



SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW

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NUGGETS

It's not easy creating a whisky publication (I should know—I've been trying for eight years) but that doesn't stop the moaning minnies from taking pot-shots at Scotch's 'new' flagship publication; *Whisky Magazine*.

Launched nearly four years ago with our enthusiastic support, it wobbled towards the mire. There have been a few occasions when it has been in the cross-hairs of this column as well for being at best a poor reflection of the unique pride and quality heralded by this industry.

However, that has changed over the last couple of years and now WM navigates the impossible divide between all its readers: the mildly curious through to the extreme enthusiast.

If anyone can do better I'd love to see them try.

That two year lead time that it took for the powers-that-be at WM to wise up can be seen throughout the industry. Repeatedly in SWR interviews the old guard bemoan the incidence of short-term appointments to key long-term, decision-making positions. On WM's evidence, many of them are moving on just as they realise that the Scotch Whisky industry is unlike any other; a special, precious and delicate thing. Perhaps they assume that with its profitability it must be robust—but the recent departure of Jim Beam indicates that if you don't care to understand you lose. If you do, like those who have been through UDV's invaluable Advocate programme, you will succeed, witness Diageo's soaring share value.

All is quiet at present (or am I going soft?): weaklings Burn Stewart are filling out, even Allied are creating a malts policy at last; we await some action from Pernod and confirmation of Bacardi's intentions. As Iain Henderson says, the future may be with the small players. They care, they look, listen and try to understand before acting. While the dim create more me-too finishes, the champions are giving us more flavoured, less tampered-with natural whiskies.

Good on yer lads!



UNSUNG HEROES

Our on-going series 'Beyond Distilling' by Gavin Smith (page 10) takes us to Kyndal's Grangemouth Bond where specialist vatting and bottlings are undertaken; including miniatures of vodka, have they no shame?

GLENDRONACH REVIVED

As you read this Glendronach Distillery is waking up after a six year uneasy slumber ("mothballed"). The 15yo bottling won the gold award in the recent Scottish field Merchant's Challenge (under £30 category) and it was at the award ceremony that Jim Barr of Allied Distillers announced that the distillery was to go into full time production in the Spring. This reflects a welcome policy change from cost-efficiency for blends to quality single malt production.

DUMBARTON CONSIGNED

The redbrick grain whisky producing landmark that has dominated Dumbarton since 1938 is to be mothballed, with no plans for its use in the future. Allied Distillers will be relying on their additional investment in Strathclyde Distillery to raise production by 25% to 40 million litres of alcohol per year. Scotland now has seven grain distilleries in production.

RECOGNITION

Loch Fyne Whiskies' proprietor Richard Joynson has been voted 'Whisky Retailer of the Year' by a panel of 270 industry members—the Whisky Academy as organised by *Whisky Magazine*.

Eight awards were made including a Lifetime Achievement award for regular SWR contributor Turnbull Hutton (page 4) and this edition's SWR interview victim Iain Henderson (page 2).

The other winners are:

Distiller: Jim McEwan, Bruichladdich
Blender: Richard Paterson, Kyndal
Bottler: Andrew Symington, Signatory
Visitor centre manager:

Jackie Thompson, Ardbeg

Innovator: John Glaser, Compass Box
Readers of *Whisky Magazine* voted for their favourite new releases: Ardbeg 1977 and Compass Box Hedonism.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the huge contribution of Andy Burns and Laura Simpson to our success.

THE BRAND CHAMPION



Iain Henderson is Manager at Laphroaig and retires in October. He received the inaugural 'Lifetime Achievement' award from Whisky Magazine's Whisky Academy.

LFW: Congratulations on your Lifetime Achievement Award.

Thanks very much, it came as a complete surprise and a wee bit overwhelming. I am particularly honoured to share the award with Turnbull Hutton, whom I've known for a long time and is one of the great characters in the industry. He's a protector of things traditional.

Turnbull is one of several people who have influenced me. Neil Cochrane—the chemist, Ronnie Martin—former head of DCL—and Stewart McBain—head of Chivas up in the north; these are some of the people who gave me opportunities and made a big impression on me; people you learn from, who never talked down to you.

LFW: How did you begin in whisky?

I wanted to be an engine driver but I started as a sailor, in the Merchant Navy on passenger ships—life was one long party for the engineer. The next thirty years have been pure enjoyment too.

I came into the whisky industry by accident. I was never a beer drinker—always a spirit drinker. I travelled the world with a fascination for spirits and I got to try them all. I discovered that Scotch was one of the finest spirits in the world, but I had to leave the country to find this out!

My first experience of Laphroaig was on ship in a storm between Ceylon and Australia; the Steward came through and said 'You've drunk all the Dewar's—all we have left is this Leapfrog stuff.' We said 'Christ! Where did you get this?' Apparently it was part payment for some deal that Stewards were always pulling off. We persevered because we knew it was different. By the time we reached Australia we had finished all six bottles and thought—this is our drink! We trawled all round the Australian coast looking for more—plenty of Glenfiddich of course but no Leapfrog. In a remote 'cowboy' town we found a pub with two bottles of Laphroaig on the top shelf and a barman from Fort William who'd thought he'd give the Ozzies a real drink—but they couldn't cope with it so up it went out of harm's way. We couldn't believe it! The barman

cheered up a lot too!

Whenever I got home on leave, Carole, my wife, kept putting the situations column under my nose. She thought I should be at home. I was invited to consider a job at Bunnahabhain distillery in charge of the maintenance department, supervising an electrician, joiner, painter etc, and a hands-on engineering job. Highland Distillers gave us a weekend on Islay; the weather was perfect, the sea was blue, we were flown in and met by a car—luxury! Carole said 'I'd quite like this' and we did. We stayed for two years of heaven. It was the boom days of the industry, working hard (filling the whisky loch). I was happy—I was still beside the sea!

LFW: A soft spot, perhaps?

I love the sea and I feel better living beside it. It has a calming effect.

Then, time to move. Carole had an ageing grandmother on the mainland and resented the stretch of water in-between. I got a job at Glenlivet building the dark grains plant. It's now closed but was very efficient at making a very natural cattle feed from distillery waste.

I'm a nosey person and was always looking into the distillery next door or at what was going on generally. During this time the automated Allt a Bhainne and Braes of Glenlivet distilleries were being built and I was keen to be part of that team. In those days you could muck in with each other's jobs. I knew nothing about whisky but would join in when sampling the new spirit. You soon learn stuff such as doing this with the foreshots gives you that effect. It all stood me in good stead later, especially when I went to Bladnoch.

The head of Chivas, Stewart McBain, gave me the choice: stay in engineering or go into production and I thought production had much more kudos and glamour. The first distillery of my own was Strathisla which had one pair of coal-fired stills and a pair of steam—the two spirits were completely different! Direct firing produced much more body to the spirit. The makes of the two pairs was combined before filling and that's what made Strathisla. We were trying to automate the stills with hydrometers and stuff; long before Glenlivet and Glen Grant were automated. Plus the lab for all Chivas was at Strathisla so I learned a huge amount from there too.

Then I got the ultimate manager's job, The Glenlivet. The Glenlivet is actually four distilleries in one—four distinct pairs of stills, I don't know of another quite so separate. We used to nose the makes individually before they were pumped together.

During my time at Glenlivet we put in the fourth pair of stills and over five years converted from direct firing to indirect (steam) heating. It does change the spirit and it's necessary to adjust the cut-offs to retain the character and fla-

avour. Again good experience. Safety restrictions demanded no smoking in the stillhouse (despite the massive gas burners!) When insurers came from America and saw huge cylinders of gas they were horrified—a bomb that could have blown the distillery away! So I saw to the decommissioning of the tanks which took six months.

LFW: Ever the engineer.

Not just, I was there for the building of the visitor centre and the numbers went from 5,000 to 50,000. I had a good grounding in visitors and how to treat people; if the product is not properly marketed it does not sell. I thought the two went hand in hand, a novel idea to some production types but I like to think that I can combine the two.

I'm basically a production person—I like the cut and thrust of that—but I still enjoy the marketing aspect as well; it was a whole new world.

LFW: Changing times...

Chivas was changing; you weren't allowed to fiddle and tinker with things anymore, or to try and improve things generally. I found it less of a challenge and after 13 years I got fidgety again. I got an attractive offer to go to Bladnoch distillery in the south west, which Bells was then resurrecting. The place was broken down, so I got my jacket off and set about getting things running again. Bells was a unique company; they gave me delusions of grandeur—I thought I owned the place!—Just because of the way they operated. Head office told us what they wanted in production and approved a budget and that was it, we were left to it. My wife and I put everything into that place and I'd like to think that I put Bladnoch back on its feet and improved it just by good practice.

The workforce built the visitor centre. They were all tradesmen and a bunch of guys who never fell out with each other. They even came back at night in their own time—they were amazing!

LFW: We appreciated the results.

In the first year of opening the visitor centre we had 17,500 visitors! Carole had four guides doing tour after tour and the money through the shop was phenomenal! I have a soft spot for Bladnoch, because we resurrected it and made it a tourist attraction.

LFW: Why didn't you stay there?

One evening with the distillery running smoothly I got a 'phone call: 'How would you like to go back to Islay?' I had just ten minutes to make my mind up so I asked Carole if she would like to go back. 'Just say yes!' She said. So I rang back and reported that she said it's okay!

UD did try to get me to stay, but they couldn't guarantee the future of Bladnoch and I had done plenty of time in Speyside. I had decided I was going to back to Islay, to Laphroaig.

UD closed and sold Bladnoch a few years later. 'Too far from Elgin' they said—ab-

solute nonsense! I went back and the place had been torn apart! A distillery keeper is only a custodian and must pass it on in a better condition, but Bladnoch was just vandalised industrially.

LFW: Have you considered returning?

Raymond Armstrong, the new owner, is doing a magnificent job but I can't understand how the old owners can restrict his production. I like to run distilleries in a proper fashion but with those output constraints it can only be a hobby. When I got to Laphroaig I realised it was dying! As a single malt it was one of the first onto the market after Glenfiddich, but by the early '90s when malt sales were booming, sales of Laphroaig were declining fast. Previous owners thought that whisky sold itself, which it did in the post war years.

LFW: A shock to you.

A crisis meeting was held here and we concluded the options were to sell the brand—cheaply because it wasn't doing well—or build it up. The Marketing Director was persuaded to appoint the first brand manager for Laphroaig and we launched the 'love-it or hate-it (no half measures)' campaign and established the Friends of Laphroaig.

Allied Domeq is not a malt whisky company—Ballantine's and Teacher's are their brands of Scotch—but this little unit makes a tidy profit. The Friends was approved and supported by Jeremy Weatherhead because we were different. Since he left six years ago I've had 13 brand managers!

Happily we've watched the revival of the brand in line with the numbers of Friends of Laphroaig (now 185,000) and are in the position that we can't meet demand. We don't sell in Spain for example, one of the biggest markets—where would we get the stock? At one point we were supplying the British Ambassador in Madrid direct by post from Islay!

I'm off to Sweden soon and we have written to several thousand Friends to come and meet me there. I'll do a wee presentation and tasting, and hopefully I'll get to meet many of these people.

LFW: A close relationship.

Last year we sent 97,000 Christmas cards out and got masses back! Have you seen 7,500 Christmas cards in one place? A Friend of Laphroaig gets two things: a regular newsletter from me which is the link between customers and the distillery (I used to do one for the company and Jeremy asked me to broaden it) and they get a square foot of Islay with a certificate. They can come and visit their plot (or check it on the internet)—it's a conversation piece.

LFW: It's certainly different.

Last year a Swedish whisky club came and found their plots and planted a wee Swedish flag on each one; eight paper flags out on the moss. That afternoon a German club came; they didn't have

flags—but by 5 o'clock they did! Another 11 flags, made from coloured paper and sticky tape! Then Finland, Australia and many others—by the end of the week it was like the League of Nations! That's immensely rewarding.

When we came here tourists were not entertained. Carole was in charge of visitors initially. As she had done it at Bladnoch she didn't question it and set about it for nothing. When my boss saw what she was doing he put her on the payroll. She now claims she's by Royal Appointment after doing lunch for Prince Charles!

LFW: This is 'Relationship marketing' done well.

No Islay whisky sells more than we do—over 100,000 cases each year. I do a presentation for business people in Europe that I call 'The decline and rise of Laphroaig'. They appreciate brand allegiance and they want to learn how to sustain it; we have turned our brand around and we've maintained it for nearly ten years. We've had a very enjoyable time here—pretty much left to our own devices.

LFW: But you're not keen on independent bottlings.

If Laphroaig is bottled by someone else it causes us an absolute nightmare. When people 'phone up and complain that a bottle is different we ask for the bottle to be sent to us; it's usually an independent. I believe we must retain control of quality.

LFW: You used to manage Ardbeg.

Ardbeg was another challenge. Just when I got it running reasonably sweetly they sold it! I wouldn't have; a good businessman does not create opposition for himself. If it had been a question of selling or not running it, I would have let it lie fallow—bulldoze it even. That's with my commercial hat on; when I talk with my heart it's a different story. I enjoy an Ardbeg and Weatherhead and I were quietly growing the brand—we teased the industry with tiny 100 case lots. All credit to Glenmorangie and what they have done so far; soon they will be a major player in the Islay market.

LFW: Any advice for a new manager?

There are three people who should not be allowed in a distillery: a chemist—whose nature is change for its own sake. Okay, I'm a fiddler (and a nosey person) but I'm also a traditionalist—a distillery is what it is, not what someone would like it to be; an accountant—because he thinks you can make whisky for nothing! And a politician—they see whisky as a cash cow. We are the most legislated and milked industry there is. I have to be restrained as I don't want to embarrass my company before I retire, but I do worry about the standards of politicians these days—I think they're all crap. I'm a political and a religious agnostic, I give both kinds of ministers a hard time. I'm sorry if someone doesn't like that—

but that's what I am.

LFW: How do you view the future of the industry?

I have to say I'm apprehensive with the new style in management, but then I'm old fashioned. Whisky men like Ronnie and Turnbull were in for the long haul, they gave stability. It seems you need an MBA these days when really common sense and firmness—with understanding—is required. New senior managers come with short term contracts en-route to 'greater' things; they can't get the same passion for the products.

I think smaller companies might be the future, if they can grow and retain the style of this industry.

Scots have a passion for things indigenous to their country—heritage, history, recovery. But there are far fewer Scotsmen in the industry. Those bloody MSPs in Edinburgh have absolutely no feeling or understanding whatsoever—we've seen shipbuilding and locomotive manufacturing go and they're unconcerned enough to let Scotch Whisky go the same way. That's a worry.

LFW: A Henderson tour is the best; what makes a good distillery tour?

If you treat people as you would wish to be treated, you won't go wrong. On a distillery tour you sell your product, try and tell people how you make and sell the quality. A tour has to be humorous, light-hearted and about the characters who have been here. Occasionally you get wise-guys asking stupid technical questions who just want to show how clever they are. They're stupid and it's probably to prove I don't know the answer; even if I don't—I'm not worried.

We have been caught up in the Islay phenomenon; I've never seen such enthusiasm. The Germans especially have grasped all Scottish culture, maybe it's because we are so welcoming. I was at a whisky fair in Frankfurt where 8,000 turned up in three days. On the Sunday they all turned up in kilts! We had to take ours off so we didn't look like natives!

LFW: So what of your retirement?

I'm not prepared for retirement. It was okay when it was five years to go but now it's five months, I'm just not ready. I'm not invited to the company training seminars anymore, I'm out of the team. It's something that no one prepares you for. I'd like someone to tell me how I'm supposed to feel at 65!

We've no plans at the moment, probably going home to fife. I couldn't stay here and watch someone else run Laphroaig. I'm a railway enthusiast with a vast collection of models which I hope to put all together at last. That and a workshop. I have amassed some machine tools and there's nothing I like more than to put on a boiler suit and get stuck in.

LFW: Desert Island dram?

My beloved Laphroaig 10yo, a Bladnoch and the much underrated Longmorn.

LFW: Thank you.

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE



TURNBULL HUTTON

SPOILED BY CHOICE?

Many years ago I took one of my cooperage managers with me on a visit to Louisville, Kentucky. My travelling companion was on his maiden visit to the States. He was therefore unprepared for the quick-fire breakfast question and answer session. After the pleasantries—“Good mornin’ y’all”—he was asked what he would like for breakfast. Orange juice, bacon and eggs, toast and coffee was his choice. Reasonable enough one would think—wrong!

Pre-squeezed or freshly squeezed? American bacon or Canadian bacon? Eggs: boiled, poached, scrambled or fried? Fried?—Over easy or sunnyside up? Toast: rye, wheatgerm, white or brown bread? If brown, wholegrain or plain? Coffee: regular or decaf? Black or white? With cream, milk or whitener? With sugar or sweetener?—Brown, white or granules? Then just in case he wasn’t confused enough... “how’s about grits and hash browns?”

My companion looked at me, rolled his eyes, and said “Great country this!”

The reason for our visit—other than the Great American Breakfast experience—was to fix up and check up on our supply of bourbon casks. As every reader is probably aware, Bourbon can only use a barrel once and since we Scots are allegedly tight-fisted we have, as an industry, traditionally purchased the used bourbon barrels from the States.

By the same token, our industry forebears were quick to acquire sherry casks from the British sherry importers—again used casks that we could make good use of. On a lesser scale distillers would pick up odd parcels of rum casks or port pipes for filling at distilleries with new make spirit.

When the sherry importers spurned wood in favour of steel bulk containers, the Whisky Industry laid casks down in Spain for ‘treatment’. You see by this time we had ‘built-in’ a sherry characteristic within our various brands and wished to maintain that which we had. Some producers only sent bourbon casks to grain distilleries, others filled them with malt whisky; sherry casks went to malt distilleries, port likewise, rum went to grain. All of these ‘imports’ however only made up a relatively small percent-

age each year of the casks that were filled at distilleries.

The vast majority of casks filled were known as ‘refill’. In other words they had previously held whisky, had been emptied following maturation, repaired where necessary, and sent back for refilling to a distillery. The bourbon, sherry, port or rum casks only merited that descriptor for their first filling with whisky—thereafter, on emptying, they would become refill casks.

Now you might learn something; new casks produced from ‘virgin’ wood are a bit of a rarity in the Scotch Whisky Industry... not unknown, but rare nevertheless and they have to be handled with care. Not surprisingly, they impart a serious woody overtone to the spirit whilst the amount of spirit soaked into the wood is significantly greater than that from a cask which has previously held spirit. For this reason grain whisky (cheaper to produce than malt whisky) was always used to ‘sweeten’ new casks. You see, we are careful with money!

When I started in the industry—the best part of 40 years ago—the inventories were always marked “use judiciously for blending” wherever virgin casks had been filled. If the blender used too many new casks in a blend, the woody overtones could easily overpower his—or her—creation.

This has been a long preamble... just bear with me and I promise I’ll get to the point. What I have described is the traditional ageing process: casks sent to a distillery, filled with spirit, left to mature in the warehouse. When the cask is emptied—either as part of a blend or as a single malt—the spirit has been influenced by the wood in which it has matured. Our forefathers discovered—arguably by accident—that sherry casks gave an added characteristic to malt whisky; bourbon casks passed on an inherent sweetness to Scotch. The percentage of such casks filled each year, however, was modest. Remember refill casks?

Nevertheless, certain companies majored on specific taste characteristics coming from the wood—at the expense perhaps of the distillery itself. Macallan is a great malt distillery. It’s been a recognized ‘1st Class Malt’ on any classification list since time began. But how many Macallan consumers have ever tasted ‘pure’ Macallan as distinct from the ‘sherry-flavoured wood extract’ Macallan on which the brand has been built?

This tale now moves on apace! Other producers... or more accurately the marketeers (there, I got them in eventually)... jealous perhaps of Macallan’s success, looked for new ways of differentiating their own product. As in all things marketing, time is of the essence! This is probably because in this Industry the marketers are somewhat transient by nature. Very few are going to be around in 10 or 12 months (let alone

years) to see this year’s filling come out of the warehouse following maturation. So why don’t we speed up the process? Let’s take whisky which is already in the warehouse and subject it to a ‘quick-fix’ in a different type of cask. The unromantic production term for this is ‘back end loading’. Marketeers call it ‘finishing’. And boy, have we had a plethora of finishes! Glenmorangie take the first prize. Port, Madeira, Chardonnay—to name but three. Auchentoshan, already a fine triple distilled Lowland malt, suddenly ‘springs’ a triple wood finish! A triple triple so to speak. The Classic Malt Distillers Edition (as distinct from the quite superb original Classic Malt Range) came up with another half dozen finishes. I could go on but you are probably ahead of me by this time.

The cynic in me would suggest that apart from salt barrels and herring barrels we’ve back end loaded all we can. Come to think of it with Pulteney described as ‘The Genuine Maritime Malt’ we’ve maybe together sussed out the future back end loading opportunities for that brand!

Remember my cooperage manager? We could all be as mentally wrecked as he. “Can I have a Loch Fyne please?”

“Would that be original formulation, sir? Or North Sea Oil finish?... Brent or Forties?... Imported steel or genuine Scottish Ravenscraig (now closed and so a hefty premium)?”

Maybe we should be producing small bottles of additives to sell with our whiskies; Whisky-fixers™. You, the consumer would have a choice not dissimilar to breakfast in Louisville: “Barman, I’d like a malt whisky—a Glen Whatever—and a fixer-Phial™ of Port and one of Sherry extract”. The future perhaps?... Regrettably an idea that marketeers may steal from us ‘boring’ production types. (Again.)

As complacency sets in, the infection has already spread to the blended whisky brands. Grant’s-with-ale and Islay-finished Grouse for God’s sake! We can only be a split-second from Johnnie Walker’s Striding Man donning his athletic support in order to achieve a photo-finish. What are we doing here? Are we being hugely creative in product differentiation and/or market segmentation? Are we playing to the wine snob market? Or giving the whisky writers the chance to indulge themselves? Are we being fair to the distillers’ art? Is what’s coming out after maturation the true taste of the natural product... hand crafted with no artificial ingredients? Or are we being too clever by half in ‘bending’ the whisky definition?

Don’t say we’re not cutting edge. And don’t expect me to provide any answers. Hell, I’m The Advocate—I just pose the questions.

An extra bonus article from The Advocate can be found at lfw.co.uk/swr.



THE INAUGURAL WHISKY ACADEMY

Marcin Miller - Editor Whisky Magazine

At this year's *Whisky Live* in London, it was high time to hand out some gongs. Since its launch in 1998, *Whisky Magazine* has celebrated all that is great about whisky. We have unashamedly championed whisky the product. That, after all, is what the industry is about and that is what our consumers want to read about. The tastings, where we record side-by-side opinions from our two resident tasters, Michael Jackson and Dave Broom, are the most popular section of the magazine.

However, the principle difference between whisky and other spirits is its reliance on people. In a 'here today, gone tomorrow' spirit like vodka or gin there is no role to be played by individuality. The distillation model there is truly industrial. Only whisky can explore the artisanal aspects. As Martine Nouet wrote in issue 20 of *Whisky Magazine*, having worked for a week at Glenfiddich and Balvenie, she discovered a secret ingredient in the production of great whisky: 'sweat'. I feel we have a duty to recognise the sweatiest people in the industry.

Like the Oscars (except with fewer embarrassing speeches), the *Whisky Magazine* awards are judged by the industry. A questionnaire was sent to a cross-section of 270 people in the industry, nominally known as the Whisky Academy. They are drawn from whisky distillers, independent bottlers, retailers and whisky writers. We asked them to propose first, second and third choices in a variety of categories. In addition, our editorial board awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award and the readers (and visitors to whisky-world.com) voted for their favourite new release.

The objective was to reward those whose efforts had gone beyond the norm, working tirelessly to drive whisky forward, to put it in front of the consumer, to help whisky maintain its rightful mantle as the best drink in the world. Of course, some in the industry (mainly those lacking personality) find the idea of promoting individuals anathema. However, I maintain that there are only so many evasive answers, spin and artfully directed bottle shots that a whisky drinker will accept. The industry needs personalities and I wanted to recognise that.

The point of all this, gentle reader, is that the retailer of the year, as adjudged by the whisky industry, is none other than Richard Joynson of Loch Fyne Whiskies. Of course, you knew that - that's why you buy your whisky from him.

It's also worth pointing out that Turnbull Hutton, regular SWR contributor, picked up a Lifetime Achievement Award.

For a full list of winners see page 1.



"The wonderful thing about whisky, apart of course, from drinking it, is that it contains more bluffing elements than almost any other subject - far more than supply-side economics, more even than wine. Wine breeds envy, discord and snobbery, whisky promotes fellowship, amiability and quiet, unassuming superiority. Supply-side economics produced Donald Trump."

David Milstead

Bluffer's Guide to Whisky

NEW CUSTOMER PAGE

The busy summer season in our shop gives us the chance to welcome 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.

We feature some explanation of the bottlings from our Stock List—OB, A, C, G&M, MM, 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).

What is whisky?

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

Scotch Whisky is the world's most popular spirit and by law must be (amongst other things) made and matured in an oak barrel for not less than **three years in Scotland**, otherwise it cannot be called *Scotch*. It must also be bottled at 40% alcohol or more in order to retain flavour—see the note about how to drink.

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 poisonous, you will go blind, your hair will fall out—and it's illegal.

Scotch whisky must contain barley and *Malt* Whisky must be made exclusively from water, malted barley, yeast and nothing else. Maturation (which is the biggest contributor to flavour) must be in oak, traditionally former sherry or bourbon casks.

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; it is produced by a complex and cumbersome batch process that makes accountants really squirm. There is no such thing as a double malt unless you are with your rich father-in-law at the bar (technically termed 'a large one').

Single malts attract great acclaim; they are no longer Scotland's biggest secret. Their intensity and complexity of flavours, previously thought to be a handicap to wider sales, are now being sought throughout the world.

Single Malt whisky is one of four types of Scotch. The most common is **blended whisky**, a mix of many different malt and grain whiskies prepared by a blender using his sense of smell and years of experience. 95% of all bottled whisky sold is blended whisky and it is appreciated the world over for its satisfying subtlety and complexity.

Grain whisky is an accountant's kind of product; industrially produced in an efficient, continuous process from a variety of cereals sourced from around the world—but always including a measure of malted barley (for bio-chemical reasons). This spirit is not fully distilled; a degree of impurity is required to add character—by law.

Occasionally you may come across a bottle of single grain whisky (which will taste light and slightly oily) but its use is mainly as a carrier for malts in blends. The 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 'Pure Malt' or '100% malt'. Some are very good, for example Famous Grouse Vintage Malt, our Bottling of the Year for 2001.

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?

2,234. Actually nobody knows! It could be five times that and there is no way of counting them. Consider the number of small brands (like our own Loch Fyne), supermarket brands, specific market (duty-free) brands which come and go and the task is impossible and pointless. Loch Fyne Whiskies has a most comprehensive range of UK available malts with examples from about 120 distilleries. There are currently about 80 open and working; others are either mothballed, closed or demolished. There have been about 750 distilleries licensed since Ferintosh in 1689.

NEW CUSTOMERS II

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. The main compounds responsible for flavour (congeners) in whisky are very soluble in alcohol but less so in water. At bottling strength 40% or above, these congeners remain locked in the solution (hence the minimum 40%alc. bottling law, agreed by wise men to preserve quality). When water is added, the congeners become less soluble and are released as vapours into the atmosphere. So experiment with each new bottling. Bear in mind you have four senses of taste and these are on your tongue, 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 a no-no; you put ice on bruises and in blended Scotch in hot climates.

Part of the fun of malt whisky is the testing and breaking of these rules! Try ice! or mixing two different malts together.

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.

How come they taste so different?

Malted (germinated) 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 major influence is the type of **cask** or barrel employed to mature the spirit; it could be one of many categories from a brand new barrel to a well-used second-hand ex-sherry or bourbon cask. A recent development in malt whiskies is the production of 'finishes' where the whisky has had some of its maturation in a cask that has previously held a wine or port for example. This creates a huge potential for further variety.

What are 'Cask Strength' Whiskies?

Whisky matures in the barrel at about 65%. Typically, prior to bottling it is diluted to 40-43% 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 concentration of flavour. These whiskies should be di-

luted in the glass after exploratory sips otherwise anaesthesia will numb the pleasure. Because of the variety of casks employed in the industry, each *single-cask* bottling will have the character of the barrel variety as well as that of the distillery so there is great variation.

What's this about 'chill-filtering'?

Untreated, whisky at 40% alcohol will cloud at low temperatures. In the mid-1960s, the Scotch Whisky industry introduced a policy of chill-filtering their whiskies to improve clarity and brightness. This prevented quality rejection in (cold) warehouses and clouding when ice is added in the glass. The process is done by reducing the temperature to as low as minus 8-10°C (typically in malts at plus 2-5°C) then filtering to remove the oils that emulsify at such low temperatures and so eliminating clouding.

The process also removes many of the elements of flavour (congeners) from the whisky and now, after the lead set by Pip Hills and the Scotch Malt Whisky Society, many independent bottlings and some official bottlings (e.g. the new Bruichladdichs or Ardbeg 10yo) are increasingly not chill-filtered, a trend that we applaud. Such bottlings should be at over 46%alc as this helps keep the congeners in solution and clear.

For reasons of 'purity' there is currently a move away from the use of **spirit-caramel** colouring in single malts. This is employed to standardise colour in the bottle, (some whiskies can be quite pale,) but in most cases caramel has little effect on flavour.

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! Finally there is a collector's market for whisky—that explains the more extreme prices!

Does a whisky improve with age after bottling?

No. Unlike wine, spirits are fixed once in the bottle and there is no benefit in keeping it. You should open and enjoy it as soon as possible!

How long can I keep the whisky in the bottle?

Unopened, a bottle should stay as good as when bottled assuming the seal is in good condition. Keep the bottle away from direct sunlight, heat or variations in condition. Once opened, oxidation



OFFICIAL, OWNERS OR ORIGINAL BOTTLINGS (OB)

When bottled by the owner of the distillery, we call such bottlings official, owners or original bottlings (OB). These are examples of the best in quality, packaging and design. Here is a range of OB Bruichladdichs from the last twenty years including limited editions, ceramic bottles, wooden boxes and, at the front the most recent with shiny metal tins (inspired by LFW as it happens...)



INDEPENDENT BOTTLERS

(Where's Cadenhead's/Connoisseurs Choice/Gordon & MacPhail's Distillery?)

Loch Fyne Whiskies favours a few independent bottlers who buy the malt whisky from a distillery by the cask and bottle outwith the supervision of the distillery owner. With all independent bottlings look for the distillery name which will be in smaller print.

ADELPHI (A)

A relative newcomer to the sector, The Adelphi Distillery Company has no distillery but is very fussy about the quality of the malt they bottle at cask strength and so their releases are only occasional. Their minimalist labelling allows the whisky to sell itself.

MURRAY McDAVID (MM)

The most recently incorporated on our list, Murray McDavid is gaining great respect for a small range of excellent and unusual whiskies bottled at 46%

and not chill-filtered. In our view this is the perfect bottling strength, just strong enough to tingle the tongue!

CADENHEAD (C)

Campbeltown in Argyll is home to Cadenhead, who buy and also mature casks of whisky and bottle each cask individually at natural cask strength, occasionally as high as 67% alcohol. At over 150 years, Cadenhead is the oldest independent bottler in Scotland.

DOUGLAS LAING & Co. (MP, OMC)

A long established firm of blenders which has moved recently into single malts with two jazzily presented expressions: *McGibbon's Provenance* is bottled at 43%, *Old Malt Cask* at 50% (or less if the cask is not up to that strength). As blenders they have access to some rare and unusual stocks.

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

The leading and most respected independent bottler with a huge range of

malts and blends, G&M bottle a bewildering range of single, vatted and blended whiskies from their Elgin home. G&M are unique amongst independent bottlers in that they mature all their whiskies from new and have done so for over 100 years. G&M still hold stocks of long gone distilleries—history to take advantage of! In 1998 G&M became distillers with the revival of Benromach Distillery. Shown above are examples of their *G&M*, *Cask* and *Connoisseurs Choice* ranges.

SIGNATORY (S)

For ten years Signatory of Edinburgh have bottled malts at 43% and at cask strength and now also at 46% without chill-filtration. They have produced some outstanding and very rare whiskies and are consistently good value. Signatory was voted 'Bottler of the Year' at the inaugural Whisky Academy awards.

will act on the whisky with a noticeable effect in between one and three years. The balance of characters may change, not always for the worse, but eventually a whisky may become 'flat'—another good reason for enjoying your dram without delay. Saving the last inch of a very special malt is usually disappointing when finally poured, so enjoy it now!

Books are useful sources of information and we recommend in particular:

Most informed—Charles MacLean's *Malt Whisky* £25.00 or *Scotch Whisky Pocket Guide* £8.99.

The Taster's bible—Michael Jackson's *Malt Whisky Companion* £12.99.

Other recommendations are shown in bold in our Stock List.

To keep you up to date visit our website: lfw.co.uk.

"The proper drinking of Scotch Whisky is more than indulgence: it is a toast to civilisation, a tribute to the continuity of culture, a manifesto of man's determination to use the resources of nature to refresh mind and body and to enjoy to the full the senses with which he has been endowed."

David Daiches

Scotch Whisky, Its Past and Present



Who or what is LFW?

Loch Fyne Whiskies is a small privately owned shop in Inveraray, a popular visitor stop in the West Highlands of Scotland. The business is owned and managed by Richard & Lyndsay Joynson and is not part of a chain, has no shareholders to satisfy and does not have any branches (I hear mutterings of 'one centre of excellence'). Working with us are Andy Burns and Laura Simpson plus our greeter Donald, pictured right, who is 'voluntary' rather than employed; his job is distributing drams of the Loch Fyne.

Our shop stocks all the whiskies in our Stock List, at the published price, as well as a range of other whisky related items—glassware, hip flasks, whisky flavoured confectionery and preserves and the most comprehensive whisky book shelf possible.

There is also a gallery of collectors' and rare bottles on display plus a selection of whiskies from around the world donated by customers featuring such unlikely products as Maltese, Polish and South African whiskies!

Visitors to our shop enjoy the atmosphere and our service and most get to do some sampling from our extensive tasting stock before they buy. Our (much imitated) web-site lfw.co.uk is acclaimed

and thought to be ground-breaking by virtue of its simplicity!

We pride ourselves on our attention to our customer requirements, principally sound knowledge of our products, a fair price for our goods and a top class and speedy mail order service.

In 2000 Richard was inducted (induced?) as a *Keeper of the Quaich*, a unique organisation that recognises those who have contributed to the good standing of the Scotch Whisky Industry. In 2002, at the inaugural Whisky Academy awards organised by *Whisky Magazine*, members of the whisky industry voted us 'Retailer of the Year'.

We are proud of our business, the respect we have earned, this newsletter, our blend 'The Loch Fyne' and unique 'Living Cask'. Our customers are worldwide, very loyal and very much appreciated.





The LIVING CASK™

A unique recreation of the storing and serving of malt whisky

Not a single malt, but a living vatting of suitable malts, The Living Cask takes its inspiration from *Notes on a Cellar Book* by renowned connoisseur Professor George Saintsbury, published 1920, in which he writes: "...The more excellent way—formerly practised by all persons of some sense and some means north of the Tweed—is to establish a cask,... fill it up with good and drinkable whisky,... stand it up on end, tap it half way down or even a little higher, and, when you get to or near the tap, fill it up again with whisky fit to drink, but not too old. You thus establish what is called in the case of sherry a *Solera*, in which the constantly changing character of the old constituents doctors the new accessions, and in which these in turn freshen and strengthen the old."

And that is what we do. When half drawn down a new malt is introduced and the character changes. Each top up is described as a Volume and this is marked on the 'spine' of our book-style label which has Saintsbury's instructions on the back. Each 'Volume' is bottled as a 20cl sample, dated at the time of drawing from the cask with the prevailing strength noted. As this is the natural strength it is in the region of 57% alc.

Living Cask subscriber Jack Mangus writes, "*The folks at Loch Fyne Whiskies have cleverly produced a continually marketable and intriguing vatted whisky. I can't wait for the next volume! Thanks to Professor George Saintsbury for his inspiration and LFW for The Living Cask!*"



The LIVING CASK

VOLUME XII

At the time of writing volume XII has just been created by the addition of some 24 year old old-fashioned highland malt to volume XI which was particularly peaty for a vatted malt.

It's early days—we prefer it to settle for a couple of weeks—but Volume XII promises to retain much of the peat with a higher floral note.

Strength 56%—add plenty of water!

LIVING CASK— 20cl 56% £14.90



Living Cask

SUBSCRIPTIONS

For the Living Cask enthusiast there is a subscription service where we will automatically send you each new volume, once it has settled in. New subscribers willing to buy the next five volumes are offered a FREE copy of *The Malt Whisky Cellar Book* (£15) that provides space for you to record your impressions of each volume—and more! Ask or check lfw.co.uk for details.

We have other items featuring Topsy, the Living Cask boy: pewter key-rings & bottle stoppers (£4.90 each). Be hip! Show them you're a whisky lover!



THE INVERARITY RANGE

adopted as our house malts

The Inverarity range is bottled by Inverarity Vaults and all three have been adopted as our 'house malts' because of their quality and great value. The three malts, two single and one vatted, complement each other and demonstrate the range of styles in malt Scotch Whiskies.

INVERARITY 10yo

The 10yo has been our house malt since 1995. It is an all-day everyday dram which both novice and experienced whisky fans enjoy because of its easy drinking Dalwhinnie/Glenmorangie style; a real example of quality and value. The 10yo is a bourbon cask matured Aultmore, try serving it alongside a fruit desert—trifle or fruit salad—instead of wine!

Inverarity 10yo, price £ 19.90.

INVERARITY ANCESTRAL 14yo

For Ancestral—the digestif in the range—Inverarity's Hamish Martin has selected a 14yo sherry cask matured Balmenach. The whisky is ruby-red, extremely smooth with a great strength and complexity and very slightly sherry-cloying in the mouth; a wonderful after dinner dram. Add a little while preparing a bramble crumble—honest!

The 14yo Ancestral is £ 27.90.

INVERARITY ISLAY 10yo

The Inverarity range is completed by Inverarity Islay, a ten year old all-Islay vatted malt made up of four components. A very emphatic phenolic and medicinal character—peat and iodine—classic Islay; a good oiliness, powerful flavours yet also a breeze of fresh air. This is an excellent variation on Islay malts which provokes much debate among Islay fans as to where the four components come from—and we're not telling!

Inverarity Islay 10 years old, £23.90.



The LOCH FYNE™

Blend of

SCOTCH WHISKIES

THE MALT DRINKERS BLEND™



THE DISTILLERY

Our label depicts the Glendarroch Distillery sited on the Crinan Canal which links Loch Fyne with the Sound of Jura. Also known as Glenfyne, the distillery was built in 1831. A succession of owners held the distillery until 1919 when it came under the ownership of the Glenfyne Distillery Co.

The cameo 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. His book 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 Lochgilphead.

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

Additional Information

Brian Townsend, SCOTCH MISSED.

We're delighted with our unique blend created for us by Professor Ronnie Martin, O.B.E., former Production Director of industry leader United Distillers.

Slightly sweet and slightly smoky, The Loch Fyne (£15.30) appeals to malt whisky fans as an easy-drinking, well flavoured blended whisky; something to drink and enjoy rather than concentrate on. We have given The Loch Fyne to the three top professional tasting writers and while all enjoy it, their tasting notes are completely different—proof that it is something for everyone!

Michael Jackson's note is characteristically analytical;

Colour: rich, sunny, gold.

Aroma: fruity (honeydew melon?)

Body: medium, slightly syrupy.

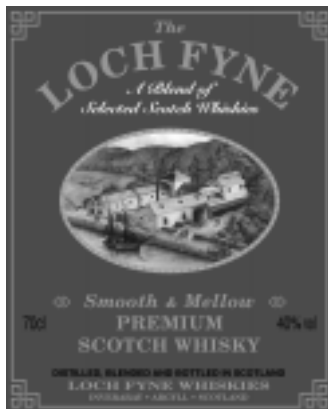
Flavours: light heather-honey, grassy, fragrant, smokiness develops, especially in the finish.

With typical eloquence, Charlie MacLean's tasting note wins by a nose: "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."



IWSC BRONZE 1996

Soon after its launch The Loch Fyne won the bronze award in the blended whisky class at the influential International Wine & Spirit Competition. The Gold Medal went to the world's top selling Scotch, Johnnie Walker Red Label.

More praise comes from Carol Shaw's Collins Gem Whisky which describes The Loch Fyne as "A malt drinker's blend, full flavoured, with a raisiny, sweet spiced nose, mellow smoothness of taste and a warming finish. A very easy to drink whisky."

Jim Murray lists it in his unique book 'Classic Blended Scotch' concluding "Highly drinkable". Whisky Magazine rated it as "a wee cracker" and in a blind tasting of 'deluxe' blends in Wine Magazine The Loch Fyne ("growly, rich and balanced") embarrassed several more expensive and older well-known brands by coming 9th in a field of 21—the highest scoring unaged blend, beating Chivas Regal 12yo, Ballantine's 12yo and W&M 30yo among others!

All this praise is supported by the rate of sale in the shop after a wee taste!





It is unusual for a single bottling to produce a universal response of “gosh! That’s gorgeous” from first time tasters in the shop but that’s been the reaction to this year’s bottlings of the year, in particular the 15yo.

Of all the bottles we stock, and there are plenty of them, we elect one our ‘Bottling of the Year’ based on customer reaction in the shop, value and unusualness; a democratic selection with (arguably) the world’s largest tasting panel! We long debated as to which was this year’s winner; the sweet and peaty Ledaig 20yo was the runner up, but we realised the inevitable:

THE NEW

BRUICHLADDICH RANGE

Our affinity for Bruichladdich has long been documented and while it was a favourite before, the new bottlings are just too easy to sell. Careful selection, not chill-filtering and bottling at 46% makes the big difference. Home bottling at the distillery starts this year; can they get even better?

The 10yo (£24.90) has the style of the old 15yo, fresh and crisp, an Atlantic breeze. The 15yo is sweeter—banana cheesecake with pear and kiwi fruit topping. The 20yo (£62.70) is a medium-heavyweight classic—with chocolate on top!

To celebrate the award we are taking £3 off the most popular, the 15yo—down to £29.90.



THE RIGHT TOOLS

GLASSWARE

A traditional whisky tumbler is fine, even a pleasure, for a blended whisky but for malt whisky appreciation there is a better glass for the job.

Malt whisky is best enjoyed with a glass that will hold aromas, such as the new ‘blender’s glass’ or our *classic nosing glass* with its generous belly to accumulate aromas, a narrow rim to focus those delights for consideration and a lid to keep them for you rather than the fairies. Engraved graduations allow accurate dilution.

For more relaxed malt drinking we recommend our *port glass*. Its wider rim and better balance aid contemplative enjoyment.

We also enjoy using our simple *water carafe*, far less fuss than a lipped jug.



Classic Nosing Glass (middle) £7.90

Port Glass £3.50

Water Carafe £3.50

When evaluating a dram it is helpful to have more than one kind in order to prevent familiarity setting in. Sampling in increasing intensity and then going back again will reveal more than concentrating on one alone. Many LFW customers enjoy ‘one-to-five’ parties where whiskies are selected according to our taste score of 1 to 5 from our stock list for a convivial evening of descriptor bandying.

LFW Tasting Mat & Cellar Book

The LFW melamine tasting mat is a white, wipe clean mat for five glasses and an aide memoire of descriptors to assist discussion and note taking.

Finally, to record those inspired sensory discoveries, *Neil Wilson’s Malt Whisky Cellar Book* is a handsome tome to treasure those thoughts and memories of your most special tasting sessions.

LFW Tasting Mat £4.90

Malt Whisky Cellar Book £15.00

Special! Five classic nosing glasses, a carafe, tasting mat and cellar book £55.00



BEYOND DISTILLING II

GAVIN D SMITH

Being people of taste and discernment, many *SWR* readers will have chosen to visit Scottish distilleries and observe the processes of malt whisky production for themselves. The tours tend to end with casks of new spirit slumbering peacefully in their warehouses, and a joke about the angels’ share, but that is really just the beginning of the story.

The whisky industry’s marketing folk are not keen to allow our imaginations to travel far from misty, Highland glens, where generations of faithful men labour to produce a hand-crafted product. They encourage us to keep those slumbering casks in mind.

If we are adventurous, however, our thoughts take us to places like Grangemouth, on the southern shores of the firth of Forth, perhaps better known for the rich, dark liquid that flows through its vast oil refinery than for its association with the product of Highland stills. But it is in Grangemouth and a dozen other less than scenic spots around Scotland that the not so glamorous functions of producing bottled whisky take place. Kyndal Spirits is one of the whisky industry’s newest names, but as readers who were paying attention during the last issue will know, it masks the former Jim Beam subsidiary JBB (Greater Europe), previously Whyte & Mackay and Invergordon Distillers.

Kyndal’s Grangemouth Bond is one of two bottling and packaging facilities owned by the company, the other being the former Invergordon plant in Leith. Grangemouth is an appropriate place of pilgrimage for us, as it is there that our very own *Loch Fyne* is lovingly blended and bottled.

Leith is geared to handle high volumes, tending to concentrate on blended whiskies, and is much more automated than Grangemouth, which specialises in smaller runs and offers greater flexibility. On average, Grangemouth produces the equivalent of one million (12 bottle) cases of spirits per year, employing 140 staff, while the Leith plant turns out around six times that amount, with a similar workforce. This is partly explained by the labour-intensive nature of much of the work in Grangemouth, where bottling line staff may find themselves hand-fitting plastic screw caps or applying ribbons.

The Grangemouth Bond began life as the Scottish Co-operative Soap Works, and some of its original red-brick buildings still survive, though the present plant was built on the site in the mid-1960s by the Grangemouth Bonding Company, which passed through a number of hands before ending up with Whyte & Mackay Distillers Ltd.

Spirit Processing Manager David Harris has 26 years experience in the whisky



industry, having started working for the Grangemouth Bonding Company. “I think I’ve worked for eight or nine different companies while I’ve been here”, he says with a grin.

According to David, “Our comparatively low-volume, low-speed lines give us the chance to spot any cosmetic faults in the bottling, which are particularly significant for our important Far Eastern markets. We have a high level of human inspection here due to our production speed”.

“We have the capability and the flexibility to handle just about anything”, he notes. “150 different spirit types go through this plant, and a high percentage of our work is with aged malts and quite a lot of single cask bottlings. We deal with anything from 3cl minis to one gallon bottles”.

In addition to its work with whiskies, Grangemouth compounds and bottles the popular whisky liqueur *Glavva*, each batch of which is personally prepared behind locked doors by Kyndal’s incomparable whisky-wizard, Master Blender Richard Paterson. The plant is also kept busy producing and bottling the liqueur *After Shock* for Kyndal’s US former owner.

Whisky arrives at Grangemouth either in casks or occasionally in tankers directly from Kyndal’s various malt distilleries or from the company’s Invergordon plant on the Cromarty frith in Easter Ross. There, grain whisky is produced and the actual blending processes that create the Whyte & Mackay blend and many others take place. The blends are formulated in Glasgow by Richard Paterson, but ‘assembled’ at Invergordon before being transported by road tanker to Leith or Grangemouth for bottling.

“There are at least 40 constituent parts in any one of our blends”, notes Richard, “and most of the malts that will go into those are held at Invergordon, maturing in the 40 warehouses there”.

Quantities of the company’s more popular single malts such as 10 year-old Isle of Jura, and 12 year-old Dalmore and Tamnavulin are held in tanks at Grangemouth ready for bottling.

Processing of whisky begins at Grangemouth with casks being emptied into the ‘dump trough’, where it passes through

a fine mesh to remove solids before being pumped into one of 20 processing vats. There it is sampled for quality, strength, colour and clarity. De-mineralised water and spirit-caramel are added in the vats as required, and David Harris notes that “we have a de-ionising plant to ensure high-quality water, and we monitor it very closely. Water is important in the distilleries, but it’s extremely important here.”

Once the whisky has passed its processing-vat tests, it is chill-filtered to ensure a stable product that won’t ‘haze’ in the bottle. In a larger plant, the chill-filtration would be automated, but at Grangemouth there is still a reliance on manual procedures. “We’re very dependent on our staff to get it all right”, says David. The result of chill-filtering is ‘bright spirit’, which is pumped into bright spirit tanks prior to bottling.

Both David Harris and Richard Paterson are keen to stress that the processes leading up to bottling are vitally important in producing fine whiskies. Chill-filtering may seem like a simple scientific process, but the speed at which it is carried out varies from whisky to whisky depending on its characteristics, and different temperatures are required to get the optimum result from malts of different strengths.

“It’s all part of the art”, stresses Richard. “These whiskies are individuals, just like people, and what happens to them in Grangemouth or Leith is critical. The aim is to retain as much character of the malts as possible, and we try not to rush the various stages, allowing the whisky time to settle. You must be as gentle as possible”.

“It’s very easy to take all the character out of whisky if you’re not careful”, echoes David. With this in mind, Fettercairn is chilled to a lower temperature than Dalmore, with the latter being reduced to 45% before being left to stand for ten days, during which time it becomes hazy. It is then reduced to 43% before bottling. According to Richard, “if you want good results you shouldn’t stress the filters”, and they may even be



Filters (left), chillers (foreground) and one of several pipe looms which permit up to 10,000 permutations of product from the many holding vats.



altered in winter to take account of temperature variations.

Before bottling, the spirit is evaluated in the laboratory adjacent to the bright spirit tanks. A nosing panel checks spirit for consistency and lack of contamination, and samples are sent to Richard Paterson in Kyndal’s Glasgow headquarters for his evaluation.

Grangemouth boasts two bottling halls, the first of which has four comparatively fast bottling lines. One is dedicated to handling miniatures, another liqueurs, a third processes higher volume single malts such as Jura and Dalmore, while the fourth is “flexible”, according to David Harris.

The second bottling hall is the sort of place to make the true connoisseur go all misty-eyed. Here, on three semi-automated lines such delights as the ‘Stillman’s Dram’ range and 26 or 50 year old Dalmores are bottled. Here, too, Kyndal’s recently-introduced ‘Discovery Malt Selection’ pack, comprising three 50cl bottles, is also packaged.

“Our smallest run might be just eight dozen bottles”, notes David Harris, “and we can even do hand-filling of ceramics. Small quantities might seem expensive in terms of labour, but remember that these are high-value products”.

A significant part of Kyndal’s business is in providing own-label brands for supermarkets both in Britain and mainland Europe, and the company also undertakes bottling for third-parties at Grangemouth, with this trade making up as much as 25 per cent of total throughput. “Inverhouse and Macduff International are two of our biggest clients”, says David, “but we also do work for UDV, Chivas and Allied from time to time. Because they tend to be so geared to large volume, high-speed lines, it’s handy for the big boys to pass on some low volume work at times”.

Lovers of whisky trivia may like to know that Grangemouth handles one of the most unusual of all Scotches. *Hamashkeh* is the world’s only Kosher whisky, and a Rabbi is present during blending at Invergordon and again at the bottling stage in Grangemouth to ensure that there is no unacceptable contamination.

Well, you never know when a fact like that might come in handy...



LFW.CO.UK A USER'S MANUAL

Lfw.co.uk is designed to be simple and quick but here is a guide to give users tips and short cuts.

Headings here reflect the left hand navigation frame. Tip: if you lose the frame click on the logo in the top right hand corner.

News

News is the busiest part of the site; although only one page long (broken up for speed) it reflects changes in stock as they happen, updated within hours of arrival. Many customers check this on a daily basis; it takes seconds to learn of any changes. From here you can check prevailing Deals and now (at last) any new miniatures as well.

The rest of lfw.co.uk can be considered to be in two parts: **Browse & Buy** and the rest.

Browse & Buy

This is the major part of lfw.co.uk, where the biggest investment in time has taken place. **Browse & Buy** is an illustrated catalogue of all our whiskies, books and hardware. It is here that you should check the current availability of an item. The lobby to **Browse & Buy** has information regarding delivery prices and terms of sale for all destinations so be sure to check these.

To continue to the catalogue check the secure option. Ordering on lfw.co.uk is secure and certificated by a respected authority; click the locked padlock on your browser for assurance. Tip: If you have trouble after entry because your computer has security fire-walls in place (*should you be doing this from work?*) then the unsecure option will give hassle-free access, but you should be cautious about revealing your card details if your padlock is 'open'. You can still order without revealing payment instructions. At check-out there is the option to print out a completed order form and fax or post it to us with card details added manually. Some of our repeat customers request that we use card details we have on file Tip: enter "Use card details on



Again, thanks to all who contributed to Donald's fund while having their picture taken outside the shop with him. Last year he collected over £800 which has been distributed to three local pre-school groups. Here are members of Inveraray creche out on the town trying to blow their huge cheque. *Are you sure you're over 18?*

file" in **Special Requests** (below your address details) as you start to check out, then choose 'Send Separately' for card details. You can of course 'phone or fax us as normal.

Browse & Buy lists prevailing prices and availability with our unique comments that many find enjoyable to browse without buying. Go take a look—no obligation to buy or even show yourself!



Tip: Options along the top include **Review Order**; here you can adjust quantity or cancel items before checking out.

Check-out tip: Once you have entered your card details, clicking Next> concludes the transaction; there will be no going back. You will then get an e-mail automatically (unless you have given the wrong e-address!).

Our practice is to retrieve orders at 10am and 3pm and to despatch that day, (but no guarantees); changes should be 'phoned, faxed or e-mailed immediately.

Search

If you know what you want then the **Search** function is very useful and very highly recommended, the descriptions for each whisky have been created with this facility in mind. A product or descriptor can be entered with an option of price range.

Keywords employed throughout **Browse & Buy** include, for example:

- 'peaty' or 'sherry' / 'sherried' etc.
- 'ace'—regarding individual bottlings (Δ).
- 'high regard'—regarding distilleries.
- 'limited' or 'collectable'.
- 'closed' or 'mothballed'.
- Dates, such as '1966' or '34yo'.
- Specifics, such as '46%' or 'single cask'.

All our distillery profiles include our

unique taste scores as explained on the back of our Stock List. Tip: These can be searched by entering colon+the score you seek —e.g. to view a list of our taste score 2 suggestions then enter :2 (no space).

Our Shop

**The Loch Fyne
The Living Cask**

House Malts from Inverarity

These four sections give information about us and our specialist items.

Scotch Whisky Review

As well as items from the current and back issues of SWR this section includes some entertaining photo diaries of whisky happenings (piss-ups) and topical informative items.

Contact Us

Please check in and join our mailing list. List members are not pestered; checking our **News** section each week will keep you adequately informed. We only circulate the list when there is a new item in short supply that we think subscribers deserve to know about first.

I value comments and notification of problems so please keep me informed; my e-mail address is shop@lfw.co.uk

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If you get lost or bamboozled **Site Overview** will help you out. Scroll down for quick jumps to various pages within lfw.co.uk—listings, order forms, charges, terms of sale etc.

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