creating the first drop in UK excise duty for 100 years—surely the Chancellor could have seen himself this was blindingly necessary. The SWA is now campaigning for a further drop of a few percent and here we differ; with the fortunes being made and lost as a result of cross-border bootlegging (and the slide into lawlessness) there must be the best possible argument for a brave Chancellor to adopt 'the Danish Solution'—a 50% cut in excise duty overnight, now.



**"PERILOUSLY SMOOTH, MELLOW AND EASY TO DRINK"**

## A SUPER-PREMIUM BLEND

Easter 1996 sees the launch of our whisky. Blended for us by Ronnie Martin of Inverarity Vaults, *The Loch Fyne* is a super-premium blend with a quality and price position between the premium whiskies (Bell's, Grouse or Teacher's) and the Deluxe blends (Black Label, Chivas Regal).

The presentation reflects the high quality of the whisky and will make an excellent souvenir of Argyll for visitors to our shop. More on page 4.

## BALBLAIR SOLD

Inver House Distillers have acquired Balblair Distillery from Allied Distillers. This follows their acquisition of Pultney Distillery from Allied last year. Allied suspended distilling at Balblair and Glendronach for two years in March.

Inver House Distillers is the result of a UK directors buy-out in from Publicker Distillers, a subsidiary of a US Corset manufacturer, in 1987. They now have four malt distilleries including Speyburn and An Cnoc.

## THE PROFESSOR



**Ronnie Martin is the creator of our new *Loch Fyne* blend of Scotch Whisky.**

**LFW: How do you create a blend?**

It's not a science, it's your own nose and palate that decides what's right in the end.

A well known character in the industry says that to make up a blend there can be no one single whisky predominating, and I agree, it's a good starting-off point. There's an strong argument for having a good spread of malts, it can't be done with just a few.

The rest is trial and error. The "Pope's telephone number" — VAT 69 — was created when William Sanderson made up 100 vattings and chose which one he and his chums liked best. I think he was quite right to do that. The blender for VAT 69 used to halve hogsheads. He'd make up a 20,000 gallon vat and actually split a hoggie of one malt to get the ratio right.

To create a blend decide on your first highlands, your second highlands, third highlands, then lowlands and Islays—but be careful with the Islays. We do a practical at the University in which we give my students a vatted malt, a vatted grain and some Islay whiskies and it can be very quickly demonstrated that you can kill a blend dead with too much Islay. There are a lot of blends without any Islay malt. Keep the Islays under control.

Next decide how much malt and how much grain.

Then wood selection, the type of cask—Sherry, bourbon, new, refilled, refilled wine treated, de-charred, re-charred, there are many categories and the permutations are almost endless.

Then how old? There has been an argument for some time between the non-aged deluxe and the 12 year olds. The

virtue of having no age on the label is that you can put a wee bit of youth in to ginger it up a bit rather than just having it all 12 years and over.

Our whisky is a 'standard', as opposed to a secondary or deluxe. The youngest is five years and the oldest is over ten with a spectrum of age, a good scatter across the range. I believe this range of ages give us a top quality product, particularly when compared with other standard brands.

Finally we put much reliance on a good dollop of top dressing; it brings the whole thing up. I consider this critical and I'm very pleased with mine. The quality of this top dressing is an important factor in the creation of *The Loch Fyne*, giving you a unique whisky.

**LFW: What are you doing now?**

I set up this company in 1991 after I retired as Production Director from United Distillers. Our company is called Inverarity Vaults and was created with my son Hamish who had been working in the wine trade in London where he gained his wine & spirits diploma. He then joined me at Inverarity in 1992.

Inverarity was my Grandmother's name and it struck me as a good name for our venture. There are not many Inveraritys about. We've been marketing a blend and a single malt under that name for the last four years.

When you're starting off, it is an extremely slow business so we've got other irons in the fire apart from whisky. We are the sole agency in Scotland for Ruinart Champagne, the oldest Champagne house in the world and also some excellent wines including De Loach from California. Champagne, wine and whisky, our three balancing elements! Hamish is 28 now and has a further 40 years to achieve our aims and ambitions. Brand building takes time.

**LFW: What are those aims?**

A return on the capital invested! To promote the quality image of our Scotch Whisky. I was the chairman of the Scotch Whisky definition committee and very much involved with the quality aspects of the industry. I'm very keen that what we put into the Inverarity bottles is a good representation of quality.

I want the best 'standard' blend in blind tastings against any other standard blend. Likewise our malt, a single Speyside, which in my judgement can stand comparison with any other malt. We're very much concerned with quality.

**LFW: Why did you choose Aultmore as your malt?**

As managing director of 45 distilleries, you visit each one every two or three years and get to know them individually and Aultmore was my favourite. It is something of a co-incidence that my predecessor had the same favourite.

I trained as a chemical engineer and my first whisky job, as long ago as 1958, was

designing a drier at Aultmore to convert the waste to animal feed. I stayed in a caravan there. I remember the distillery when it had a water wheel, the tun was belt driven and barley came in 1 cwt sacks, taken on backs up stairs to the malting floor, steeped & spread. It was called Aultmore-Glenlivet which I think was a bit of licence—it must be over 20 miles from the Livet!

**LFW: You must have experienced the DCL take-over battle from the front line.**

Yes I did, but it is all history now.

You have to remember that the original proposal submitted to and recommended by the board to the shareholders was for an overall holding company based in Scotland whilst retaining the individual boards of both The Distillers Company Ltd and Guinness. For a number of reasons this never came to pass.

The result is United Distillers in its present form which is proving very successful and I'm not saying this because I'm a pensioner of theirs!

Their products are good. I had a tasting the other day of the new Johnnie Walker Gold 18yo. That and the Blue label are superb products. A lot of good effort has gone into the Classic Six. We were slow into malts and had only Cardhu until Guinness came along. Malts are now up to 10% of total Scotch Whisky sales.

*"I want the best standard blend"*

**LFW: When did you become Director of Production?**

I became Managing Director of Scottish Malt Distillers in 1979 and Production Director of SMD's parent, DCL, in 1982—a difficult time. When I took over as Production Director we had 45 malt distilleries and closed 21 of them. Carsebridge grain distillery was closed, and many bonds. Every year we used to buy 200,000 shook bundles, that is dismantled casks, and we went from manual to mechanical raising of barrels which unfortunately put a lot of coopers out of work.

In the early 70s we were filling casks for a projected 8% compound growth in sales, up to 8 or 12 years ahead. We were building eight new warehouses a year, each of 66,000 hogsheads.

**LFW: What went wrong?**

With hindsight, I don't think any product in the world can keep on growing at the rate predicted. It wasn't a drop in consumption that caused the whisky loch but the loss of growth.

**LFW: Now the industry is looking lean and fit.**

A lot of changes had to take place over the last twenty years.

On the sherry cask side we required 10,000 home-emptied sherry casks a year, travelling casks they were called, tatty old bodega casks. When they stopped coming in we set up the DCL bodega at Carsebridge, bringing in thousands of gallons of sherry. We'd do a wood trial to identify between American and European oak, fill it with sweet sherry and hold it for six months and then disgorge it for re-use—which I have to tell you made a fantastic product!

**LFW: Is six months adequate?**

In this case yes. Very seldom do the Spaniards use sweetened wine whereas the UK is very much a sweet market. So the home emptied sherry casks are not typical of the Spanish production. You are really talking of oloroso filled casks as opposed to fino.

**LFW: How did you get to be so concerned about quality?**

I was Chairman of the Scotch Whisky Definition Committee, which produced the Scotch Whisky Act. The 1990 Act enlarged on the original definition of Scotch which was that it had to be produced in Scotland, matured in wood for three years and contain malted barley. There were three things that I was very keen to make sure were included. One was the minimum strength of 40% alcohol by volume, (there was a very strong lobby from the marketing side at the time for 37.5% as other spirits were all 37.5%). With the help of the DCL/UD research facility at Glenochil we were able to show, (with easy to understand coloured graphs!), the enormity of the fall-off of the flavour giving congeners between 40% and 37.5%. A lot of flavor congeners are flung out at 37.5%. It really is quite extraordinary that our forefathers, without the aid of high pressure liquid chromatographs and other gadgetry, knew what was absolutely right, quite often as well. At levels of below 40% you lose a lot of character.

I was also very keen that the enzymes for producing the sugars for fermentation should be purely and simply from malted barley and not from any other source as can be done with other types of whiskey. Scotch Whisky is a noble spirit and it should be made purely. For the same reason we fought for the use of whole grains only, otherwise a large proportion of Scotch Whisky could have been made from the by-products of a cereal factory! There was considerable opposition to that.

**LFW: Who were you fighting?**

Cost driven arguments!

We also decided that the definition of Scotch Whisky is all embracing. You can have 100% grain whisky, 100% malt, that is Scotch Whisky. We do not have

separate definitions for grain, malt or blend, be it 1% or 99% malt. The reason is that you are not saying that grain is a secondary product to malt. The definition, rightly or wrongly, and I think rightly, is that there is no reference to the amount of malt in a blend.

The Act succeeded due very much to the services of Bill Walker MP, and Bill Brewsher, the then Director General of the Scotch Whisky Association. There were two angles to it; one was getting political support and eventually it got all party support. I was in charge of the technical considerations; now that we had the chance, I had to make sure that it was absolutely right.

**LFW: For this work you were awarded the OBE for services to Scotch Whisky.**

I was very fortunate, but in terms of honours I like to think of the original whisky barons—Dewar, Buchanan, 'Restless' Peter Mackie, Walker and Haig; it is they who created the industry.

*“now we had the chance, I had to make sure it was absolutely right”*

I'm Visiting Professor of Distilling at the International Centre of Brewing and Distilling at Heriot-Watt University, here in Edinburgh which I became involved with in the late 1980s. The University wanted some financial input and involvement from the brewing and distilling industries. They wanted to put in a pilot plant brewery and we gave them the small stills from Glenochil. They've got a first-class lauter tun for preparing mashes that they can play every tune on you can imagine—depth, rotation, everything! They now have the definitive pilot production plant.

With my opposite number at Scottish & Newcastle Brewers, we obtained support from the brewing industry and the Scotch Whisky Association to put up a direct injection of cash. I don't want to be immodest about it, but it really has taken off. Demand well exceeds places and last year every graduate got a job. A great success.

Now the Scottish Whisky Research Institute is going to be set up next to the ICBID in the research park. The SWRI is financed by the main Whisky companies so it really will be the research arm

of the industry. Both share some of the same directors, for example Alan Rutherford of UD, is on both boards.

**LFW: If you were allowed one whisky on your desert island...**

One whisky? It would be a blend.

**LFW: Why a blend?**

It's difficult to describe. Consider the congeners; there are many more in malt than grain. In a blend you're cutting the congener levels by the addition of grain. If you are a serious whisky drinker, then you are a blend man. Talk to anyone in the trade and I think you will find a preference for blends. A malt is fine but I enjoy a blend. It goes down easier!

I'd take my own blend or Black Label. A lot is to do with what you've drunk in the past and I know what goes into it and how much care has gone into it.

I suppose I should say *The Loch Fyne*, that would do just fine!

**LFW: Thank you Professor Martin, full marks!**

**THE DEFINITION OF SCOTCH WHISKY**

Professor Martin Chaired the Committee that created the current legal definition of what exactly is Scotch Whisky in the Scotch Whisky Act.

“Scotch Whisky”, for the purposes of the Act means whisky—

—which has been produced at a distillery in Scotland from water and malted barley (to which only whole grains of other cereals may be added) all of which have been—

—processed at that distillery to a mash,

—converted to a fermentable substrate only by endogenous enzyme systems, and

—fermented only by the addition of yeast.

—which has been distilled at an alcoholic strength by volume of less than 94.8% so that the distillate has an aroma and taste derived from raw materials used in, and the method of, its production.

—which has been matured in an excise warehouse in Scotland in oak casks of a capacity not exceeding 700 litres, the period of that maturation being not less than 3 years.

—which retains the colour, aroma and taste derived from the raw materials used in, and method of, its production and maturation, and

—to which no substance other than water and spirit caramel has been added.

The Act prohibits the production in Scotland of whisky other than Scotch Whisky.

All Scotch Whisky bottled and/or put up for sale within or exported from the European Community must be of a minimum alcoholic strength of 40 per cent by volume.

# The LOCH FYNE™ Blend of SCOTCH WHISKIES

*A tasting note by Charles Maclean, Scotland's foremost whisky writer.*

"The deep amber colour of this whisky, (darker than many blends) implies age and this is supported by the (undilute) nose, which is rich and vinous, with no trace of grain. All the indications of mature fillings.

There is an interesting aroma of apple dumpling (suet crust), and this remains when water is added, enlivened by lighter citric notes (oranges and tangerines), and by some oil-related aromas (walnuts, linseed oil). Phenolic notes are slight, and express themselves more as 'roast meat' than peat smoke. Medicinal phenols are present in a very slight trace of oilskins. Overall the nose is subtle and relatively closed. Not much water is needed for this whisky.

The mouth-feel is smooth and well balanced, engaging the whole palate with acidic, salty, sweet and dry flavours, and coming down ultimately on the side of sweetness. The overall impression is fresh and smooth—mellow without being flat. The finish is quick and clean, and surprisingly warming. It is extremely easy to drink.

**Conclusion:** A true premium blend which has clearly used well matured fillings. There is no harshness in it, no cereal notes or feints, no artificial caramel notes. A whisky which is appropriate for any time of the day. **Perilously smooth, mellow and easy to drink."**

## GLENDARROCH DISTILLERY

Our new label depicts the Glendarroch Distillery sited on the banks of the Crinan Canal at Ardrishaig. Also known as Glenfyne, the distillery was built by Henry Hoey & Co in 1831. A succession of owners held the distillery until 1919 when it came under the ownership of the Glenfyne Distillery Co.

Our water colour by Gail Gordon depicts the distillery at the time of Alfred Barnard's visit in 1885. Barnard's detailed description of the buildings enabled us to recreate the floor plan and Gail was able to complete her task from this combined with etchings in his book.

Barnard was clearly taken by the setting, the distillery and hospitality afforded him. He devotes six pages to his visit, much taken up with details of the buildings e.g. "a new kiln, one of the finest we have seen in Scotland, it is 51 feet square" but also with the location: "It is built at the foot of the Robber's Glen which runs upwards from the banks of the canal into the heart of the hills in the background; this glen was once the haunt of smugglers, and no more romantic spot could have been chosen for the distillery."

Glendarroch was complete and well laid out. Barley was unloaded from the canal direct to the malt barns then moved through the process clockwise

around a courtyard to the kiln, tun room, still house and warehouses. Whisky was then shipped to market via the canal. Eight houses were available for the workers and two for the excisemen. There was also Glengilp House and Glendarroch House for the manager and the owner respectively. At the end of his day's visit Barnard's party "donned our 'war paint' and proceeded to Glendarroch House to enjoy the hospitality of the owner".

The distillery closed in 1937, unusually as there was a distilling boom at that time, although the warehouses continued to be used for storing whisky until the mid seventies. A brief life as a joinery followed until the eighties when a salmon hatchery made use of the buildings and water which was also the drinking water supply for Ardrishaig and Lochgilphead.

In 1990 the Regional Council acquired the water rights and every last trace of the distillery has been removed.

**Additional information:**

**Brian Townsend, SCOTCH MISSED.**

### LAUNCH PRICES

The Loch Fyne is presented in a tall round bottle with a cork stopper, blue and embossed gold front label and cap label seal (left). The gift presentation includes a branded tube and Loch Fyne Whiskies dram glass.

The Loch Fyne, bottle only ..... £13.90  
Gift Bottle, tube & dram glass .. £15.90

## YOU LIKE IT!

All despatches of full size bottles before Christmas included a complimentary miniature of Ronnie Martin's blend for The Loch Fyne with a request for your comments.

Some of the first to go out omitted to be described as a blend and many thought or assumed our mystery sample was a malt. This did not deter an Ipswich tasting club from enjoying it, describing a recurring butterscotch character with other superlatives such as "toffee, velvet, ermine, smooth, almost chewy, unctuous, caramel, vanilla, warm and lingering with a spirity vapour". They finished with two questions: "What is it?" and "When will you install a pipeline for this butterscotch malt?"

We realised that it was unfair not to reveal that the whisky was a blend and the miniature labelling was amended. Our preferred tasting note comes from Philip Irving, who was both succinct and commercially stimulating: "Very smooth blend worthy of a price tag of Black Label!" The suggestion of charging an extra £4 or £5 more than envisaged is a very good idea!

Chris Pascall brought us back to earth, when he described our blend: "a rich distinctive flavour, a subtle after taste and almost the right price." Perhaps we've got the price right after all.

John Campbell revealed considerable insight by guessing "water from the north-east, matured in sherry casks for 6 to 8 years. Taken neat—an excellent reviver and with a drop of water a good clean drink with a mellow, almost smooth pear drop flavour."

The letter pulled first out of the hat to win the snazzy presentation bottling is Mr N. A. Bray: "Regarding the sample of your proposed new blend, this is something I could also get very used to."

## THE TRADE MARK™

The Loch Fyne Trade Mark was first registered in 1884 to a company called J. M. Borthwick & Co. About the middle of this century it was assigned to the Glenfyne Distillery Company, as testified by the bottle of Loch Fyne which we bought at Christie's Auction (right). Last year we asked the registered owners if they would be willing to sell the Trade Mark to us.

After some considerable thought and discussion and to our immense delight, they agreed to sell the Trade Mark for what is best described as a 'modest sum'.



## RAISE YOUR GLASS TO THE BLENDER

An Appreciation by Charles Maclean

Donald Mackinlay, former Chairman of Charles Mackinlay & Sons, says accurately "If the practice of blending whisky had never begun, the whisky trade in Scotland might not have developed beyond a cottage industry".

His great-grandfather was one of the first whisky blenders—possibly *the* first, although this distinction is usually given to Andrew Usher, who created *Old Vatted Glenlivet* in 1853 (a mix of Glenlivets of different ages) and a true 'blend' of malt and grain whiskies soon after in 1860.

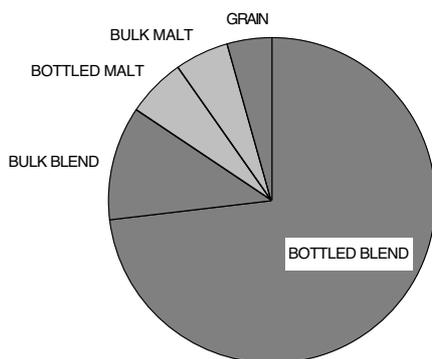
The importance of blended whisky cannot be overstated: even today, when single malt whiskies are enjoying greater popularity than ever before in history, 95% of the Scotch Whisky produced goes into blends. They account for the huge success of Scotch around the world, one of the UK's top five export earners and the backbone of the food and drinks industry (without Scotch, the trade deficit in this sector would increase by 40%). How do we account for this success? There are several reasons, historical and commercial, but at base, the success of Scotch—by which the world understands 'blended Scotch'—comes down to its universal appeal. It 'touches the spot'; satisfies where other drinks do not (yes, and even malt whisky); finds favour with people of all races, it is Scotland's greatest gift to the world. The achievement of the Master Blender is prodigious. It has been said that while "distilling is a science, blending is an art": the blender's task is to combine a number of malt and grain whiskies in such a way that the resulting drink is more than the sum of its parts.

### WORLD SALES, 1994

Blended whisky accounted for 85% of all Scotch sold in 1994; with malt 11% and pure grain 4%. Exports of malt had a value of £236m (11% of total); blended Scotch valued £1,898m (87%) and grain £56m (2%). Malt whisky sales are becoming increasingly significant as a factor of Scotch Whisky exports; sales volumes have almost doubled in the two years 1992-4.

Source; SWA Statistics, 1994

#### WORLD SALES BY VOLUME 1994



Its parts are many.

Typically, he will select between 15 and 50 malts and three or four grains—although *Ultima*, a recent creation by J&B, makes use of every malt and grain whisky available, many from distilleries which have now disappeared—128 whiskies in all! Deluxe whiskies tend to use fewer malts at greater age and with a higher percentage of malt to grain (say 60:40).

A single bottling run may require hundreds of casks. Each and every one of these has different characteristics which must be taken account of by the blender: one dodgy barrel can destroy an entire bottling run. Just think of the cost!

The whiskies will be of different ages, and will have matured at different rates. The blender must assess the impact this might make on his blend. Even a 'standard' 5 year old will have some whiskies in it which are much older. If the bottle bears an 'age statement' (the new Bell's 8 year old, for example), all of its constituents—malt and grain—must be of at least that age.

The recipes—formulae—for some blends are over 100 years old, but they are not sacrosanct. Distilleries close and their products are no longer available. Or a particular malt takes off as a single, and mature spirit becomes difficult to obtain (Glenmorangie is a case in point). Replacements must be sought which lend the same character to the finished blend. When he is creating a new blend, the blender must take account of the cost and availability; he must know how one malt reacts with another, not only immediately but over time—I have heard Islays described as 'a rat in a bag': after a while they 'eat their way out' and dominate the flavour of the blend. Some blenders compare their work to conducting an orchestra: "The malts of Islay are heavy and sombre as cellos. Highland malts are violas; lowlands the discursive violin and grains are like pianos—sometimes *fortissimo*, sometimes *pianissimo*".

And the master blender must take account of all these variables every time stocks run low and a bottling is ordered. He must monitor the stocks of whisky he has in bond, and the new make spirit coming out of the distilleries owned by his company. Consistency of flavour is crucial to the success of blended whisky: if your favourite blend tastes different next time you buy a bottle you will be disappointed, and may even move to another brand.

So—you malt purists out there—never underestimate the skill, experience and effort that goes into creating a blended whisky. The introduction of a new blend—*The Loch Fyne*, for example—is a matter for celebration.

Until quite recently whisky was a subject that tended to be monopolised by Scots, foreigners, and elderly gentlemen in Clubs. This made the whole area fairley barren ground for bluffers unless they were fortunate enough to find themselves in the company of North Americans with remote Highland ancestry. Such people have a pleasing habit of believing pretty well anything, up to and including the social benefits of the clan system and the romantic joys of kelp gathering.

Things have changed. Whisky appreciation is an idea whose time has come. It will bring you into contact with much nicer people. Real people. Good people. Caring people...People like us."

David Milstead

Bluffer's Guide to Whisky



## NEW CUSTOMERS START HERE

The busy summer season in the shop is the time when Loch Fyne Whiskies welcomes new customers to our growing band of happy whisky fans. The following pages are for those who are developing an interest in the marvels of Scotch Whisky where we feature some explanation of the bottlings from our Stock List—MH, G&M, C, S etc., but we'll start with by far the most often asked question:

**I can't remember the name, but it came in a dumpy green bottle, can you help?**

Bunnahabhain! (Boo-na-ha-venn).

— Next!

**What is whisky?**

Literally the alcohol spirit produced by distilling fermented cereals. Whisky is produced in many countries, historically those that had climates more suited to growing cereals rather than grape/wine production.

*Scotch Whisky* is the world's most popular spirit and must be (amongst other things) made and matured in an oak barrel for not less than **three years** and **in Scotland**, otherwise it cannot be called *Scotch*.

### CADENHEAD (C)

The oldest of the independent bottlers, Campbeltown in Argyll is home to Cadenhead's who buy and mature casks of whisky and bottle each cask individually at natural cask strength, occasionally as high as 67% alcohol.



**How is whisky made?**

Easy, mix some processed grain with water, add yeast and let it ferment in the same way that beer is produced. Boil up your beer and collect the steam which will be mostly alcohol. Voilà, whisky! Throw this away as it is probably poison, your hair will fall out—and apart from that it's illegal.

Scotch whisky must contain barley and Malt Whisky be made exclusively from water, malted barley and yeast only.

**What is the difference between a single malt and a double malt?**

A **single malt** is the product of one malt whisky distillery and that one distillery only. There is no such thing as a double malt unless you are with your rich father-in-law at the bar (technically—'a large one').

Malt whisky is one of four types of Scotch. The most common is **blended whisky**, a mix of many different single malts and grain whiskies prepared by a blender using his sense of smell and years of experience. 92% of all bottled whisky sold is blended whisky and it is appreciated the world over for its satisfying subtlety and complexity.

**Grain** whisky is industrially produced from a variety of cereals including malted barley. The spirit is not fully distilled—a degree of impurity is required to add character. It is also stored in Scotland in oak barrels for at least three years before being used for blending.



**SIGNATORY (S)**

A range of malts bottled at both 43% and at cask strength. Edinburgh based, Signatory Vintage Scotch Whisky Company has been enjoying great success with some excellent rare bottlings.



**GORDON & MACPHAIL (G&M, CC, Cask)**

The leading and most respected independent bottler, G&M bottle a bewildering range of single, vatted and blended whiskies from their Elgin home. G&M are unique in that they mature all their whiskies from new. Shown above are examples of the *Connoisseurs Choice*, *Cask* and *G&M* range.

Occasionally you may come across a single grain whisky but its use is mainly as a carrier for malts in blends.

A fourth category of whisky is a **vatted malt** which is a blend of several malts but no grain. Malt bottles lacking the word 'single' may well be vatted; other clues are descriptions such as 'Pure Malt' or '100% malt'.

A single malt is a happy accident of science, nature and circumstance. Blended and vatted whiskies are one man's opinion of what he thinks you think a good whisky should taste like. Many members of the industry claim to appreciate blended Scotch the most.

**Why don't you stock a certain brand I had once?**

Whisky brands tend to fade away faster than get created as the industry changes from hundreds of brand owners to just a few. As big companies expand by the acquisition of small they find that they have two brands on the same shop shelf at the same price so one has to go. Some brands are only available overseas because they are better established there than in the UK.

**How many Scotch Whiskies are there?**

The Scotch Whisky Association draws attention to the Clave Vidiz collection in Brazil of over 4,000 bottles of Scotch. Not all of these will be available today and Campbell Evans of the SWA reckons that there are about 200 in the UK (201 now!) and 2,000 around the world.

Loch Fyne Whiskies has the most comprehensive range of UK available malts with examples from about 120 distilleries. There are currently about 95 open and working.

**How am I supposed to drink my malt whisky?**

How you like! Although it does seem a shame to mix a £25 malt with a sweet, fizzy mixer. Addition of water (anything from a drop to 50:50, depends on the bottling) often reveals more character because your nose is happier at lower alcoholic strengths, so experiment with a new bottling. Bear in mind you have four senses of taste and these are in your mouth, not in the back of your throat. Plus you have some 30 or more senses of smell so use the schnoz. Ice in malts is also a no-no; you put ice on bruises and



**HOW MANY DISTILL**

J&B have released Ultima — a blend containing the largest possible number of malt and grain components. Ultima contains 116 malts: Nevis, Ben Wyvis, Benriach, Benrinnes, Benromach, Bladnoch, Blair Athol, Bowmore, Braes of Glenlivet, Brechin, Brora, Bruichladdich, Dhu, Dalmore, Dalwhinnie, Deanston, Dufftown, Edradour, Fettercairn, Glen Albyn, Glenallachie, Glenburgie, Glencadam, Glen Craig, Grant, Glen Keith, Glenkinchie, Glenlivet, Glen Lochy, Glenlossie, Glen Mhor, Glenmorangie, Glen Moray, Glen Rothes, Glen Scotia, Knockdhu, Lagavulin, Laphroaig, Ledaig, Linkwood, Linlithgow (St Magdalene), Littlemill, Lochside, Longmorn, Macallan, Macduff, Brackla, Royal Lochnagar, Scapa, Speyburn, Springbank, Strathisla, Strathmill, Talisker, Tamnavulin, Teaninch, Tamdhu, Tomatin, Girvan, Invergordon, North British, North of Scotland, Port Dundas, Strathclyde. The only distilleries that could not be represented

**MARKET HOUSE (MH)**



When bottled by the owner of the distillery, we call such bottlings market house. These 'official' presentations are examples of the best in quality, packaging and design. Here are 'The Classic Six', owned, bottled and sold by the industry leader, United Distillers.

**Where's Cadenhead's/Connoisseurs Choice/Gordon & MacPhail's Distillery?** These bottles are from Independent bottlers who buy the malt whisky from a distillery and bottle it with their name foremost as their badge of quality. With all independent bottlings look for the distillery name which will be in smaller print.

**What are 'Cask Strength' Whiskies?** Whisky matures in the barrel at about 65%. Prior to bottling it is diluted to 40% so as to incur the least alcohol duty (originally a wartime measure). Cask strength whiskies are at natural, barrel strength which provides more impact and immediate flavour. These whiskies should be diluted in the glass after exploratory sips otherwise anaesthesia will numb the pleasure. Because of the



**The right glass for malt whisky.**

A traditional whisky tumbler is fine for a blended whisky with a mixer but for malt whisky appreciation a tulip or balloon glass is preferred.

A classic nosing glass has a generous belly to accumulate aromas, a narrow rim to focus those delights for consideration and a watch glass lid to keep them for you rather than the fairies. Engraved graduations allow accurate dilution.

For relaxed whisky drinking we recommend a port glass. A wider rim and better balance aids contemplative enjoyment. We also enjoy using the simple water carafe, far less fuss than a lipped jug.

Classic Nosing Glass .....	£7.50(a)
Port Glass .....	£3.50(a)
Carafe .....	£3.50(a)

in blended Scotch in hot climates. The advice of Aeneas MacDonald: Take a small wine-glass, preferably one with a generous belly and a narrow rim, let him [the taster] warm it slightly with his hand and then pour in a little of the whisky. Having assisted the process of evaporation with a gentle rocking motion of the glass, let him sniff the vapour at the rim. It should be mild and yet potent, round and 'warm', with no trace of the objectionable acidity of raw spirit. Then he should take a sip only a drop or two and allow it to remain in his mouth for a few moments. There ought to be no harshness in the liquor's assault on his palate: 'kick' only indicates a young or badly mannered spirit. It should be gentle, with nothing of that 'mineral' taste about it which causes all but hardened and careless drinkers to shudder a little and contract the facial muscles; and it ought to have a smooth, elusive and varied flavour in which it is very difficult to distinguish a dominant constituent. Having performed this operation, the experimenter should add some water to the remainder of the spirit and drink thoughtfully; it will be found better to use soft water for diluting, but it is a refinement which the beginner can spare himself.

**How do I know which malts I will like?** Most single malts will have the region of origin on the label, either Lowland, Highland, Speyside or Islay and these give a clue to the character of the contents—but there are many exceptions to the rule. **The Lowlands** are the most

gentle; mild, almost wine-like. **The Highlands** can be further divided; those from the south are akin to the lowlands, those from the north are fuller flavoured. **Speyside** is a category of its own within the Highlands. These whiskies are complex and half of Scotland's distilleries are found here. The most fully flavoured whisky is produced on the island of **Islay** (pronounced eye-la). Islay whiskies are unguided missiles in the wrong hands—you will either love them or wonder what the attraction is in smelling hospitals.

Books are useful sources of information and we recommend in particular: Value for money—*Collins Gem Whisky* £3.50 Most informed—*Pocket Whisky Book* £7.99 Taster's bible—*Michael Jackson's Malt Whisky Companion* £12.99 (alternatively *The Malt Whisky File* £9.99) **How come they taste so different?** Malted barley has to be dried before milling and fermentation and traditionally this has been done over an open fire. In Scotland a variety of fuels is found locally including peat (decomposing heather) and coal. The amount of **peat** that is used to dry the barley has a big influence (on Islay it is the only source of fuel). Other influences are the style of apparatus employed in the production, particularly the **still** and how that still is operated by the stillman. The final big influence is the type of oak **barrel** employed to mature the spirit; it could be one of many categories from a brand new barrel to a well-used second-hand sherry or bourbon cask.



**WERIES ARE THERE?**

...: Aberfeldy, Aberlour, Allt A Bhaine, Ardbeg, Ardmore, Auchentoshan, Auchroisk, Aultmore, Balblair, Balmenach, Balvenie, Banff, Ben ... Bunnahabhain, Caol Ila, Caperdonich, Cardhu, Clynelish, Coleburn, Convalmore, Cragganmore, Craigellachie, Dailuaine, Dallas ... Glendronach, Glendullan, Glen Elgin, Glenesk, Glenfarclas, Glenfiddich, Glenflagler, Glen Gairloch, Glenglassaugh, Glengoyne, Glen ... Glen Spey, Glentauchers, Glenturret, Glenury-Royal, Highland Park, Imperial, Inchgower, Inchmurrin, Inverleven, Jura, Knockando, ... f, Mannochemore, Millburn, Milntonduff, Mortlach, Mosstowie, Oban, Ord, Pittyvaich, Port Ellen, Pultney, Rhosdhu, Rosebank, Royal ... Tomintoul, Tormore, Tullibardine, and 12 grain whiskies: Caledonian, Cambus, Cameronbridge, Carsebridge, Dumbarton, Garnheath, ... that we can think of are Killyloch, Kininvie, Ladyburn and Speyside (although someone will know probably better).



Photo: Eddy Posthuma de Boer

**Who or what is Loch Fyne Whiskies?**

A shop. We sell only whisky and whisky related products. We also provide a mail order service. We are not part of a chain nor do we have any other branches. It is owned by Richard Joynson (above) and Lyndsay Shearer. We are devoted to our customers' enjoyment of our service.

variety of casks employed in the industry each single cask, cask strength bottling will have the character of the barrel variety as well as that of the distillery so there is great variation.

**Why are some whiskies so expensive?**

The first thing to check is the age of the whisky. If it is say 21 years old (the time spent in the cask—once bottled it does not 'age'), it will be dearer because of the additional storage required. Also whisky evaporates in the barrel by about 2% each year so after 21 years only two thirds remain. The other thing to look out for is the degree of alcohol strength as duty is applied according to percentage alcohol. Most whiskies are bottled at 40% alcohol by volume (abv), some at 43% or 46%—15% stronger and so dearer than the 40%. We stock many whiskies with strengths of up to 65% so these are the equivalent of over a bottle and a half!

**What's the fuss about tax?**

The Government has applied a tax to sales of alcohol and now by successive increases the duty on a bottle of Scotch (at 40% abv) is nearly £6. Added to this,

value added tax is applied to the total price (including the duty—a tax on a tax). The tax on a £40 cask strength bottle is £15!

**I heard that Scotch is good for you.**

The benefits of Scotch have been known for over 400 years:

*Beying moderateli taken, it sloweth age; it strenghened youthe; it helpeth disgestion; it cutteth fleume; it abandoneth melancholie; it relisheth the harte; it lighteneth the mynde; it quickeneth the spirites; it cureth the hydropsis; it healeth the stranguary; it preserveth the heart from whyrling—the eyes from dazelying—the tongue from lispying—the mouth from snafflying—the teeth from chattering—the throate from ratlying—the weasan from stieflying—the stomach from wamblying—the heart from swelling—the bellie from wirthchying—the guts from rumblying—the hands from shiverying—the sinwoes from shrinking—the veynes from crumplying—the bones from soaking—trulie it is a soveraigne liqour if it be orderlie taken.*

**Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland 1578.**



**What does Lyndsay look like?**

It's unfortunate that Lyndsay has not been in the shop when a photographer has chanced by. In response to demand for a face to put to the name we modestly print this picture of Tosh and Hope waiting for supper (23 hours to go).

**THE CLAIVE VIDIZ SCOTCH WHISKY MUSEUM IN BRAZIL**

*Martin Whittome*

If you find yourself in Sao Paulo for reasons of business or pleasure (most probably business as Sao Paulo is firmly off the tourist track) I sincerely recommend you try to wangle, through one of the local offices of the leading Scotch whisky companies, an invitation to visit this private museum.

The owner, Clave Vidiz, is now retired from a successful international business career. His Anglophile mother wanted to give him the English Christian name Clive, he explains, but since Portuguese speakers would have pronounced this Cleeve she was forced to adopt the expedient of inventing a new spelling so as to get people to pronounce it at least fairly correctly.

Clave had for a long time been passionately interested in anything concerned with Scotch whisky and he started out by buying up individual collections from other people, selling off duplicates, and buying more bottles. During his worldwide travels he himself always bought whatever he could find in the way of old or new rarities, and before long he had built up an impressive collection of bottles.

To house them he has carried out a remodelling of a wing of his house in the hills overlooking the city where he designed and created a museum. On shelves round the walls, in a temperature and humidity controlled atmosphere, he now displays over 4000 different presentations, all of full bottle sizes, with an additional section for special presentations, jugs, decanters, etc.

Some of these bottles are almost as old as the century and many date from the fifties and sixties, so for those of my generation a stroll around the shelves is a real journey into the past, a re-acquaintance with old friends one had long since forgotten.

The most recent edition of the Guinness Book of Records included an entry on Clave Vidiz and a photograph of a part of the collection. I am proud to have been able to help Clave convince the publishers of his Bona Fides.

Attached to the museum is a delightful little private bar to which one repairs after the visit to take a celebratory dram, or even two! Scotch whisky is there to be drunk as well as admired in a glass case, and Brazil imports impressive quantities. If only the average purchasing power of Brazilians were higher, then the consumption would be quite phenomenal.

*Martin Whittome is an independent Consultant of Scotch Whisky.*

### LEAVE SCOTCH WHISKY TO THE SCOTTISH

Dear Sirs,  
Your interview with George Urquhart made very interesting reading. I would like to say how much I agree with his concern about whiskies being bottled by some companies at very young ages. Young bottling may I suspect be linked with Mr. Urquhart's other concern, i.e. companies outside Scotland exercising control.

The Italians I believe like their whisky young and fiery. I have tasted malt whisky purchased in Italy which is clearly bottled too young and is, amongst other things, indeed fiery and not to me a good example of malt whisky. This may suit the Italian taste but what about the visitors to Italy buying malt whisky for the first time. Would such buyers be put off buying malt whisky again because they were not impressed? Is a similar risk being taken with cheap malts and blends which are bottled too young and sold in this country?

I have another concern; in recent months I have been provided with two "whiskies" from abroad. One made in Japan which seems to be a poor attempt to mimic certain Islay malts. The other I do not know what it was meant to be but it was to me an insult to call it Scotch whisky.

Do these foreign attempts at imitations do more harm to the Scottish whisky industry?

Whilst foreign investment in the malt whisky industry is of obvious benefit, would it not help the industry more if companies and investors in the industry from outside Scotland would only act on the advice and considerable experience of Scottish influence alone, advice from people like George Urquhart and other family run distilleries such as Springbank?

**Charles Hutcheon**  
Chairman, W.E.W.I  
(Worthing Enthusiastic Whisky Imbibers)

P. S. I shall return without the wife but with a trailer!

### MALTINGS MEANINGS

Dear Sirs,  
Having recently read several books about malt whisky I found several mentions of different types of maltings—floor maltings, Saladin box maltings and drum maltings. However, none of the books gave any explanation of how the maltings operated and what the differences are. You may wish to consider an article on this for a future issue of the *Scotch Whisky Review* as I think your readers may find interesting.

I find the *SWR* very interesting and informative—keep up the good work.

**Fiona MacNab**  
Isle of Skye

*At last! Some letters to publish!* We were surprised that even the promise of a 1974 bottle of Longrow failed to produce a really stimulating letter.

Letters until now were much appreciated but excessively of the "I think Loch Fyne Whiskies is great and Springbank brilliant—can I have my bottle of Longrow now, please?" We're not that easily bought, (cash yes, flattery, no).

We couldn't allow a letter expressing thanks for our service be the winner but for a year those were all we had. Bill Urwin's letter (below) expresses the sentiment of all of your nice 'thank you' letters. Helen MacNab's letter (below, left) gives us the chance to come up with the goods, a request for information not found in books that is here fulfilled by the manager of Glen Esk maltings on page 10.

Charles Hutcheon raises the question of under-age-Scotch (and other whiskies) and challenges those who are in charge to consider their responsibilities to what is in Ronnie Martin's words a 'noble spirit' (left).

In the last six months two major supermarkets have introduced taste bands; one like the *Collins Gem Whisky Book* scale of 1 to 5 (as we have adopted) the other a more complex 10 point A to J. Is the consumer getting more confused? How about standardisation? The prize of a bottle of 1974 Longrow goes to Maarten Willems who launches 'the quest for classification'.

*Feeling inspired? Next edition's best letter wins a bottle of 21yo Springbank.*

### DEAR SWR

Having an interest in Malt Whisky and living in the English Midlands means it's just a tad difficult to stay in touch with events, so each edition of the *SWR* is read avidly and the Stock List explored to discover something to tempt the palate or even to drool over before compiling a *purchase justification* to my better half (well, she is the cook).

Your Review gives them that think they know about Scotch Whisky a tremendous link with those that do know. The balance of interviews, articles and jottings suits me and makes it very readable. It helps me to understand a little of what the experts are saying when we have our annual 'distillery week' at Cullen. Yes, I'm the guy who asks everyone in each distillery to sign my Whisky Trails book. I'd like to thank all who have signed 'the book' for their hospitality and to those who haven't had the opportunity yet—I'll get there one day. Keep up the good work in publishing the *SWR*—it is appreciated, honest.

**Bill Urwin**  
Leicestershire

P. S. Notice I didn't mention the Springbank car park once!

### SENSE OR NON-SENSE OF GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATION

Dear Sirs,  
Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands, Northern Highlands, Midlands, Lowlands, Campbeltown, Islay, Perthshire, Orkney, Islands, Speyside, Lossie, Findhorn etc. etc.

Every Association, Society or book seems to have its own classification of malt whiskies. Besides this being very confusing for the consumer, one should ask oneself whether it is significant anyhow. Some of the 'classic' districts now only consist of two or even fewer distilleries (e.g. Campbeltown, Lowlands, Irish Bushmills), while others are so huge (e.g. Speyside, mainly due to its usefulness in blends) that possibly further subdivisions could be useful. Differences within certain regions can be bigger than those between distinctive areas: Talisker probably has more so-called 'Islay-character' than Bunnahabhain.

Taste is what this is all about, or should be. So why not suggest a classification based on taste rather than on geography. But how? A 'taste-intensity score' for instance: see the Loch Fyne Stocklist, with its handy and surveyable 5-point scale. But what's in a number? "I'd like a number-4 dram" doesn't sound as passionate as "I'm looking for a round, complex, subtle-sherried Speyside, Richard". I should stress however the convenience of the aforementioned rating-scale for use in short-lists. But numbers in the first place are for indicating age.

So we go on as we did before, with all its shortcomings. In that case; would it be necessary, or at least desirable, to come to an agreement about how many and which appellations will become 'standardised' in general use. To be honest, only Speyside seems to be inevitable. All the others are too small, too vague or too various. Even Highlands is insecure. Those who-know-a-lot-about-whisky agree that the typical highland whisky doesn't exist anymore. Glen Albyn, Glen Mhor, aye, those were real highland whiskies, but nowadays? Dalmore, Balblair?

So my suggestion for the classification is as simple as it is absurd: Speysides and Non-Speysides, the latter subdivided into Heavy and Light. Such a dreadful conclusion and the number of question marks in this letter, can only lead to a truckload of really serious suggestions concerning The Quest for Classification. Let the debate continue...

**Maarten Willems**  
Schijndel  
The Netherlands

*Awards for the letters page are by generosity of Springbank Distillers.*



## MALTING METHODS

Mike Jappy, Manager  
United Malt and Grain Distillers Ltd  
Glen Esk Maltings

The process of malting is essentially a natural one. When a barley corn falls to the ground it will, after a time, absorb moisture and start to germinate. The maltster really only replicates this under controlled conditions, starting the germination by steeping the barley then controlling the germination until the corn reaches a certain point, when the maltster stops the growth by drying the germinated barley in a kiln.

A barley corn is basically made up of two parts; an embryo, which will develop into the new plant and the endosperm which contains the starchy foodstore needed to sustain the shoot of the new plant until it can photosynthesise. It is this starch

which is important to the distiller since it provides the sugars which are fermented and distilled.

However the starch in the endosperm is held in cells made of protein, and these cells must be broken down before the starch can be utilised by the plant. Therefore when a barley corn starts to germinate it firstly produces enzymes which degrade this protein and then it produces different enzymes to utilise the starch as energy. The art of the maltster is to allow the germination to progress to a point where the cell walls have been broken down, but before the starch is used up by the growing plant. At this point the maltster kilns the germinated barley or "green malt" and the growth is stopped. It's a common misconception that the maltster converts the starch in the barley to sugar—this is done by the distiller at the mashing stage. The maltster must make the starch available for conversion, like removing the wrapper from a sweet. The enzymes which convert the starch to sugar are not destroyed by kilning, only deactivated and they resume their activity during mashing.

Traditionally the highland crofter would have kept back a little of his barley crop, carefully steeped and germinated it before drying it over a peat fire. This would subsequently have been distilled into a rough, fiery liquid which would bear little resemblance to today's whisky.

As distilling became industrialised however, the quality and quantity of locally grown barley in the Highlands and Islands would have been insufficient to meet demand, and much barley was imported from the south of Scotland and England. This was largely assisted by the expansion of the rail network in the late nineteenth century, which in many cases could deliver barley directly into distilleries and return south loaded with casks of spirit.

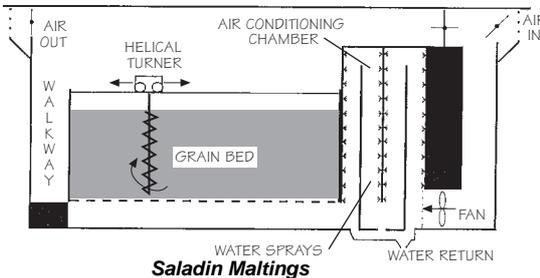
The problem with Scottish barley was one of climate; late harvests meant that the barley was often cut wet, and the technology to dry the barley without killing the embryo, was not readily available. English barley on the other hand was usually harvested earlier, in drier conditions, and did not require further drying prior to storage and transport to the maltings. (Wet barley cannot be stored for any length of time before turning mouldy which in turn kills the embryo). This situation remained largely unchanged up until the 1960s, because although the technology to dry the barley was now commonplace, the barley varieties commercially available to the maltster did not grow well north of the Highland line. Then two very important developments took place. One was an explosive growth in demand for Scotch Whisky; the other was the introduction of a barley variety called Golden Promise. This was the first barley which could be grown commercially for malting in the North of Scotland. The expansion within the industry also resulted in the floor maltings attached to each distillery being unable to meet the increased demand. Malt production moved to centralised malthouses which could supply the malt requirement for many distilleries. Maltings of this type were not new by any means and had been supplying malt to breweries in this way for decades, however this did mark a shift in direction for distilling.

### Floor Maltings

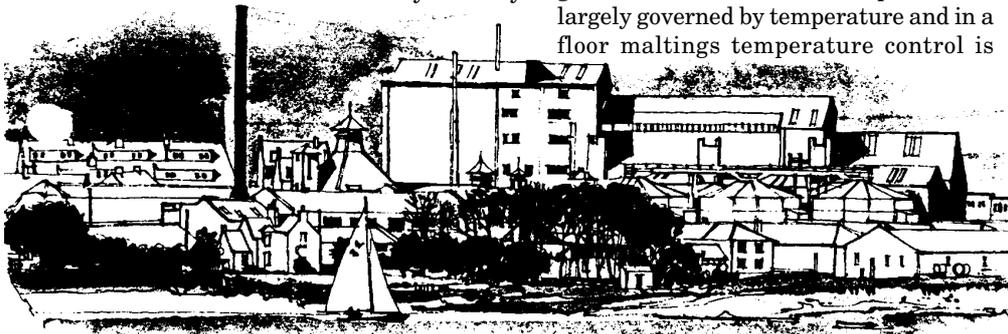
The traditional floor maltings in a distillery was, and in some cases still is, a very simple way of making malt. The barley was steeped in small rectangular steep ditches or cisterns, and at the end of steeping the barley would be shovelled out into barrows. The grain would then be spread out on a floor to germinate (hence the term "floor maltings"). The rate at which germination (or modification) proceeds is largely governed by temperature and in a floor maltings temperature control is

limited to say the least. At the start of germination the grain would have been "couched"—basically piled in a heap. This would rapidly heat up as germination started then the grain would be spread evenly over the floor. Keeping the temperature under control during the summer however was difficult and most maltings used to shut down during the height of the summer. Of course as the grain starts to grow it sprouts rootlets, and if these are not to tangle and mat together the grain must be turned. This was achieved in the floor maltings by manually turning, throughout the day, the grain with shovels, an image which has become traditionally associated with malting. Once germination on the floor was complete, the grain was manually loaded onto the malt kiln. Traditional distillery malt kilns are easily identifiable by the Pagoda style roofs, and although few distilleries still have working maltings attached most have retained the Pagodas. These kilns in the simplest form would have been natural draught kilns fired by peat. Drying time would have taken 2 or 3 days and the resultant malt very heavily peated but fairly inconsistent.

The basic problems with floor maltings were that the amount of malt which could be made was limited to a few tonnes at a time and the whole process was very labour intensive. Although the quality of the malt could be excellent it was very variable and the final peatiness, very important for spirit character, varied greatly. In order to achieve a consistent quality of malt it is essential to control the temperature of the grain at all stages. This is why floor maltings gradually gave way to pneumatic maltings. The term pneumatic means that air is passed through the grain to control temperature. By controlling the temperature, the batch size can be dramatically increased (the largest batch size currently in use is over 500 tonnes at Buckie Maltings, but this is unusual).

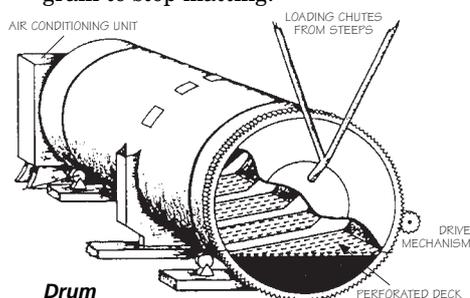


The two most common pneumatic systems introduced were Saladin and drum systems. Effectively they perform the same function—they provide a perforated floor on which the germinated grain is loaded to a much greater depth (1m) than could be done on a traditional floor. These systems then deliver large volumes of humidified attemperated air which is blown up through the grain. The main difference between the systems is in the manner in which the grain is turned. In a Saladin box, mechanical screw turners traverse the



THE OLD AND THE NEW, PORT ELLEN

length of the Saladin gently lifting and turning the grain. In the very earliest days of these systems some brewers were concerned about the damage these mechanical screws might do to the germinating grain, and so the drum system was developed as an alternative. To turn the germinating grain in a drum the entire vessel is turned very slowly thus avoiding any mechanical damage. In both Saladin and drum maltings the grain is turned three times a day and drums are turned through three revolutions each time. A typical Saladin system will process 200 tonnes per batch, a drum malting 50 tonnes. Other systems have been developed for germinating including circular vessels which are now very common (similar in operation to the Saladin system), but they all perform the same basic function of providing a very accurately controlled temperature environment with some method of turning the grain to stop matting.



**Drum Maltings**

Kilning moved away from natural draught kilns at quite an early stage, fans being added to consistently provide a large volume of air which dries the malt quicker.

The main source of heat became coal or oil with the peat being burned in a separate burner to provide the reek to flavour the malt. Today kilns bristle with all manner of energy saving technology and, in order to conserve peat bogs, new efficient peat burning systems are being introduced that inject the 'reek' at the start of the kilning process.

The kiln does the same job as before, drying and flavouring the malt, only today it is much more efficient and consistent. Some modern systems combine steeping, germinating and kilning in one unit, others two of the three. Older systems (Port Ellen) have steeps feeding maltings by gravity and elevators filling kilns with mechanical spreaders and gatherers.

Malting therefore, is a very simple process but it has come an awful long way since distilling was little more than an illegal cottage industry. Developments in breeding new barley varieties now mean that distillers can achieve higher spirit yields by making more starch available for conversion. Until a few years ago such yields were unimaginable. Malting plant technology has advanced so that today thousands of tonnes of malt can be made with very little manpower, and be very energy efficient. However turning barley into malt is exactly the same as it ever was.

## OUR HOLS

Like most people, we thought our days of writing the 'what I did in my holidays' essay were over. That was before a trip to Islay too good to keep to ourselves.

At the end of January, with much of Britain snowbound, we decided to get away from it all. We set off on our busman's holiday—a whisky weekend at the Lochside Hotel, Bowmore. The owners, Alistair and Anne Birse, are friends and had been our hosts before, but so many of our customers had enthused about their special whisky breaks that we just had to experience one for ourselves.

There's nothing like a sea trip to make you feel you're really travelling—even if it is only a two-hour 'Cal-Mac Cruise'! As we disembarked, Alistair was waiting with our first whisky sampling—dripping from a lorry on the quayside was something suspiciously like the cratur (if you ignored the traces of rust and machine oil!) and later identified as Jura. Oh to be such a connoisseur.

The more conventional part of the break began that evening with a visit to Bowmore Distillery. Our group was mixed in our knowledge and appreciation of whisky but all benefited from the first class tours throughout the weekend.

Bowmore's Jim McEwan soon had us all familiar with the end product and then proceeded to turn us into production experts too, starting in the floor maltings, where some of us tried our hand at turning the malt in the time honoured manner they make look so easy in the videos.

After a practical demonstration this time of the benefits of maturation, it was back to the hotel for dinner—the first of many wonderful meals featuring local produce. The hardest part of the weekend was what to choose—Islay: beef, oysters, scallops, lamb, cheeses and then the hundreds of Islay malts behind the bar....

Counterpointing the malt shovels at Bowmore, our tour of hi-tech Port Ellen maltings and its industrial scale brought home the size, technology and importance of the industry. We learned how the island's distilleries formed a concordat buying their malt from Port Ellen thereby ensuring its survival, local employment and the supply of malt peated to their different and exacting peating levels.

Having seen the warehouses lashed with sea spray at Laphroaig, it is easier to appreciate the iodine elements in the whisky. Ian Henderson's tour further explained how the magic is worked (while leaving us no wiser as to how they really do it!) His hospitality extended to having our picnic lunch in the warmth of the visitor centre. Alistair pointed out this was the first whisky weekend ever to picnic indoors, but it was *almost* snowing and the bar was open!

Bunnahabhain offered no less interest

or comfort. Hamish Procter dragged himself away from his Sunday lunch (or was it the washing up?) to show us how this most delicate of the Islay malts is made. By this time, with two distilleries under our ever-expanding belts, we were experts but Hamish still managed to give us a fresh insight.

To make sure our cultural sides were not neglected, Alistair organised a tour of the Kildalton peninsula (complete with wildlife sightings of roe deer and golden eagle) to Kildalton chapel with its high cross dating from 800 a.d. The archaeological site at Finlaggan, ancient powerbase of the Lords of the Isles, was fascinating but freezing on that day, making a sample bottle of *The Loch Fyne* much appreciated by all!

A light hearted quiz completed the weekend—we had to try to identify 6 Islay whiskies and answer 20 questions on what we'd seen and heard during our stay. Interesting to note, and not for the first time according to Alistair, a non whisky drinker did best!

A measure of the break's success was that although about half the guests (partners) claimed not to like whisky on arrival, by Sunday everyone had not only enjoyed the break but the spirit as well! This had a lot to do with Alistair—a great ambassador for whisky and for Islay and an extremely generous host. A busman's holiday? Perhaps, but to paraphrase a certain whisky ad, you don't have to be a busman to enjoy it.

**LFW recommended.**

**Lochside Hotel, Bowmore, PA43 7LB  
01496 810244**

## WHISKY SCHOOL

We also attended the Scotch Malt Whisky Society's inaugural Whisky School at their sumptuous members' rooms at Leith.

The intensive twelve-hour, one day course involves a marathon programme of practicals, lectures and tastings. Dr Jim Swan, analytical chemist to the industry, and Master Blender Trevor Cowan gave a fascinating insight into the deeper complexities of production and the social history of Scotch Whisky. The long day was not rushed, and plenty of time was made available for chat during coffee breaks, a superb buffet lunch and magnificent evening meal. As with all good parties we each received a jam-boree bag of goodies to take home.

Any one who lists whisky as one of their main interests will find the Whisky School a superb day, extremely worthwhile and at £150 it is great value for money.

**LFW recommended.**

Details of membership of the SMWS can be obtained from:

**The Scotch Malt Whisky Society  
The Vaults, 87 Giles Street,  
Leith, Edinburgh, EH6 6BZ  
0131 554 3451**



**£2.00 OFF!**

your next purchase of  
*cask strength* whisky

**LFW DEAL**

All our independent cask strength bottlings include a voucher for **£2.00 off** a future purchase of a similar bottling. Offer applies to *Cask, C, JM, S or A* labels of over 46%Alc, all marked \* in our list. Does not apply to *MH* bottlings or those 46% and under.

**SEAGRAM DEAL:**

**FREE GLENLIVET BOTTLE**

Buy four from the 'Heritage' malts and get a free 70cl bottle of Glenlivet 12yo.

<b>Benriach</b>	<b>10yo 43%</b>	<b>£23.40</b>
<b>Glen Keith</b>	<b>10yo 43%</b>	<b>£23.40</b>
<b>Longmorn</b>	<b>15yo 45%</b>	<b>£26.90</b>
<b>Strathisla</b>	<b>12yo 43%</b>	<b>£26.80</b>

Alternatively buy any two and get £5 off.

**MATTHEW GLOAG DEAL:**

**FREE DELIVERY**

Buy any three whiskies from the following list of Gloag-distributed products and they will pick up the post and packing tab.

<b>Bunnahabhain</b>	<b>12yo 40%</b>	<b>£21.90</b>
<b>Glengoyne</b>	<b>10yo 40%</b>	<b>£20.90</b>
<b>Highland Park</b>	<b>12yo 40%</b>	<b>£21.90</b>
<b>Macallan</b>	<b>10yo 40%</b>	<b>£21.50</b>

**UNITED DISTILLERS**

**CLASSIC SIX DEAL:**

**FREE MINIATURES & VIDEO**

Buy any two from the Classic Six range and get two free miniatures of Oban 14yo and the Jackson Tasting Video free.

<b>Cragganmore</b>	<b>12yo 40%</b>	<b>£22.90</b>
<b>Dalwhinnie</b>	<b>15yo 43%</b>	<b>£24.90</b>
<b>Glenkinchie</b>	<b>10yo 40%</b>	<b>£24.40</b>
<b>Lagavulin</b>	<b>16yo 43%</b>	<b>£25.50</b>
<b>Oban</b>	<b>14yo 43%</b>	<b>£23.90</b>
<b>Talisker</b>	<b>10yo 45%</b>	<b>£24.50</b>

The Gloag, Classic Six and Seagram offers are for UK mail order business only and while stocks last (plenty at the moment). In all cases two or more bottles of the same qualifies for the offer but the three deals are not inter-changeable.

**WHISKY AUCTIONS**

Christie's have announced the dates for this year's sales in Glasgow. These are Thursday 9th May and Wednesday 13th November. Further details, catalogues (£12) and closing dates for entries from Martin Green, 0141 332 8134.

If you are going to the auctions, find some time to drive over the hills to Inveraray; we're less than 90 minutes from Glasgow city centre and it's a great drive.



**AND WE THOUGHT WE HAD PROBLEMS...**

Designing a new presentation is not easy. This remarkable picture shows "a small selection" of the prototypes created in the development of the new packaging of the range from Balvenie. We know the feeling!

**THE ULTIMATE BLEND**

(No question)

J&B's Master Blender has fulfilled a dream that preoccupied him for eight years. Jim Milne has blended together 128 whiskies to produce *Ultima* (£51). This remarkable product is unlikely to be repeated and is a worthwhile addition to every whisky collection.

We have a handful of posters, 800mm wide, featuring the display of barrels printed on our centre pages (we've framed ours). Order a bottle of *Ultima* by mail order and you will receive one—but be quick!



**CASK SALES**

Loch Fyne Whiskies are agents on behalf of Springbank and Isle of Arran Distillers for sales of full casks of new make malt whisky—ask for further details.

**A WORLD FIRST**

Customer Bryce Baird has compiled a fascinating and detailed whisky quiz book containing 480 whisky teasers, *The International Whisky Connoisseurs Quiz Book*. "My local Rotary Club is hooked", enthused Bryce, "We always have a quick game of 40 questions every time we meet; it's really stimulated their interest in whisky." £ 5.50.

**MAILING LIST RULES**

We are no longer sending out Stock Lists and SWR's to prospective customers more than once. If you or a friend would like a current stock list please ask and you will be sent one with a back-issue SWR. Your name will not be placed on our mailing list for current SWR's until you have bought by mail order. Your name will remain on the list as long as you buy from us once a year.

*"I have bought malt whisky from several other UK mail order outlets...I am pleased to report that not only is your list the most extensive, but your prices the most reasonable."*

*Harvey Siegel  
March, 1996*

**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.**

**PLEASE TELL YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT US!**

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