



# SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW™

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## SHUCKS!

**Well! What to discuss?** The Cardhu row? Rant against Wm. Grant about their use of crude, distorting and sensationalising spinmongers? Regardless of the dubious merit of their argument—was *purity* their cause, or the fear that Cardhu would topple their market dominance?—the public's confusion we witnessed in the shop was very distressing and damaging to Scotch in general.

Or shall I have a dig at our chancellor's delusions? Jilted John was right, Gordon *is* a moron! His blinkered proposals to have us apply arcane tax-strips to bottles serves no benefit to anyone (save the fraudsters) and may make untenable The Loch Fyne blend, our Living Cask concept, independent bottlers and single cask bottlings in general. It will make whisky specialisation less interesting—in the UK anyway. Another typically British self-handicapping measure.

Or shall I fume at the discussions behind doors at the SWA? Discussions so important that Diageo endured humiliation by rescinding their Cardhu victory to take part. What are the possible end results of these discussions? New definitions for Scotch that may prohibit independent or alternative bottlings of single malts. Surely not, considering the contribution of Gordon & MacPhail, Signatory and others to the creation of the exciting malts sector. Without them the future would only be of gloomy blend forecasts.

No rant then; instead I'll devote this entire column to more benign 'thank you's'.

1. Thanks to Inver House Distillers for their patience and superb professionalism in the creation of the Loch Fyne Liqueur; the result is perfect.

2. Thank you, LFW customers who voted us inaugural 'Retailer of the Year' in *Whisky Magazine's* 'Icons of Whisky'. Following on from the whisky industry members' inaugural vote two years ago this is very special.

3. Thanks to Andy and Laura, without whom point 2 would be unlikely...



## LUSTY & BUSTY NAILS

Meet the Loch Fyne Liqueur—a top quality liqueur, based on 12yo Scotch with hints of tangerine and chocolate-orange, very slightly smoky and less sweet than other stickies. Customer trials have generated a stack of advance orders.

A pleasure on its own, the Loch Fyne Liqueur £28.90 is also a remarkable base for rusty nails—most notably with Laphroaig (a *busty nail*) creating a peaty liqueur (what a finish!) rated by shop customers as 'extraordinary' and 'the perfect mix'; or try a *lusty nail*—mix 50:50 with a good 12yo blend (if you're out of the Loch Fyne blend) to reduce the sweetness further. Talisker, cask strength Caol Ila, Aberlour A'bunah and coffee all work well too. If you have other cocktail combinations, please post them at [lochfyneliqueur.com](http://lochfyneliqueur.com).

# THE COOPER



**Our victim this time is Willie Taylor of Speyside and Broxburn Coopers. LFW: What is your job?**

I am joint managing director of Speyside Cooperage, which is managed by my brother Douglas, and I am production director of Broxburn Coopers located west of Edinburgh. I am also President of the National Federation of Coopers.

**LFW: Do you handle 'barrels' or 'casks'?**  
A cask can be a barrel, hogshead or butt; a barrel is a specific cask of 200 litres. Our business is the handling of casks, the universal wooden containers.

There are cave drawings from Egyptian times depicting casks, the Romans used wood to move their wine, and casks were used as a well liner in Roman settlements in England.

Coopering was once one of the largest of all trades; everything used a barrel—it was the best way of moving, dry goods and wet. I recall one elderly lady from England telling me her father made casks for transporting crockery, which is very heavy stuff.

Today oak casks are required by the Scotch whisky industry as the only acceptable method of maturation, the removal of foul elements from the new spirit and the addition of pleasing flavour compounds.

**LFW: How did you get started?**

My father and grandfather started Speyside Cooperage in 1947. Father joined grandfather's tailor's shop in Dufftown after the war and together they went around the area selling army surplus but it came to the point where there was not enough to sustain them. Great-grandfather owned the old stables in Craigellachie which he had been renting out to coopers before the war—who of course never paid the rent. So when after the war they asked back in again father suggested they work for him; he would go out and get the work. They enjoyed reasonable growth in the whisky industry; I recall the sixties as being good. Douglas was keen to get into the trade but I had no such ambitions. After a

stretch training in accountancy, I managed a local hotel for my father for eleven years but that's a thankless job with no time off at all. Eventually I joined Douglas at the cooperage in 1977—hardly a buoyant time, but not too bad. Soon I was delivering casks to the distilleries. One memory is a car in my mirror flashing its lights just before he got showered with casks—I eventually got to learn how to lash them down!

I enjoyed the physical work and the shorter day—especially Saturday afternoons free! I loved seeing raw material converted into casks. By 1980 a reduction in work came and it was down to me to do the cost-cutting exercise.

By the mid-eighties things started to pick up again, at home and with producers in Japan. We were back into good shape with more people and apprentices; we were bringing in fresh bourbon barrels and converting many into hogsheads by adding additional staves, but we were outgrowing our space. Douglas found out the farm up the road was up for sale and, after much to-ing and fro-ing with the planning people we bought the farm to build a new factory and moved up there.

At the old place, because we were on the roadside, a lot of people used to stop and stick their nose in and usually one of the guys would show them round. I remember a film crew came to see us shortly after we had spent a huge amount of money modernising the old site. We were standing at the entrance and one of the film crew came running back saying "You've got to see this place! It's like going back 100 years!"

By the time of the move we were getting a lot of visitors, from the trade and whisky-trailers, and there were more safety aspects to consider. We thought it a good idea to incorporate a visitor centre and now, after ten years, it looks after itself. We have had a peak of 27,000 visitors—close enough to our goal of 30,000 per year—and now we seem to be on a rise again. I'm not sure if we would have a visitor centre if we were doing it all again, but it has helped in so much as we have had to get our act together with regard to health & safety and keeping the place tidier. It was an expensive operation where we had to go the whole hog but it has given us lots of good publicity—not to forget the sales of flower tubs, garden furniture and mini casks!

That site is now set up for 20 coopers with as many support staff again. A throughput of 400 casks a day is possible—when distilleries are going full belt—but presently we are at about half that rate. We are putting out as many casks as we were five years ago but much of that is wood redirection—casks we buy from America, check them out, run those that need repairing through the workshop and the better ones are moved

straight on. They come in whole, not shook or knocked down into bundles, in containers of 210. Many distillers are taking the opportunity of low prices for bourbon casks and getting their stocks back up. We also make a lot of new cask ends for home and export.

**LFW: How did you come to expand to Broxburn?**

We leased the cooperage at Broxburn 8 years ago. It was part of a Bell's warehousing and bottling plant and was sold by United Distillers to Glenmorangie who let us take on the cooperage. We had been searching for more premises when we realised that the north was being reduced in utilisation—whisky made up north was being tankered away for filling into casks in the central belt.

When I moved to Broxburn we had 6 coopers, but within a couple of years that was 18 going flat out for a few years—all relative to the demand of the fillers. At present I have 10 coopers and 8 support staff.

**LFW: Are you the biggest coopers?**

The biggest independent cooper, yes, but Diageo is the biggest employer.

After years of overproduction there are more dumpings than fillings and so a surplus of freshly dumped, good casks which no one wants. The distillers have the option of paying us to fix a cask or buying one in better condition, at half the price. In times like this the industry can go without a cooper for quite a while—especially with the pressure on distillers to lower costs and do better for their shareholders. I can appreciate where they are coming from.

Another result of the 1980s downturn is that blends became made of older whiskies—as a way of using up maturing stock—and now they are filling for eight years rather than three, with the result that we get less work.

Palletisation of the grain whiskies has also hit us, as this means the casks do not get the rough handling that they used to get. Pumps fill and empty the spirit through the head of an upended cask which is just sitting on a pallet without any bashing or wear and tear.

**LFW: Is palletising a good thing for the whisky?**

Not for me! I not sure about palletising; there certainly is a lot of debate about it. I discussed it in the States and it is interesting to note that they have not adopted it in the bourbon industry. They did large-scale trials—as the Americans do—but they have not gone any further than trials, they're sticking with traditional warehousing. I suspect that casks being so close together for air circulation is one reason it is questionable; they just don't get to breathe the same. There is more evaporation too; you are losing from the whole of one end and since the two ends amount to 1/3 of the cask area that much loss of wood contact will diminish maturation.

**LFW: What is the NFC?**

I am the president of the National Federation of Coopers; I served on the council for a number of years and as the numbers decreased they ran out of people to appoint!

When I first became involved with the Federation it had the main purpose of wage negotiation, a sort of union, but by the time I was on the council everyone had started doing their own deals. Now the NFC primarily manages and looks after apprentices to make sure they are properly trained and that high standards are maintained. We are also involved with H&S issues, drawing what's required to members' attention.

In 1980 there were over 1,000 coopers but that has now dropped to a little over 200 of which only 140 are active production coopers and that figure is likely to fall again.

There has been a big focus on safety issues. The H&S executive love us—they use coopering as a training field for their officers! Very very physical, noisy, dusty, machines, lots of revolving blades, and dangerous substances! In days gone by there was a lot of boozing from wet casks and the old guys would encourage the young with a "you've got to drink this, son..." but nowadays fortunately they are not interested in the drink. You have to picture the old guys coopering away with blood pouring down their hands! "Cut the top off your finger? Here have another one, lad!"

**LFW: So, what does a cooper do?**

Most of what we do is simply repairing casks, replacing the heads and any broken staves. More heads need replacing as the bourbon industry (because they have to use brand-new casks every time) has tried to control the price of casks so they are as thin as is necessary, the tolerance has been reduced with more defect and sap-wood employed. When such a cask is filled, there is a lot of ingress which makes the wood swell which has to go somewhere causing the head to bow in or out, so most bourbon casks coming in from the States now are needing new heads.

We used to be busy enlarging barrels to make 'hogsheads', from 200 to 250 litres, by putting in new staves and larger heads but there is not so much of that now. It's a shame because I think the hogshead gives a really nice whisky; a barrel is much smaller than a hoggie and so much more intense, there is less volume of liquid and a greater relative area of wood.

Making new casks is not our main business—just a few hundred a year, but that is increasing because some distillers are charging ahead with organic whisky, which requires supervision and certification from the Organic Society. We use all American oak. In fact most of the oak in the Scotch industry comes from America; it is tighter and better for the job than European. Sherry casks

have a fair percentage of Spanish oak but now there is a lot of American oak used in sherry casks too. We import the wood pre-cut to lengths but not fashioned.

We have dabbled with Polish oak and we have been involved in making wine casks with some Hungarian oak. Eastern European oak is much more porous, it is harder to get quality oak, harder to work with, there's more waste and it's much more expensive. In fact that is the case with all European oak, even French can be difficult and has to be very carefully cut.

Distillers can get an ex-bourbon barrel for £25 and French oak wine barrels are changing hands for about £450. In fairness to the distillers they don't want too much new oak; there are too many tannins released into the first filling; like ex-bourbon there are lots of vanillas but you still have a bitter tannin note.

## *sherry and port producers don't need wood to make their products*

**LFW: Will the Americans change the regulations and allow barrels to be reused?**

They have been discussing it over there, but it would change their product considerably. There are the conservationists and as costs become a greater issue it is possible that they may start refilling a small percentage even. I recall when Early Times bourbon from Louisville—once a big seller in the American home market—changed from bourbon to 'Early Times Kentucky whisky' (dropping the bourbon name) sales disappeared! So there is a history that makes it unlikely in my opinion.

**LFW: What does charring do?**

Charring caramelises the sugars in the wood; it also helps to filter out many of the impurities in new spirit. There are those that will not consider re-char because they do not want those smoky flavours coming through in their spirit.

**LFW: Now it is exotic casks.**

I like the idea of using casks from wines and fortified wines; there are new flavours to be gained from the likes of Malaga and port. Fortified wines were the first to be brought into this country and those casks would have found their way into the scotch industry. When whisky was matured for three years you did not have cooperages making casks; they were

just making use of what was available. There were different grades and wood used for the various uses be it fish, butter, beer, wine or spirit. The problem with some woods is the absence of medullary rays which run through the wood and it is very difficult to get a wood that will hold liquid. Chestnut was used as a cheaper option on the continent but I think wine has different properties from spirits; I think spirits in a chestnut cask would not work—most chestnut casks were waxed on the inside anyway.

I love wondering what is going to come from a cask, is it going to be sensational or is it going to be 'flippin'eck, what have I done here!' One may be exceptional while another makes you wonder what went wrong.

**LFW: Will we run out of port pipes?**

There have been a lot removed from service and not just to whisky producers. Like sherry the port producers don't actually need wood to make their product—not for ruby port anyway, for tawny ports yes, but ruby probably never sees a cask. Some of the distillers want a ruby port because it is giving lots of colour so I have to find someone who is willing to fill specially. So far I have been able to source port pipes but I am hearing that we are not going to get this sort of thing for much longer.

**LFW: Where does the flavour come from in a finish?**

Finishing gains flavour from the wine that is saturated into the wood, not the wood itself. There is enough in there that a high strength spirit will absorb, like a solvent cleaning a dirty tin. This is where Glenmorangie have been successful; they are using a high quality matured spirit. Putting a duff spirit into a bourbon wood would help to get some maturation and colour it up but shoving bad into a port or sherry cask to sweeten it up will not work.

I'm going to Whitby next week to meet the replica sailing ship Endeavour that has sailed back from Madeira with 10 hogsheads that have held a gorgeous wine. When Glenmorangie heard of this, pressure was brought to bear and they have secured them all, but they have to give me a bottle, that's a condition! I'm really looking forward to the results. These are casks that we sent out several years ago for a bit of experimentation, a mixture of new, ex-wine and ex-whisky wood.

**LFW: Desert island dram?**

That's a dangerous one; I'd hate to offend any of my customers and we do deal with a large percentage of the industry. However being a Speyside man, a 25 or 30yo Glenfarclas, or any similar dark, well-matured European oak sherry cask whisky.

**LFW: Thank you.**

*The full text of our discussion, almost twice as long as the above, can be found on-line at [fw.co.uk/swr](http://fw.co.uk/swr).*

## DEVIL'S ADVOCATE



Turnbull Hutton

### CARDHU or DON'T?

Farce-writer Ben Travers made a fortune writing scripts like this. *Cardhu* film rights anyone?

Those of you of a certain vintage will well remember The Grand Old Duke of York—he who marched them up to the top of the hill, and then marched them down again. He was obviously fortified at the time, an early Diageo director, not hellish sure of what direction he was taking.

His descendants, the Lords Blyth and MacFarlane, Prince Paul Walsh, and the jelly-wobblers who make up the non-executive Board at Diageo, have most certainly kept up the family tradition for indecisiveness and lack of leadership—giving in to a storm in a teacup instigated by those high moral guardians of the Industry, Wm. Grant and Morrison Bowmore!

Next, the media. Column yards written by people who had little bloody idea what a single malt was, and absolutely no idea as to a vatted or blended malt—either of which may be, or not, “pure”!

Then, an assorted collection of self-proclaimed ‘experts’, all wittering on about the dastardly deeds taking place regarding Cardhu. This would be the same Cardhu that 90+% of the great British public had never heard of before—far less tasted!

Enter stage right the Director-General of the Scotch Whisky Association—two days into the job—caught like a rabbit in headlights, his plonker pulled by gutter-based media activists who finally took Grant’s for an alleged half million pounds in fees!

Extras? Assorted politicians—from Holyrood, Westminster and Brussels, a star billing for “Teflon” Blair—doing his impersonation of the DG of the SWA—and you can see why this whole sorry mess provides hours and hours of genuine entertainment. Even I couldn’t make this stuff up!

So what was it all about really?

Well, we could blame the Spanish I suppose. They could not be persuaded to drink Walker Black Label. No, they had to be different. They liked the name Cardhu, the bottle shape, the packaging, and the advertising—oh, and they

really didn’t mind the taste, especially served with half a glass of ice and topped up with Coca-Cola!

Every malt distillery has a finite capacity. Sell an aged product—say, a 12yo—and 25% of what you distil and put in the cask disappears into the ether by the time you come to bottle it. Fact.

Diageo well knew how much 12yo Cardhu they could sell—both in any current year and, indeed, going 12 years forward. All the stories of Diageo marketing types suddenly becoming aware of a problem are tosh. Of course they knew.

I knew—I was there.

The only problem Diageo had was an inability to persuade an ever increasing number of Spanish drinkers away from Cardhu and on to any of their other dozens of available whiskies. No, it was Cardhu or not at all as far as the rapidly expanding Spanish market was concerned.

So what do you do? Traditionally, you would de-age the product thus generating more instantly useable stock and increase the size of the distillery to produce more stock—albeit that you have a fairly long wait for that stock to mature, all the time hoping that you can retain the demand despite having eradicated the age that helped sell the product in the first place. Mind you, tastes could change, the competition will wise-up and you could have wasted shareholders funds increasing capacity in an industry where there currently exists plenty of spare capacity anyway.

Not so smart.

Or you could think outwith the ‘traditional’. Produce a tailored product to keep your customers happy, maintain the age and quality, while not adding capacity that your company—the whole industry—does not need. If you then finish up with a product that has, to all intents and purposes, huge growth potential outwith the market it was originally designed for... well, you could be a hero!

Four years ago, that was where the Diageo thinking was. It was, to quote a senior Vice President (no not me, he’s still there), “the single biggest potential profit earner we currently have. Nothing must stop this happening...”

It was possible—and quite straightforward: change the distillery name back to what it was up until 1982—Cardow; register the name ‘Cardhu’ as a Vatted Malt; advise the Industry, individually as well as collectively through the SWA; tell the consumer; then make the change evident enough in packaging terms to avoid any possible charges of “passing off”; and you’re home and dry. Clever—eh?

Diageo screwed up just about every one of these steps. They dawdled with the name change; they had TV cameras focused on Cardhu signage—as against Cardow; they gave the trade a couple of weeks’ notice of intent, without any pre-

liminary discussions; they hardly changed the packaging and they tried to give a heritage to the word ‘pure’ that was errant nonsense. Add to that several abortive attempts to field spokesmen who weren’t talking drivel, and you can start to see where it went pear-shaped.

Not only that, they never shot down the nonsense spouted by those dual guardians of Industry standards, Grant’s and Morrison’s. No matter that the Chief Exec of the former is now no more—gone presumably for wasting that half million of family money, or that the Chief Exec of the latter is currently off-loading his parent Company’s excess stocks into the Own Label market—at prices which make a laughing stock of the whole Industry pricing structure. Moral conscience of the Industry? Don’t make me laugh!

The great mystery of course is that despite Diageo’s early blundering about, they had just about got the show back on the road. The negative PR had died away. More enlightened Industry observers had worked out that if malts were to become the new phenomenon of the new century, you cannot constrain yourself indefinitely to the capacity of the one existing factory. That’s not to say you don’t have distillery malts—of course you do. But just about every company in the Industry already has a vatted malt in their portfolio. Diageo were simply making Cardhu their mainstream vatted malt. Bottom line here is that if it’s not Cardhu it will sure as hell be son-of-Cardhu. Watch this space.

Whether the ‘son of Cardhu’ will ever have the impetus that ‘Pure Cardhu’ would have had from its kick-start in Spain—thereafter expanding into other markets—remains to be seen. I think the wobbly successors of the Grand Old Duke have done a great disservice to their shareholders—and indeed to the industry generally. They’ve blown the chance to create a new business paradigm—as they used to say at my old school when they meant ‘model’.

When some overpaid, creative type came up with the name ‘DIAGEO’, the in-house joke was that it was an acronym for ‘Don’t-Imagine-Any-Great-Employment-Opportunities’. On the basis that some poor sod will have to carry the can for the Wobblers, the humour of the acronym may well be lost.

So there we have it... The Advocate’s slant on the great Cardhu cock-up. Coming from the mouth of the horse, so to speak. Others will have their views. Did the wobblers wobble because of blackmail threats totally unconnected to Cardhu? Was sex involved, or money laundering, or international double dealing? I’ve heard rumours—but I couldn’t possibly comment on these here.

Unless you happen to have another slant on all of this...

# 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 (£15.90) 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.*

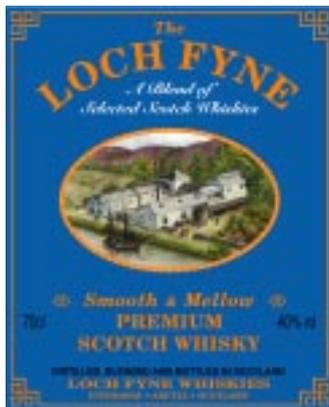
*Flavours: light heather-honey, grassy, fragrant, smokiness develops, especially in the finish.*

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!





*“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 satis-

fying 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.

**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



## 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.

#### 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.

#### 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!

#### 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 has twice been voted 'Bottler of the Year' in Whisky Magazine's Whisky Academy awards.

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 won-

der 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 diluted 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 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.

*Whisky Magazine* is published seven times a year. Other book recommendations are shown in bold in our Stock List. To keep you up to date visit our website: [lfw.co.uk](http://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 (we hear mutterings of ‘one centre of excellence’).

Working with us are Andy Burns, Laura Simpson and Andrew Smeaton plus our greeter Hamish-of-the-Isles (but it’s okay he doesn’t drink) pictured above. Hamish 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 rare and collectors’ 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](http://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 which now makes up half of our business.

In 2000 Richard was inducted (induced?) as a *Keeper of the Quaich*, a unique organisation which 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’, a title bestowed again in the first vote by the magazine’s readership in 2004.

We are proud of our business and the respect we have earned, this newsletter, our blend ‘The Loch Fyne’, our new liqueur and our unique ‘Living Cask’.

Our customers are worldwide, very loyal and very much appreciated.

## COLLECTING WHISKIES

### Some points to consider

The satisfaction of collecting whiskies holds considerably more pleasure than all of today’s ‘manufactured’ collectables—plates, thimbles or die-cast models—as here we have a legitimate and scholarly subject with no less than five hundred years of provenance.

But wait!

If you want to buy whisky as an investment—walk away now, buy lottery tickets. Every collector has gems worth several times their cost but it is possible the whole collection will not have appreciated at all. Assemble your collection for your pleasure and not for your future.

So what do you want to collect? It’s a question worth considering early on, otherwise you will create a diverse, confused collection which has near bankrupted you in its creation.

The sooner you can focus, the more pleasurable your collection will be. Specialise, create a set of rules and try to stick to it. Generally the thoughts are: malt or blend? (usually malt); only official bottlings or any? (usually OB first choice, then independent if necessary); what top price? (are you prepared to be victim to a lavishly presented rarity, fifty times more expensive than the norm?) Simple specialisations may be a specific region, fancy shaped bottles or ranges such as the *Rare Malts* series.

One popular choice is to seek a representative of every possible distillery, first choice being the official bottling but it will be necessary to default to independent bottlings in some cases. Some may then go on to collect cask strength bottlings only, trading in their first specialisation to finance the next project.

Others home in on one region or even one distillery; Ardbeg, Bowmore & Springbank are favoured for a steady trickle of interesting releases.

Astute buying of ‘ordinary’ bottlings can do well; as they get repackaged or discontinued they become desirable with time. For premium priced ‘collectables’ the ratio of number of bottles released to price is an important factor. Consider the total number produced. A release of up to 600 uniquely presented bottles is scarce; 2,000 bottles and a sensible price is worthwhile. Bowmore’s 40yo release of 300 bottles at £4,000 is wrong (there aren’t that many mugs in the world), however their ‘Black Bowmore’ series of three would have set you back £ 300 and now realises £ 4,000! High quality drinking whiskies are premium to those less appreciated (but often overpriced) drams as many of these will get consumed and taken out of the resale equation.

Whatever your choice, you are guaranteed much pleasure in something that will add decoration and interest to your home, and done sensibly you shouldn’t lose money to boot!

## 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**



## BOTTLING OF THE YEAR

2004

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! Reaction from our customers to this year's winner makes the decision one of the easiest so far—a whisky that is not too challenging but with enough sophistication and complexity to make it everyone's winner.

**Springbank 100° Proof, 10 year old** is a true reflection of the glories we expected from Springbank and of the promises to come as we look forward to the distillery's return to the single malt premiership.

The nose is malty with lemon zest, bottled at high strength but of such maturation that there is only very slight nose prickle; with water there are sweet floral notes. Tasted, the dram is round and zesty with brine, a little sour and herby. More recent bottles have been giving a lavender note.

100° Proof was released less than three months ago but has won universal approval—witness the depleted bottles at the 'Icons of Whisky' dinner!

**Price is £30.90**



## 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.**

## 'IT'S JACK WOT WON IT'

Tom Bruce-Gardyne

The battle of Cardhu at the end of last year will go down in Scotch whisky history as the bloodiest since the days of Ernie Saunders and the Guinness take-overs of the mid-eighties. It broke out over Diageo's decision to turn its top-selling single malt into a vatting of Cardhu and other malts from neighbouring distilleries on Speyside. Having informed the Scotch Whisky Association of its plans in April, the bottling lines were fired up and the first shipments of Cardhu Pure Malt began arriving in Spain. There was then a slow, rumbling build up of indignation among rival distillers, notably William Grant & Sons, as bottles began to appear on the shelves. By September, with no resolution at the Council meeting of the SWA, the Cardhu story was becoming too hot to handle. For a month it simmered behind closed doors and then exploded into the open. During November it generated more column inches and airtime than the rest of the Scotch whisky industry had managed in a year. With Diageo's reputation under attack in the press, threats of litigation and even questions in the House of Commons to Tony Blair, an internal family feud had become a very public spat.

Then almost as quickly as it had erupted peace was declared on December 4th outside the SWA's headquarters in Edinburgh's Atholl Crescent. 'Pure Malt' was to stay, but with a new green label to differentiate it from the old brown label of Cardhu Single Malt. For interested observers like myself it was hardly the climax we'd been promised. It was also obvious who had won. While no one from Diageo's Global Malts team was punching the air and shouting 'Yes!!', at least not in public, there were some pretty grim faces among rival maltistas and dark mutterings of betrayal. Strangely enough Tony Hunt, deputy MD at William Grant & Sons, was refusing to look glum on the steps of the SWA. In fact according to *The Scotsman* he was grinning like a Cheshire cat.

But maybe not so strange, as events were to take 'a sudden and dramatic twist' as they say. Three months after the issue was 'officially' resolved, a brief press release slipped out from Diageo HQ one quiet Tuesday in March. It seemed the world's biggest drinks company had had a sudden change of heart. Cardhu Single Malt was to be reintroduced in its core markets in Continental Europe while its much-maligned protégé, 'Pure Malt', was to be phased out. The reason given by Ian Meakins, Diageo's President of EU markets, went as follows. "Although our revised proposals for packaging were accepted by the Scotch Whisky Association, we commit-

ted to work with them on a review of Scotch whisky definitions. The direction of this definitions work is clear. In future, distillery names should be used only for single malts. We believe that our decision will allow all those involved to focus on the completion of this work." Let's pause and consider a couple of things. First the timing of Diageo's apparent volte-face. The announcement to drop Pure Malt occurred just ten days after the company released its half yearly interim results. These showed turnover up 4% to £5.06 billion and a 6% rise in operating profits to £1.16 billion. With the Cardhu affair seemingly resolved there were no awkward questions from shareholders to Diageo's MD, Paul Walsh. Second the reaction of the media to the March 9th press release. Compared to the storm that blew up in November, the silence was almost deafening. A few articles here and there, a couple of comments and then nothing. However it did give rival distillers the opportunity to welcome the news. "I think it's been an excellent and brave decision, and they've done it in the greater interest of the industry" declared Mike Keiller, chief executive of Morrison Bowmore. While Ronnie Cox of Cutty Sark International, whose great grandfather sold the Cardow distillery to DCL in 1893 said he was "absolutely delighted. Diageo have had the courage to admit defeat." Which begs the question why, having gone through all that pain, did the company choose to surrender now. Was it really just about Scotch whisky definitions?

## *the story had become the story*

Before trying to answer that, let's consider the background for a moment. The story dates back to 1997 when Diageo was formed out of what was Guinness-UDV. The company's single malts were grouped together under one department to be run by Jonathan Driver. Cardhu was always the odd one out and did not sit easily with the Classic Malts. It was sold predominantly in Spain and was considered an 'after-dinner drink' rather than a single malt per se. In its packaging and price it competed head to head with Chivas Regal. Having been sold mainly in Barcelona and Madrid the brand went national under a new distributor who were thrilled to have a deluxe Scotch to add to their Smirnoff, Bailey's and J&B. The portfolio also included Johnnie Walker Black Label, the top-selling deluxe blend that dominates the 12 year-old stakes alongside Chivas

Regal just about everywhere else. For whatever reason, possibly because Black Label had some negative association with the time of Franco, the Spanish distributor was only really interested in Cardhu. With a big advertising blitz, sales took off like a rocket, but Driver insists that no one could have predicted they would grow by nearly 100,000 cases between now and then. He says that "alarm bells really started going two and a half years ago."

If satisfying the Spanish had been the only concern, Cardhu might well have coped as a single malt, but of course Diageo's ambitions went further than that. There was Portugal, Greece and one day the US—a potentially huge market for the brand which currently sells a mere 4,000 cases there. Various options were looked at. To create a new brand and call it say, 'Glen-dhu' was quickly rejected. To dampen sales by raising the price was considered 'commercial suicide'. "If we went down the high price limited supply route," said Driver, "we would be walking away from the malt whisky market in Southern Europe." In his view using scarcity to justify a price hike only works for connoisseur malts like Lagavulin.

But what of that other solution to a supply problem—abandon the 12 year old age statement? This is what Tony Hunt says he would have done; indeed his main brand, Glenfiddich, had to do just that on occasion and suffer the odd snide comment as a result. Yet it seems in this case, the magic figure 12 was too important. There was also the prospect of a big inventory hole in 2007 thanks to nine months' lost production in the mid-90s when a new still-house was built at the distillery. Besides, even if it were unaged, Cardhu would hardly have the stocks to conquer North America on its own.

The solution, as everyone knows, was to create Cardhu Pure Malt—a vatting of Cardhu, Glendullan and various other Speysides. Driver says that five years ago his mission at Diageo was "to go away and get the share [of the malt market] that matches our productive capacity." The trouble was Glenfiddich was two and a half times the size of Diageo's biggest malt distillery. It had tried with Glen Ord, dubbed the 'the Glenfiddich buster', and had failed. But with a vatted malt there would be no restriction on supply. At which point the sales graph of the world's fastest growing brand of malt whisky could continue its cartoon-like trajectory and overtake Glenfiddich within ten years. No wonder William Grant's were worried.

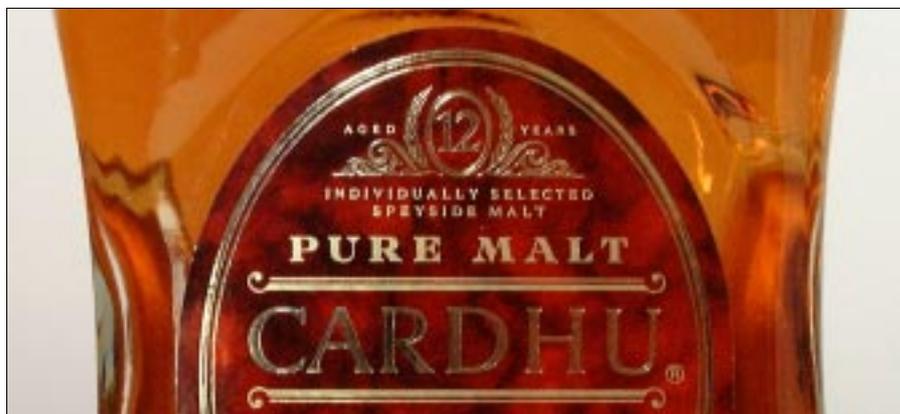
As for the perpetrator, it transpires it was not some suit at Diageo Head Office but the larger than life figure of Turnbull Hutton. "I'll hold my hand up, it was me," said the company's former head of Scotch whisky production. "It

was the logical way to go.” It is a view he still holds, though if Turnbull had had his way the execution might have been rather better. For a start Diageo might have changed the name of the distillery from Cardhu to Cardow a lot earlier than it did. Leaving it so late only fuelled the indignation of its rivals. And choosing a subjective phrase like ‘Pure Malt’ was bound to be provocative, implying it was somehow better than a single malt. On the other hand no one at Diageo feels any need to apologise for the quality of the whisky itself. The vatting preserved the style and flavour of Cardhu Single Malt and may well have improved it. If consumers didn’t like it they would have voted with their feet. It certainly wasn’t a cheaper option, which is usually the motive for someone trying to ‘pass off’ a product as something else—this being the crime of which Diageo were accused. “We were very clear that as long as we were bringing consumers with us in Cardhu Pure Malt we were fulfilling our part of the bargain,” Driver told me in March.

However the company did know that Cardhu Pure Malt was likely to be contentious among some in the industry, even if they badly underestimated the level of concern. What they didn’t anticipate was the very public nature of the row when it blew up particularly in Scotland, and here one can sympathise. This was not a brand destined to be sold in the UK after all, and besides the whole issue seemed far too technical to be of interest to the mainstream media. But Diageo reckoned without the genius of Jack Irvine, William Grant’s secret weapon.

Jack Irvine knows a thing or two about the media having been Rupert Murdoch’s main man in Scotland and editor of the Scottish Sun. Now with his own Glasgow PR company, Media House, the so-called ‘rottweiler of Scottish spin’ was perfectly placed to turn up the heat and get the issue into the open. “I have been retained by William Grant & Sons to help resolve this unfortunate situation,” he wrote to Members of the Scottish Parliament on November 3rd. There followed a blistering attack on Diageo’s “sharp practice against the consumer” ending with a reminder to MSPs that this was “the company which introduced Smirnoff Ice—the only trouble was that it contained no Smirnoff!”

Within days Irvine had it raised in Holyrood, Westminster and the European Parliament at Strasbourg and had mobilised the all-party Scotch Whisky Association. At the same time he was furiously feeding the press. His paymasters at William Grant’s were well-pleased. Deputy MD, Tony Hunt, praised his ability to get “what sounded a very technical, esoteric issue—the difference between vatted and single malt—into



the public arena.” As for the reward, rumoured to be well into six figures, Hunt said, “I think in the end we have a result that will deliver long-term value for the industry. So if William Grant & Sons have had to dip into their sporrans to pay for it, well I think it was money well spent.”

Asked if it were ‘Jack Wot Won It’?, to use a Sun-style headline, Irvine sounded bashful. “I was given a job to do, a pretty tough job. We did it, we got handsomely rewarded for it, we got the result.” He also played down his achievement. “We were pushing at an open door. It was a great story. It was about Scotland’s most famous product and it was about David vs. Goliath. Newspapers love all that.” In other words the story had become the story and it didn’t much matter what Diageo said, they were always going to be the villains. The one thing the PR campaign failed to achieve was any significant coverage in foreign markets. In his letter to MSPs in early November, Irvine wrote of how the issue would soon ‘catch fire’ abroad. This did not happen.

## *revenge...*

William Grant’s hired Media House because the Scotch Whisky Association were unable to resolve the matter behind closed doors. According to Tony Hunt, “The SWA have some difficulty policing Diageo because Diageo are the dominant player and provide reportedly 40% of the funding for the SWA.” Irvine puts it more bluntly, “Grant’s and all the rest of the boys felt that if Diageo didn’t get a short, sharp lesson, Diageo were never going to change their ways, because Diageo has always been a bully.” In the early sixties the Chairman of what was then DCL supposedly threatened to cut off grain supplies to Grant’s when he heard they planned to advertise one of their whiskies on TV.

So was it really media pressure? Jack Irvine clearly thinks so. “They [Diageo] knew there was a lot more to come. They knew we could be very, very bad boys when we wanted to. And we had virtually ‘carte blanche’ to bring these people to their knees, as long as it was all done legally and above board. They knew they

were in for just bucket-loads of this stuff.” For his part Turnbull Hutton finds the whole story ‘bizarre’. “My understanding is that certain members of the board got the wobbles because of the bad publicity.” There has been speculation that Lord Blyth, Diageo’s 63 year-old chairman, was so embarrassed by the whole episode he wanted to draw a veil over it. Meanwhile in the background hung the vague threat of litigation. “We have sued people in the past,” said Tony Hunt darkly. “We have sued Glen Catrine over Grant’s Vodka. But suing a company like Glen Catrine is one thing, suing Diageo would be a nightmare.”

Informed sources say that it was not fear of ending up in the courts that resolved matters, but a secret deal struck between Glen Gordon of William Grant’s and Diageo on or around December 4th. As a family member, Gordon was Group MD until 2000, and then stayed on as a non-executive director. He has now left the company “to pursue other family interests”. The green label was simply a fig leaf designed to give Diageo the chance to leave the scene with its dignity intact. Tony Hunt insists the dispute was never personal. “We were never fighting a blood feud with Diageo”. Whether Jonathan Driver sees it this way is another matter.

We will never know what stories Jack Irvine had up his sleeve nor whether media interest would have endured. Eventually negative comment would have drip-fed into the stock market, but as things stand Alan Gray, whisky analyst at Sutherlands, does not believe Diageo has suffered any lasting harm. The costs would have been nothing compared to the £18 million reputedly spent on withdrawing Captain Morgan rum from the US in late 2002. Meanwhile something big is expected to rise from the ashes of Pure Malt. “I think it’s very safe to say that there is a lot of energy inside Diageo to produce a massively successful malt whisky brand as a consequence of all this,” said Driver in March. “There is considerable corporate energy and personal energy to bring that to fruition in a time period that might be less than 12 months.” With Glenfiddich in its sights, revenge could be sweet indeed.



**LFW.CO.UK**  
**A USER'S MANUAL**



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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.

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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.

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**6 - 9, A PYRRHIC VICTORY**

We make no apologies for the heavy Cardhu/ow coverage in this issue. It is a story that will stay in the history books and within we publish the definitive story and that 'from the horse's mouth'. We couldn't resist this apt picture demonstrating Moray Council's speed at changing that name. They'll just have to change it back.

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.

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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.

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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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