

SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW™



EDITION 28 / Spring 2007

£2.95

TO A WORLD GONE CO₂CK-EYED

It is noted that as well as a small plethora of new tin-pot or boutique distilleries, at least two very (or very, very) significant plants are making their way off the drawing board and on to the construction tendering process. I bet they're going to be absolute crackers! Unlike any other! Modern distilleries for the new age: Adios frilly pagodas.

They'll have super-insulated stills for super-doooper efficiency, gravity-assisted materials movement, X-paste® pump technology, zero heat-waste by titanium-alloy recovery vessels and carbon capture-and-sequestration-without-trial. At the massive Roseisle plant they will distribute some of the carbon dioxide into the adjacent maltings to aid germination (and, as Lady Grist suggests, maybe some big, fat, juicy tomatoes). As Girvan is also by the sea they can both utilise fisco-saline cracking and deep-sea heat-source and photosynthetic algal-bloom techniques to further Krebs-cycle all the CO₂ generated by other group distilleries making the whole industry carbon hungry! Fantastic! What opportunities! What fun the engineers are going to have!

I wish.

While the blenders decide on the style or styles of malts to be produced, the engineers are going to have to address the 'issue' of global warming and the carbon boot-print these monsters will produce, also that of their ancient Doig-esque predecessors. Malt distilleries are by nature environmentally hostile; huge amounts of energy is used and only a small proportion of the product retained, the rest being returned for reprocessing – and again. Giant vats of well-fed yeast fart and belch pure CO₂ onto the ground. The only treatment? Dilution to atmosphere. Action is possible; Grant's have

already absorbed carbon emissions from their Girvan grain plant of 30,000 tonnes per year, a feat that we assume is part of Diageo's £20m grain investment. Maybe it's time to see the return of the 'Distillers CO₂' tankers, but this time collected from malt distilleries and put to good use (mostly Irn Bru and dry ice for TV's *Top of the Pops*). Or just buried.

In the future, after Bush has declared war on global warming, in the grungy-grey-green future of mankind's feeble efforts to postpone his self-destruction, one thing is certain: hysteria and hypocrisy. Individuals are going to 'tut' and condemn everything; recreational air travel or leaving lights on or driving interesting cars or a catalogue of other extravagant passions* while exonerating their own carbon failings as being essential – or by appeasing themselves by the fictitious and utterly crass concept of carbon offsetting – how can you possibly exonerate yourself by paying a corporation to plant a hopeless, non-indigenous eucalyptus seed in the Sahara or even a tree that was going to be planted anyway? This is redemption by PayPal. Or one could join Ton-e Blair's fantastic fantasy-world where air travel is okay "Cos – you know – er, someone will invent a safe aeroplane soon".

No matey, not before the tundra melts.

*Malt whisky is an extravagant passion. The prohibition of alcohol (along with Mr Blair's recreational air travel) is unlikely, no Chancellor can afford to permit the loss of such an earner, nor will a government outlaw the only legitimised solace available to us as the days grow grimmer, wetter and windier.

But there will be a fuss as to how carbon-efficiently your preferred unit of alcohol was produced, in our case a wood-fired poiteen still will fare better than an old, traditional,

clumsy, Scotch malt distillery. Most distillers have made energy improvements over the years but the batch pot-still process remains carbon archaic – that's why we like them, and their product.

So for a while the distillers have been wondering (and now we 'informed' consumers must also consider), how far can we go in making our distilleries green? For example, will we accept the insulation of our stills – so changing the all-important reflux characteristics and the spirit of the new make?

Ugly insulation is already happening in the more discreet distilleries and the quality control boffins watch this carefully, but a brick of expanded foam over an original cast-iron mash tun and the gleaming copper pot stills will not impress distillery visitors, nor will the closure of the few remaining traditional kilns.

Have we considered our new climate on maturation yet? I think we should.

Ah well, we'd better get used to it. Who wants to visit a rain-sodden distillery in a slow, whining, hydrogen-tram with 51 other unwashed, miserable representatives of the new, desperate humanity anyway?

On a brighter note, my next piece will be on alcoholism. ■

SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW

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What a Koch-up

Those of you with an interest beyond whisky (there must be someone out there) may have noticed reports of a scandal involving fake wine which made the broadsheets recently.

A German wine dealer, Herr Rodenstock, is having his collar felt by the FBI for allegedly masterminding a scam which saw a bottle of 1787 Château Lafite, purporting to come from the cellar of Thomas Jefferson, being sold for \$500,000 to William Koch, a Miami-based billionaire.

Koch had no reason to believe there was anything wrong with the bottle (one of a number of Lafites ‘discovered’ by Rodenstock). After all, it had been verified

by the auctioneer, Christies, who had a ‘close’ relationship with the suspect.

The **SWR**’s fraud desk has been aware of this investigation for some while now and has been told that the Jefferson Lafite is liable to be only one of a large number of faked bottles now nestling in the collections of wealthy wine lovers.

We are mildly amused to see that wine fans can be as deluded as whisky collectors but at least Mr Koch reported the main suspect to the authorities, rather than inviting him ben the hoose for a wee dram as one distiller who was caught out in the fakes scandal did when the man in question came to call. We await the launch of a Lafite 1787 Jefferson

‘Inspiration’ soon.

One question is nagging us however. Will anyone ever question the modus operandi of auction houses?

It strikes us that there are precious few checks and balances in operation and should the buyer discover he has been sold a pup then the auction house absolves itself of any responsibility – even if, as has happened on a number of occasions, it has been warned in the first place that the bottle was suspect.

It surprises us that a Scottish auction house where the bulk of the fake whiskies were sold is still maintaining that they were genuine despite concrete proof to the contrary. ■

No such thing as a free launch (part I)

Trying to corral drinks ‘writers’ into one place to tell them about your wonderful brand is becoming increasingly difficult. In addition it’s also virtually impossible to keep any new plan a secret, so hats off to Chivas for managing to do both at the same time by literally keeping a bunch of hacks in the dark at the launch of the new Longmorn 16-year-old.

The event took place at Dans le Noir, a restaurant where you eat in the pitch darkness. Quite how you guide food or

indeed Longmorn 16-year-old to your mouth I know not, but it’s a French thing and therefore a Chivas thing as well.

This novel way of launching a brand – you can’t see the pack, the whisky is being poured in your ear, the person next to you has their hand up your kilt – was too much for one attendee who, after a minute in the murk, had to be led out gibbering and screaming like a small child. (*It was more whimpering than screaming. M.*) Rumours that he bore a marked similarity to the

publisher of the **SWR** are nothing more than wild supposition.

Come to think of it, Chivas has a habit of freaking hacks out. On midsummer last year they threw a midnight “beach party” on Orkney which mutated into a recreation of the Wicker Man. This so disturbed one journalist that soon after he resigned his position as editor of another whisky magazine and retired to a life of peace and quiet in the Norwich area. ■

A great experiment (reversed)

It’s well known that our great leader, Comrade Kim Il Blair, the Victor of Baghdad (may his praises be sung forever), is uniquely responsive to public opinion.

That being so, readers may be interested in the petition at the Government’s E-Petition website that states: “We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to abolish the duty on whisky.”

If you think it will make the slightest difference you can sign on at: <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/Whisky/> ■

Diageo PR triumph

A breathless press release whooshes into our email at **SWR** HQ. “Diageo make £100m investment in Scotland.”

“Interesting”, we think and read on to find a personal invitation to call the Diageo MD Scotland, with details of his direct line. “Unusual”, we think. Naturally we immediately pick up the phone. A recorded message greets us:

“B*** D**** is on annual leave, returning to the office on 26th February. Please leave a message.” 26th February was approximately two weeks after the momentous announcement.

So we left a message. Oh yes, we did. ■

Gratuitous plug

The Classic Expressions project of Neil Wilson and Ian Buxton is close to launch. Avid readers will remember that Classic Expressions aims to reprint facsimiles of lost whisky classics (*that’ll be mouldering old books which no-one read in the first place, Literary Ed*) and make these available in limited editions with a very clever searchable CD-thingy so you can read the whole book on your computer, if you’re sad enough. Mr Buxton now tells us that they have nearly enough orders to press the button on the first two reprints and have active plans for several more titles.

Visit their splendid and well informed website at www.classicexpressions.co.uk for more details. ■

If you have anything for inclusion in these pages, please e-mail news@scotchwhiskyreview.com

NEWS AND REVIEWS

No such thing as a free launch (part II)

The other technique used by distillers is to entice the venal members of the Fifth Estate to the launch with promises of free gifts. Upon departure, guests at the launch party for the new Balblair vintages were presented with a generous 'goodie bag' containing whisky and various Oscar-style gifts.

Chief amongst these was a specially commissioned crystal paperweight commemorating the launch (doubtless selected after many hours of anxious discussion in the Balblair marketing department). So which tired and emotional London-based drinks writer was spotted only hours later trading her memento for cigarettes on the steps of a nearby cocktail bar? ■

Greatest living Scotsman

Billy Connolly has been sharing his opinion of whisky drinkers with Canadian arts website www.canoe.ca. Apparently, you'll be pleased to learn, he can't abide Scotch whisky or the people who drink it.

"There's a snobbishness involved in it," Connolly says of Scotch connoisseurs. "They're like wine snobs. The rarer it is, the more they like it. They say: 'Oh, have you

ever had Old Snackitty Bockitty? Oh, you gotta try it!' They all try to get into the rare ones to look very learned."

"And they all tend to be golfers, and that pisses me off. It's so racist, sexist, it's anti-Semitic; it's everything I dislike. The champion of the world wouldn't be allowed in half the clubs of the world because he's a darker shade than they like."

Billy Connolly is a comedian. ■

Make your mind up time

Like the rest of the industry we are truly enervated by the continuing crusade to match food and whisky. (*Don't you mean excited? Ed.*) No... enervated. Anyway, we can only imagine how exacting it must be to carefully match the nuance of each whisky with the subtleties of each food. We were therefore hugely excited to see that at Whisky Lie (sic)

recently there was a stand offering cheeses which were perfectly matched with specific whiskies. Judging by the crowds this was a huge hit, though at the end of the day we couldn't help but overhearing the bekilted barrow boy manning the booth confess that he had accidentally been serving the wrong pairings for a while... and that no-one had complained. Ahh the exactness of science. ■

Caption comp

Photographed during a recent press trip to Speyside, **SWR** would like to know precisely what young Rob Allanson, the

affable, new Editor of *Whisky Magazine* set his sights on? Entries to the usual address please; news@scotchwhiskyreview.com ■



NEWS AND REVIEWS

Tardis

On a slow news day we decided to have a quick shoofie at the Blackwood's Shetland "Distillery" site (that's www.shetlandwhisky.com) when the following caught our eye:

"Two 12 (70cl) bottle cases (24 bottles) plus your FREE 2% Angels Share of four 5cl miniatures – all bottled at 46% a.b.v. Your first case will be of three-year-old (ready late 2006) and your second case will be of five-year-old (ready late 2008)"

Now, unless Shetland operates outwith the known space-time continuum (*having been in Lerwick I'm not so sure that it doesn't, Ed*) we're wondering how many people have received their bottles of three-year-old whisky from a distillery which has yet to be built. Must be an oversight and I'm sure our friends at Blackwood will take down that page immediately.

Intrigued by this, we decided to see how far advanced the distillery on Unst had progressed, so we had a gander at the Shetland Regional Government site. A planning application has been lodged for the site at Saxa Vord, (it's PL2006/335 if anyone is interested), but it is for warehousing only. No mention of a distillery. The plot thickened.

Then, just as we were going to press came the following news. Apparently Blackwood has now pulled out of Unst and is now heading back to its original proposed site at Catfirth, South Nesting. That's the one which was refused planning permission on a number of grounds though, of course, that wasn't mentioned when the Unst deal fell through...

Instead Blackwood placed the blame for the collapse of the Unst deal on the owner of the former airforce base – Military Asset Management (MAM) which is apparently turning the site into a holiday resort.

The disagreement centres on the work needed on the buildings which Blackwood claimed were to be turned into its distillery (or warehouses). The firm claims that MAM originally offered to lease it a "fully paid for and fitted-out distillery." At the end of 2006 however the offer was allegedly withdrawn and a lease of the empty buildings was offered instead. Blackwood claims it tried to buy these from MAM but then balked at the work needed to make them suitable for use. This added cost on top of the distillery was

cond-sidered "too high."

This surprises the **SWR** somewhat as it suggests that Blackwood wasn't paying for its own distillery to be built, merely leasing back a fully-kitted plant from a third party. Surely all the funding for a distillery has been in place for many years? It couldn't have been invested elsewhere... could it?

Anyhow, MAM claims that Blackwood accepted its proposal in October but then pulled out in March. MAM's boss Frank Strang said: "why they are not going forward is purely up to them. We are disappointed, we felt that we tried everything to get them over the line."

The Blackwood line is that the buildings needed "significant additional work which... amounted to higher than anticipated works and the identification of costly and time-absorbing additional surveys to be completed before planning applications could be submitted." It is estimated that this would an additional year before distilling could commence, claimed Caroline Whitfield,

Blackwood Distillers Chief Executive.

She didn't divulge quite how this time scale would change now the firm is back to Square One at Catfirth. Maybe that strange warp in the space-time continuum is at work again. Equally, the **SWR** is somewhat surprised that Blackwood – after so many years of (presumably) planning its distillery apparently only now realises that it could involve building work... and spending its own money.

"We really did want to make a difference (on Unst)," Ms Whitfield added." However we will be making a difference to Shetland overall... Nothing ventured, nothing gained." Indeed. Nothing has been ventured... and certainly nothing has been gained. The **SWR** wonders what the investors in the Shetland scheme make of this and who Ms Whitfield now expects to build her distillery for her.

The Blackwood Distillers website informs us that Ms Whitfield's favourite colour is teal blue and, interestingly, she hates "cheating, arrogance, shoddiness, excuses." ■

Sour grape finish?

Scanning the Scottish papers the other week we couldn't help but notice a(nother) feature on Bruichladdich and its Port Charlotte distillery. We were surprised however to note that Mark Reynier calls Bruichladdich the only independent distillery on Islay. What about Kilchoman? This oversight must have been down to the journalist in question having his fingers

numbed by the Islay breeze. It couldn't be sour grapes, could it?

Mark couldn't be annoyed that Kilchoman is now the most westerly Scottish distillery and the newest on Islay. Neither was it he who had been heard demanding that the (fast-moving) miniatures of Kilchoman new make are "illegal" and should be taken off the shelves immediately. ■

Hauns aff oor glens

The Cerberus of the whisky industry is at it again. Despite being rebuffed in January this year, the SWA is mounting yet another challenge to the right of Canadian whisky maker, Glenora Distillers, to use the world 'Glen' on one of its products claiming it "unfairly trades on Scotch whisky's international reputation" and infers that the whisky was made in Scotland. (*This will be why its maple leaf bedecked label says Canadian/Canadian*

single malt whisky then, Ed.)

The distiller is somewhat amazed by the continuing challenge to Glen Breton. After all the distillery is in Glenville and is situated close to Glenora Falls. Glencoe and Glendyer are not far away and as one -- not normally enraged -- member of the Scottish whisky community says in an electronic communication: "It's made in f***ing Nova Scotia! SCOTIA!!" The SWA's Glen Barclay was not available for comment. ■

Well, gossip and hearsay mostly . . .

Mrs Hewitt's diary

MONDAY

I'm rather worried about Gavin. Lately he's taken on the appearance of a rather morose Robertson Hare in *All Gas and Gaiters*, sitting in his silk dressing gown, toying with his Rice Crispies at breakfast, and gazing forlornly at the Appointments page in the *Times*. He rarely even has time to play with the cat. I can't even tempt him with a nice Abernethy. It's all to do with that ghastly job he decided to take in Scotland.

TUESDAY

Gavin really no better. And now it's because of those horrible lawyers in Atholl Crescent. First of all they told him he couldn't eat Manx Kippers for breakfast. Then we had to forgo the Pure Honey on our crumpets at tea time. We weren't allowed to serve Spiced Tea at Christmas, and now they've told him he can't listen to Glen Campbell any more. What next?

Gavin is very worried about the nasty Indian gentleman who is apparently trying to buy Scotland in order

to send it all to somewhere called Mumbai – try as I might I can't find this place in Gavin's 1952 World Empire Atlas. But Scotland is such a small and insignificant country, would anyone really notice, I ask him? "Hugh says it could be his pension on the line" he snapped back harshly. Poor Hugh, always worried about his pension . . .

WEDNESDAY

That man called Paul 'phoned again about sorting out the frogs. I thought Gavin was more concerned about moles – at least that what he muttered when he went out to the garden shed again last night – but perhaps we have a plague of frogs to deal with too. It's a real pestilence.

Apparently Paul and the others are all very angry with Gavin for something he did with stamps. They say it's cost them lots and lots of money and now they might stop paying for his nice little office in Edinburgh. I think it's all too cruel. After all, what has the price of stamps got to do with him? Anyone would think Gavin looked as though he ran a Post Office.

THURSDAY

A rather pompous Scotchman called Grant keeps 'phoning when Gavin's in the

shed and says "Do you have any idea who I am?". Silly little man – of course I don't.

Gavin brought home something from the office called Vesta Beef Curry and left it in the pantry. "We'll all be eating this soon if we don't watch out" he grunted as he made for the shed. Silly Gavin. When I looked I could see it was dried cat food, so I carefully made some for their supper. Oh dear – within half an hour they'd made a terrible mess on Gavin's favourite silk dressing-gown. I'll have to pretend it's at the laundry with the linen.

Paul apparently is from the Northern part of England – I think that where Geordies come from. Gavin says he's far too big for his boots, "but as long as he keeps the frogs at bay I suppose I'll have to put up with him". I must say I think he's rather charming on the telephone.

FRIDAY

I'm rather worried about Gavin. He says he'd rather be back in Finland, which is odd because he always hated it when we were there. Now he says he has to play hardball with the Indians – but the last time he played cricket he knocked himself out with his own bat. I do hope he's careful. ■

Lonely hearts

Whisky collector seeks lady for light bottle dusting duties and maybe more. Box 7

Ardbeg fan seeks something very young. Name and address withheld.

Accomplished and vivacious Shetland business lady seeks distillery for adult fun and mutual satisfaction but no long term commitments. I've been looking for so long, please call me now! Box 666

Generous Indian gentleman of independent means seeks impoverished long-term companion for romance and who knows what else. Must be prepared to travel. Box 1844

"I'm Ard', would you like to be my Port Ellen?" Whisky enthusiast seeks lady with strong liver to share long walks on the beach, evenings in by the fire and the occasional bottle or two of cask-strength malt. References essential. Box 57

Deluded idiot, planning to build home on Islay and integrate into local community, seeks lady for same. GSOH essential. Box 13

Whisky writer seeks blonde for patronising and sexist tasting note. Must have big tits. Box 38

Dom publisher, serial divorcee, seeks sub-editor to be my new young plaything. Come and grovel to me if you dare! Box 21%

Bi Russian plutocrat WLTM anyone thinking of selling a distillery for a good shafting. Possibly could exchange for soccer team. Box 433

Singlemalt TV guy seeks Wall Street investor. One, just one... please? Box 625

Lonely distiller with time on his hands urgently seeks malt, no questions asked. Any age, the more the merrier. And I'm prepared to pay as much as you want for it. Box 135

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NEWS AND REVIEWS

Keeping up with the Joneses

Roseisle

In February, Diageo took the industry by surprise when it announced a £100m investment in its Scotch infrastructure. Capacity is to be increased significantly at its Cameronbridge grain plant and a giant new malt distillery is to be built adjacent to its maltings at Roseisle on the Moray coast.

"The future is looking better and better," says Brian Higgs, Diageo's malt distilling director. "This is the first time in a good number of years that we're seeing serious sustainable growth. If we didn't start planning today we're not going to be in the right place in five, 10, 15 years time.

"Everyone is asking if it's the right thing to do, is it too big a commitment? We've looked at the figures, we've looked at growth and this is our answer. It's a positive signal for all of Scotch."

It is only when the size of the Roseisle plant was revealed that the trade could see how serious Diageo expects this 'sustainable growth' to be. Roseisle is to contain 14 stills and will have a capacity of 10 million litres, double the size of Dufftown, currently Diageo's largest plant. In addition, the **SWR** has been told by one senior figure in the firm that this upping of capacity was a 'conservative' move, which 'might well be replicated in the future'.

The trade was surprised by the move mainly because, unlike most of its rivals, Diageo has recently appeared to be reluctant to up production levels. Even last year many of the firm's sites were on short-term working. "It does seem a contradiction," admits Higgs, "but we knew the industry was coming back up. I see this as a vindication of keeping these sites open when we faced a downturn. The easiest thing for us to have done was to mothball distilleries, but we wanted to maintain the diversity of all of our 27 distilleries."

The question as to which style of whisky will be made at Roseisle has not yet been answered, although the **SWR** wonders whether the firm would want to have 10m litres of one style suddenly appearing in its inventory as it could tilt the flavour balance. American coopering industry must be happy as well because Diageo will have worked out

how many new barrels it will need. It will have, won't it?

Responding to mutterings that this will result in Diageo closing smaller sites, Higgs said: "Who are these people? I can assure them categorically that this is not the case." ■

Girvan

Reports are swirling around the trade that Wm Grant is also set to jump on the distillery building bandwagon with a new development at its Girvan grain plant. Depending on who you talk to this is either a new/larger grain facility or a malt plant. The Dufftown firm is, however, keeping remarkably tight-lipped on the issue... as it is about its new Irish whiskey The Knot: "a shot for real drinkers, not for kids" according to its website www.shotoftheknot.com before adding "drink responsibly". Glad there's no confusion there then. ■

Fit's this?

No sooner had these three plans been announced than the **SWR** gets wind of yet another new distillery. The **SWR** is sworn to secrecy as to who is building this (something to do with 'due diligence'... an ironic phrase in the circumstances since most of Roppongi is already in on the news) so all we can divulge is that it will be near Huntly.

In an exclusive interview with **SWR**, one local independent bottler stated: "you must be f***ing mad to want to build a distillery." Any connection between him and the plans are pure conjecture. "I'm not *au fait* with the plans," he continued showing a previously hidden facility with language other than Doric, "but it wouldn't surprise me if construction hadn't started by June with a view to completion in April or May 2008. It could cost £3m and there's no external investment. I would estimate that the size will be 'reasonably large'. We can therefore expect something bigger than Edradour but smaller than Roseisle.

PC corner

Only two days later, Bruichladdich announced that it too was building a new distillery... or at least has applied for planing permission to build its long-mooted 'Port Charlotte' plant which will house the equipment snaffled from the now demolished Inverleven plant in Dumbarton. (My, how Chivas would have liked to have bought Allied before it ripped down a grain distillery complete with its own malt plant). Those interested in the plans can study them in the Spar in Port Charlotte.

Out of interest, the **SWR** was wondering if one of its multitude of readers with a legal bent could answer this question. If 'Port Charlotte' was one of the names used by DCL's now defunct Lonchindaal distillery is it not still, technically, a Diageo trademark?

Answers on a postcard to the usual address please. ■

"I've spoken to the loon behind the scheme," he added, "and I believe that he's decided to do this because he's totally frustrated at trying to buy a distillery." He said there was no truth in the rumours that the mystery man had had an agreement to purchase a plant, but before the deal could be done, the firm selling it was swallowed up by another distiller who then reneged on the deal.

"Right enough, I know that he's called other distillers on numerous times leaving messages – including one where he stated he was willing to pay £20m for one distillery, but the call was never returned. Part of it comes down to the fact that the big guys don't know what they are doing. I got a letter today saying a major distiller is stopping sales of bulk goods and cancelling all contractual arrangements. Because of the success of new markets, coupled with shortages and under-filling, they've come to the decision they won't have enough stock in four or five years time. I'm not surprised that he's decided to build his own." ■

Editor's column by Dave Broom

The news came through when I was in Japan with a bunch of distillers. At first everyone thought there were one or two too many zeros in the press release: £100m? When it was confirmed as being true glasses were raised. The feeling that the good times had returned to Scotch was now underlined in red about, well, 100 million times. Even now, a month after the news, it is still seen as the most positive commitment to the long-term future of the Scotch whisky market and rightly so.

After all, anyone who didn't welcome this investment would be considered a churl, but for argument's sake, it might be worthwhile stepping back and asking a few questions about how it may pan out in the future.

The size of the Roseisle super-distillery is the first thing to try and get to grips with: 10million litres per annum? That's twice as large as Dufftown, Diageo's current largest site. Why would a firm whose Speyside plants were on short-term working less than 12 months ago suddenly make such a dramatic volte face? Why weren't they cautious? Why not increase production across the estate and, if necessary, sub-contract with other non-company plants as in the past? If you assume that production targets are calculated by taking the wildest claims of sales and marketing and then cutting them in half, then how much whisky does Diageo think that they will be selling over the next decade?

The question is answered by looking at where they -- and the rest of the industry -- believes that whisky will be sold. The industry all agrees that this new golden age is heavily reliant on the success of the BRIC economies (otherwise known as Brazil, Russia, India and China, by the way), yet are they the guaranteed successes we are told they will be?

The growth of Scotch in all these countries is predicated on a strong economy and the subsequent growth of an affluent middle class drinking imported (global) brands. At first glance Brazil seems to be in the right place for this to happen, but if anything its economy has stalled. While there is undoubted growth across Latin America it is not an explosion.

India's potential remains bedevilled by the ongoing tax issue and until that is resolved (and no-one knows when that may be) Scotch remains stalled. In addition, although the domestic market for Indian whisky is larger

than Scotch's global sales, is there any evidence that the Indian consumer will switch en masse to blended Scotch? It fits the bill, no doubt about that, but while for me India looks the most likely of the BRICs to fly, it remains a totally new and therefore unproven market.

In Russia, sales are growing across all price levels, there is an emerging middle class but it has to be said there is also a widening gap between rich and poor. Distribution agreements can be 'interesting' shall we say and though this is a large country there's no evidence that whisky is spreading outwith the Moscow/St Petersburg axis.

More worryingly, Russia is in the grip of an increasingly authoritarian and centralist regime. The country controls much of western Europe's gas supplies and is not averse to using grand political gestures to reinforce this point. In its current mood, Russia could easily apply more swingeing controls to imported spirits. Last year the market was plunged into chaos as the Russian government decided to change its tax stamps before it had even printed the new stamps or issued the correct paperwork. This resulted in no spirits being imported for months and for a time no spirits, domestic or imported, on sale. Put simply, Russia is potentially very volatile.

Then there's China. Yes, the Chinese appear to have taken to whisky in a big way, but sales are still only at the two million case mark. A lot, for sure, but that's only 1% of the country's total spirits market and, in case we overlook the fact, Jack Daniel's and Absolut are growing as fast as Scotch.

In other words, while the Chinese are drinking more blended whisky, they are not abandoning their own domestic spirits and are looking across other categories as well. In addition, everyone has decided to let Chivas 12 and Walker Black slug it out before entering the fray.

As it stands therefore, Scotch in China is a 12yo blend drunk by the young educated elite who may turn out to be closer to their cousins in Taiwan and be extremely fickle when it comes to sticking with spirit categories... or brands. In any case, building a market long-term on a 12yo brand rather than a strong standard market is dangerous.



Dave Broom (left) presents fellow drinks writer Chris Orr with his Icons of Buckfast 2007 Award

China is mind-bogglingly huge and the opportunities are, I agree, fantastic but long-term success is by no means guaranteed partly because it is becoming evident that the foundations of the Chinese economic boom are not as strong as many have believed. The economy could -- some say will -- slow.

OK, so these are worst-case scenarios and I am sure that the industry as a whole has long-term plans in place to ensure long-term growth in these emerging markets. This isn't a repetition of the arrogance of the past where distillers believed that all they had to do to grow their brand was to rock up to a market and watch people fall over each other to grab the first bottle.

That said, those of us old enough to remember the 1970s know that whisky goes in cycles and that no boom is everlasting. So what happens to your new 10m lpa plant should the predictions prove to be less rosy than expected? Do you shut it down -- or look at making savings elsewhere? It's hard to believe that such a large distillery would make a single style because the blended mix would be affected by 10m litres of one single flavour suddenly appearing in the inventory. I am not suggesting, as others have done, that Roseisle is part of some devious strategy on Diageo's part to centralise distilling. The £100m is a hugely welcome vote of confidence in Scotch, but should these projections not pan out then I cannot see them not favouring Roseisle over other plants in their estate.

I hope that none of these worst-case scenarios come true, but I can't help wondering if these projections are not over-optimistic. Everyone should hope they are not, otherwise history will be repeating itself once again. ■

Alfred Barnard is unwell

as told to Jon Allen

London: Transport of delights unfulfilled

The same entrepreneur who invited me to something called Whisky Live! held in a tent in Glasgow, pressed an invitation on me for a similar event in the capital of the Kingdom. (How many of these gatherings does he hold?) On accepting, I had thought that I might do as I did last time and check up on the progress of local whisky distilling and hopefully plan a journey to the site (with luck incorporating usage of the fairly new Docklands Light Railway).

Entering the London event I found myself underneath a solid roof near the Palace of Westminster in the Royal Horticultural Halls. I thought that perhaps we were in for a festival of whiskies with solely floral notes. But that transpired not to be the case.

My enquiries amongst a crowd of knowledgeable whisky enthusiasts I met as to the health of the Lea Valley Distillery in Stratford to the east of the City, elicited blank looks. Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the United States of America, Canada, India, Japan and even Norfolk, were all mentioned as places with or about to have whisk(e)y distilleries... but London brought mention only of dry gin.

Suppressing my natural modesty, I pointed out to this group of 'Livers' (which rhymes with drivers, not givers) that the LVD was No. 4 and the last of the English Distilleries in the book that is referred to now simply by my name. It was producing 305,000 gallons of grain and 155,000 gallons of malt whisky. This, if my memory serves me after all this time, would have given it a place in the top 20 distilleries in Scotland back then.

On doing some research later via the wide web of the internet world, I discovered that it had probably closed down not long after I visited. I found this all the more difficult to comprehend because when I visited it, the transport links to the distillery were excellent. From a frankly extravagant choice which also involved omnibuses from the Bank, trains from Fenchurch Street and Liverpool Street stations, I selected the tram-cars from Aldgate. (*Alf, I warned you about this transport anorak stuff last time. No more. Ed.*)

The modern Olympic Games began seven

years after my guide was published. And I see that those scheduled for 2012 have been 'awarded' to London. The Lea Valley Distillery was situated bang in the centre of an area now entitled the 'Olympic Park Zone' wherein the main Olympic Stadium is to be constructed.

What a missed opportunity. The owners could have cranked up the production a few years ago, accepted an enormous compensation package for the land, matured the spirit and bottled it as the Official Olympic Malt Whisky produced where the games are actually taking place. As well as bottling a special, expensively priced collectors' item, 'Olympic Spirit', the organisers might have arranged another called 'Over a Barrel' to placate the council tax payers of Greater London. As it is, the official drinks partner is called Coca-Cola. Presumably this has been preferred for its health-giving properties.

It is another opportunity missed in true British style. My earlier mention of Japan reminds me of some individuals who had a stand at WL in London and were importing single malts from that truly enterprising country. A few representatives of the organisation were Japanese, which you could have told just from their gentlemanly demeanour which set them apart from their occidental colleagues. However, I was 'looked after' by a large, bespectacled, bald man who insisted on wearing a short oriental-style dressing gown and a headband made from what is the modern Japanese flag.

He was particularly keen to show me a malt which had been given a secondary finish in a cask of Japanese Oak. When I expressed astonishment over the high price, he explained that there weren't many trees in Japan.

In response, I told him that I had seen a television programme about bonsai trees, and maybe the distillers should investigate letting

some of the oaks grow larger. He whispered conspiratorially that I wasn't to breathe a word to anybody but they did in fact use oak from Japanese bonsai trees to make their casks.

They are roughly the size of two thimbles joined together and the contact between the wood and the spirit means that maturation is complete in 3.76 seconds. With automated handling, something he assured me that the Japanese nation is famous for, the world domination of the malt whisky market is as good as theirs. I looked him square in the spectacles to see if I could tell if he was telling the truth. Nothing but a cold, hard stare was returned.

Recalling the ghastly experience of the Patent 'Ageing Apparatus' I was let into the secret of at Yoker distillery which I visited too early in my journey of discovery, I resolved to check on the character of my informant before retailing this story. I was told that he was from Poland.

As luck would have it, I had spotted a pony-tailed friend I made at Whisky Live! in Glasgow who sounded Dutch but was, in fact, Polish and made my way through the diverse throng to ask him about the big, bald chap. Greeting me, he kept pronouncing my name 'Ulf', which was overheard by a large group of nearby Livers and embarrassingly I was surrounded and forced to sign copies of a book on whiskies called *The Rare Malts* and never did get to enquire about the bona fides of his fellow countryman.

Perhaps I'll get the chance to ask him at the next Whisky Live! which should be along any moment if they are anything like omnibuses of which none come along for ages and then (*Right, that's enough. Ed.*) ■



Spot the difference

The story so far....

Caleb Bann, our intrepid undercover report, was cast adrift from the luxury yacht *Deadly Ernest* whilst seeking to penetrate the Marvellous Malts Island Cruise. He landed, totally washed up (*no change there, then. Ed.*), on a magical island far to the west of Scotland where he infiltrated the high security screen surrounding a press conference held by the secretive Ladybrook distillery. Now read on....

My media colleagues slowly began a desperate attempt to slit their own wrists as the presentation dragged on through the second volume of planned releases from Ladybrook. One indeed, expired in front of me from sheer boredom.

I had, however, previously engineered a cunning plan. The daily fare of these simple island folk is haggis and by collecting the skins, which I sewed together, I was able to contrive a large bag or balloon. This I arranged over the chimney of the building and, as the proceedings continued, it rapidly inflated using the plentiful supply of hot air from the conference.

To my home made dirigible I had attached a basket formed from a half barrel – this latter one of the balsa wood casks destined to form yet another ace ‘finish’ from the enterprising islanders. I was thus able to slip out unnoticed with the Duke of Johannesburg on one of his frequent cigarette breaks (“essential to refresh the palate, old boy” he assured me) and make my escape from the enchanted island.

I do not know for how many days I drifted in the upper atmosphere. But gradually I became aware of a host of inebriated angels arguing over a can of Special Brew, so I knew I must be in Scotland. As if in some strange dream (or nightmare) a babble of voices drifted up and, from the confusion, I began to discern that I was hovering over Edinburgh – right over the 34th Annual Conference on Viscimetry in fact.

An angry debate was in progress. A Teutonic voice commanded my attention and I hastily scribbled these words:

“MacLean is generally well informed on matters viscimetric, indeed he may be considered to have pioneered its appreciation (at least on these shores) but he appears strangely uninformed on early studies in this field.”

“I refer, of course, to the work of Professor Dr Markus von Straubner (1889 – 1985) of the School of Phrenology at the Leipzig Technical Institute in the days before the late European conflict – a halcyon period for middle-European studies of viscimetry. Though lost for many years behind the Iron Curtain, tantalising extracts from his personal ledgers are now available to bona fide students in the Private Reading Rooms of the Moscow State Archives.”

“These reveal that von Straubner may have linked the mystic spiral at the heart of viscimetry to early Germano-Celtic ritual practices and shamanic observance. If so, it may be that MacLean’s hypothesis that the Romans derived their use of spiral decoration from observation of Celtic Druids can be discarded and an even earlier date for their adoption should be considered plausible”.

The speaker was Professor Nikolai Morgenstern, sometime Reader in Theoretical Structuralism in the Department of Obscurantist Linguistics at the University of Central Arkansas. But what could this strange, impassioned outburst mean? And what was it to do with whisky? Who were these malt maniacs gathered in frantic debate about the number of angels that could dance on the end of a cask?

Such questions whorled around my fevered mind - as cloudy as a glass of cask strength clearic. But emergency measures were called for. My trusty balloon was now leaking and I was losing altitude rapidly.

Fortunately, my crash landing brought into the heart of the famous Edinburgh Whisky Festival, known to its friends as the Invisible Festival. The promoters have employed the highly innovative marketing strategy of telling no-one of the existence of the event

and relying solely on telepathic messages to convey its location.

As I fell to the ground then, I was grateful for the absence of exhibitors, visitors and indeed whisky. An official rushed to my side. But not, as it transpired, to offer aid.

“That’ll be £800,” he stated baldly.

Familiar as I am with Edinburgh’s rapacious traffic wardens this seemed extravagant, even for a blimp.

“What, for landing fees?” I replied in some confusion.

“No,” he said. “Your stand rental.”

“But I am planning to open a distillery,” I replied. “Surely that exempts me from all charges? People give me money.”

His countenance darkened.

“You are the hot air man,” he said. “Come with me. I must take you to my leader...”

The Editor writes: At this point communications with Caleb Bann were interrupted, perhaps lost forever. We presume he has been imprisoned by the whisky festival’s chief troll and dragged to his underground lair.

A ransom note is awaited, though it is unlikely to be paid.

This column may, or may not, be continued in future issues as we await news of Caleb’s fate. ■



Women and whisky



by Kate Ennis

“Women and whisky is a really boring subject, you know,” sighed the male whisky writer. “All been done before.” When I explain it was all the Ed’s idea, he retorts: “What a sexist pig.” Well, Mr. Whisky writer, I beg to differ.

When you say it’s been done before, I think you must be referring to the acknowledgement that some women drink – and even like – whisky. How very gracious of you to accept this and allow us to drink in the Gentleman’s bar. If our hallowed Ed is a sexist pig, at least he is astute enough to realise that the topic is worth revisiting (unless, of course, his cruel intentions are merely ironic and he plans to mock me by covering this page with pink hearts and flowers). As women are being patronised, and even ignored, by male whisky drinkers and distillers, there is still plenty to talk about...

If the subject of women and whisky is so passé then why, even now, have distillers still not got the balls to directly engage with women when advertising their whiskies? Why have they failed to make them appeal to us as well as your typical golf playing, Audi-driving, forty-something, bearded professional bore? Sexism should be actively encouraged if it means discrimination by recognising that women like different things and think in different ways. If there are any whiskies out there aiming specifically at women, they haven’t reached me. Sorry, I forgot... we do have some products for us laydeez – the sickly Strawberry Kiss liqueur and the bright pink Bruichladdich Flirtation. Oh, I see, we’ll like them because they look pretty!!

Sorry, but are we supposed to be happy with that? Pink is an insult because not only is it bloody unimaginative, it’s also screams SHALLOW CHEAP GIMMICK! What makes this more criminal is that there are women on these marketing teams who are letting the side down by coming up with this drivel. I can just imagine the press release: ‘Well girls, now you can have a drink that complements your boudoir; an ideal addition to your dressing table next to life’s other little essentials like lip gloss, blusher and nail

varnish.’ Does this also mean men who drink a pink-hued Rosebank are camp?

The ‘pink lady’ products may work for Lambrini-loving young girls weaning themselves off alcopops but has the industry ever considered the fact that most women don’t need whisky to be sweetened or dumbed down to enjoy it?

As women have long said, when they have needed to assure men in... (ahem) other departments, it’s not what you’ve got but what you do with it... We don’t want new products or overtly girly ones – there’s enough variety among existing whiskies to please us, thank you – we just want

the marketing departments to communicate with us. Women may be less interested in the history or geeky Puritanism that blokes are so obsessed with, so why not play up the lifestyle angle with food or cocktails to make things more accessible?

We are intelligent human beings who have sophisticated palates and enjoy complex taste experiences. How about seeing some whisky advertising reflecting that and strong, female role models – sophisticated women who are confident, individual and unapologetically feminine?

Women’s taste sensations are shaped by different experiences; they can bring a whole new perspective to whisky tasting so might even help men get more out of a tasting – if their egos can handle that, of course.

What? Distillers won’t do this because they are fretting about upsetting their core male drinkers by going girly? Don’t worry! The old guard will pop their clogs soon enough and younger male recruits are far too metro-sexual these days to care. Of course, the whisky makers could focus purely on taste instead. Surely this is a leveller for both sexes without them having to resort to labelling the bottle pink or blue?

The trouble is that the whisky police seem bent on confining women on the flavour front too. Lowlander Glenkinchie is frequently put forward as ‘the ladies malt’ because it’s lighter and softer and therefore apparently more suitable for delicate female beings. Do you think the wine world would ever patronise us with ‘Sorry love, we don’t you think you can handle a bold Australian Shiraz so why don’t you stick to a light, flowery Riesling’? (Er... yes! Ed.)

If we drink Islay malts, we’re not doing it to impress the guys and we definitely don’t want a pat on the head for being brave enough to manage it without crying. It’s because we like the bold flavours, funnily enough. Same goes for cask strength. We know we have water and are not afraid to use it. The real shame is that I’m only speaking for the most individual and confident women here. The current message to the average women is still ‘it’s too strong and you won’t like it’.

The whisky companies are the ones who have created these constraints and stereotypes, the ones who’ve maintained them, therefore it’s in their hands to break them down (again). If all else above fails to convince the distillers that they are missing a trick, I appeal to their wallets. Whisky is a business after all, isn’t it? If I can fritter £500 on a handbag without a second thought, just think of all the disposable income I have to spend on whisky! Who are the ones doing the shopping and actually remembering to buy gifts on special occasions? Clue: they ain’t usually male. Is business so hunky dory that they’d happily do themselves out of potential sales for half the population, damn it? I wish they’d wake up and smell the roses.

Just days after I finish putting rant to paper, the most timely news story appears. Aha! What have we here? The Macallan is launching Amber, a whisky liqueur aimed at ‘upmarket’ laydeez? It looks like a perfume bottle and is flavoured with maple and pecan?! MAPLE AND BLOODY PECAN! Pass the bucket! This certainly hands me a very big piece of wood to stoke my fire of rage. And boy, does it prove I’m right! Give me a brick wall to bang my head against.

For now it’s a trial launch in the US, so the lights are currently on amber for Amber but I sincerely hope that it bombs and the lights for go-ahead turn red or otherwise I will with fury!

What is The Macallan thinking anyway? Not only is only watering down the whisky, but also the brand’s quality values and consumer respect along with it – male or female. To quote a line from *Pretty Woman*: “Big mistake. Big, big mistake.” ■



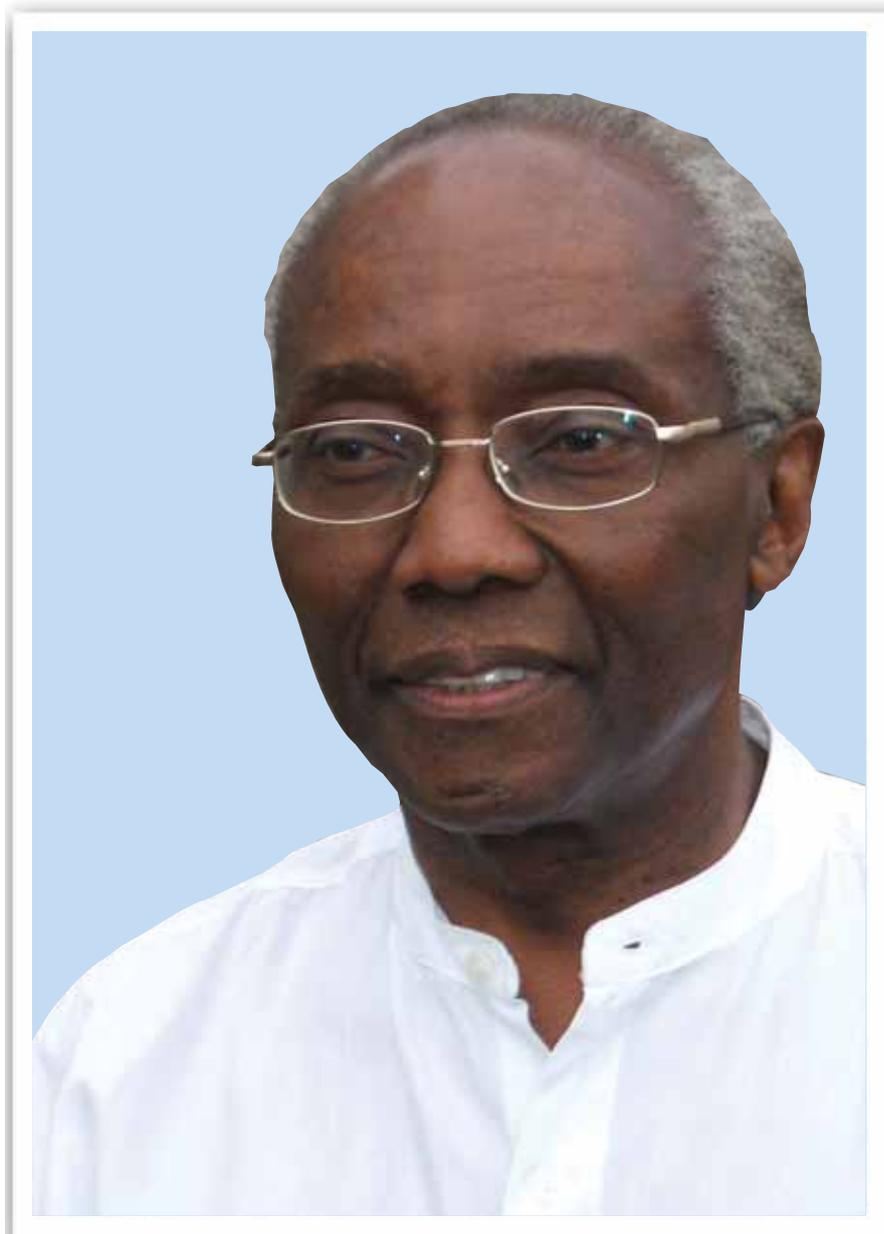
Geoff Palmer is Professor Emeritus at Heriot Watt University in Edinburgh. During four decades of academic achievement he made a major contribution to the development of grain science and forged strong links with the Scotch whisky industry, earning its respect, affection, and an OBE in the process.

SWR: Please tell us something about your background.

I was born in Jamaica, which was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1494, the same year as the first written record of Scotch whisky. Maybe I was destined for the Scotch whisky industry – it was providence! My mother left when I was eight years old to come to Britain and work, and I joined her when I was almost 15. I hadn't had much formal education up till then. My mother had plans for me to work, but thankfully for me I wasn't allowed to as I wasn't 15, so I was sent to the local Secondary Modern School in Highbury, London. I was there for six months and I played cricket during the summer, being picked for the London Schoolboys team. I was the first pupil not from a grammar school to be selected for the team. Then I was head-hunted by the headmaster of Highbury Grammar, who was short of a decent cricketer. I was very good at scripture, because back in Jamaica I'd been to Sunday School three times a day, but I wasn't much use at anything else for a grammar school. This proved a little difficult, but they had to keep me for the cricket team! Eventually I did learn physics and chemistry, and my biology was quite good. I got a few O levels and two A levels.

SWR: So what did you do after you left school?

Queen Elizabeth College at London University was looking for a junior lab technician, and I was interviewed for the job by Professor Garth Chapman. My full name was Godfrey Henry Oliver Palmer, but

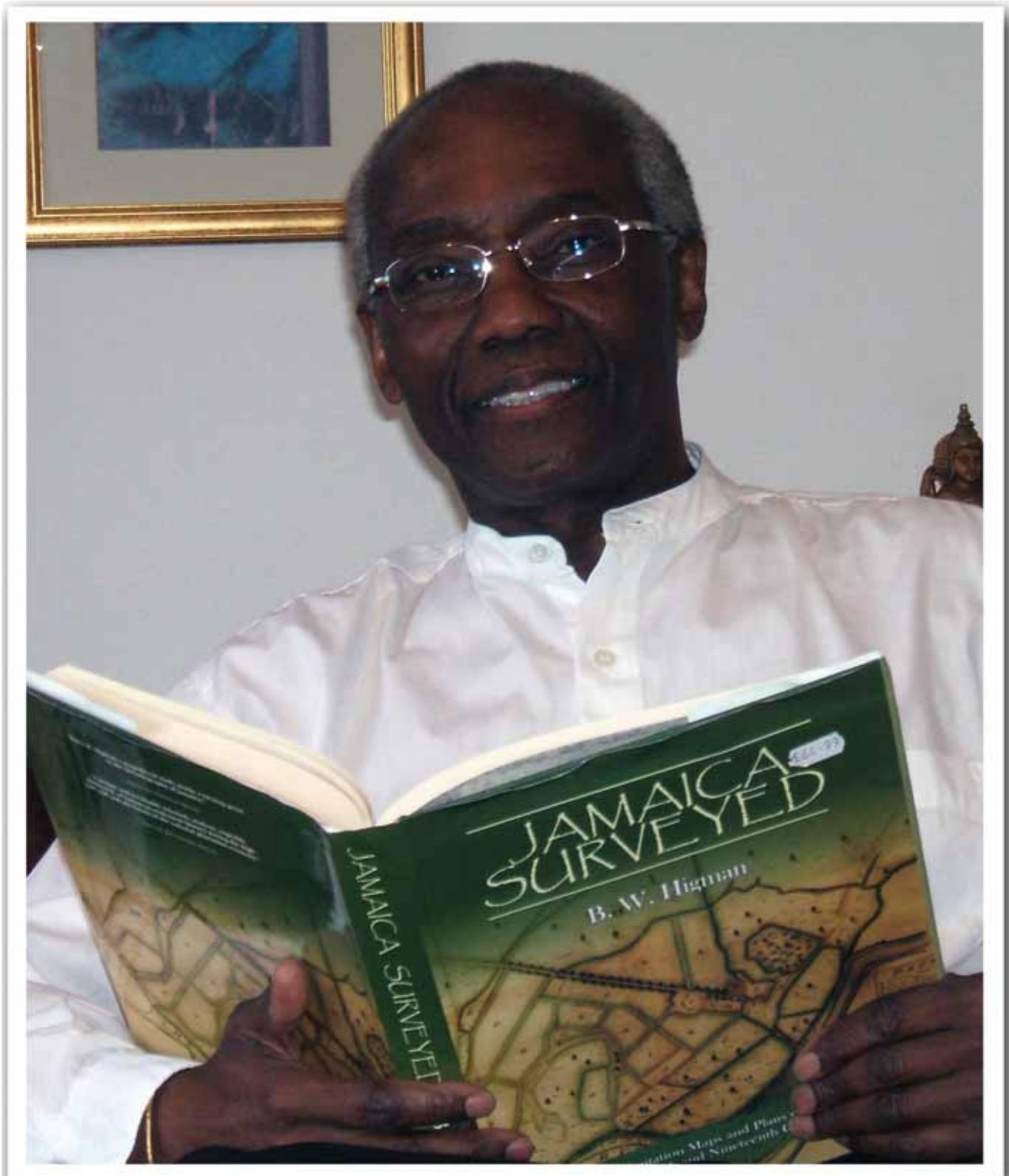


Professor Chapman said "Look, I haven't got a lot of time. Can I call you Geoff? If so, you've got the job." He thought Godfrey was a bit much for a junior lab technician. I said yes, and I've been Geoff ever since. I got two more A levels and some more O levels by studying on days off, until I had the requisite number for university. But universities hadn't taken immigrants before, and they wanted me to register as an overseas student – which, of course, I wasn't. Professor Chapman finally got me into Leicester, where I took Honours in Botany. When I graduated I went back to London, and turned up at the Labour Exchange in Seven Sisters Road. I told them I had a degree in botany, and they gave me the choice of working in a bookmaker's shop

or a restaurant peeling potatoes. I chose that, as I felt potatoes were closer to botany than a bookmaker's!

SWR: But presumably you managed to escape?

Well, I was there for a few months, peeling potatoes and finally being promoted to fish cook. Then I saw an advert for someone to do a PhD on barley at Heriot Watt University in Edinburgh. It was Christmas 1964 and I was interviewed by Professor Anna MacLeod. It was a short interview, but at the end she said she'd take me. She told me there were two reasons for this. "Firstly, while I was talking



you seemed to be looking out of the window, and I hate keen people. Secondly, as far as I can discern, you don't look English!" I think in reality she'd looked at my record during the past few years and thought I deserved a chance. The period while I was at Heriot Watt from 1964 to 1968 really introduced me to the Scotch whisky industry.

SWR: Was a West Indian scientist made welcome by a somewhat conservative whisky establishment?

Anna was a woman who was well regarded by the industry, although it was male dominated, and she dragged this

West Indian around with her. An odd pair. Once it appeared that I was doing work that was for the benefit of the distillers they accepted me, and I never experienced any difficulties. What mattered was what I was doing.

SWR: So just what were you doing?

Golden Promise was the great malting barley of that era, and basically I was trying to define just how barley worked. I took photos to give a visual explanation of how grain worked. Then in 1968 I left Edinburgh and went to the Brewing Research foundation at Nutfield in Surrey. It had close links to the old Distillers Company Ltd. We developed micro-malting trials to predict the performance of various varieties of malting barley in terms of yield and so forth. I developed an abrasion process there which accelerated malting and I also used the electron microscope that had just been introduced to show inside barley and malt to help explain how and why it functioned. Then in 1977 I returned to Heriot Watt as a lecturer and my close working relationships with the whisky industry began in earnest.

SWR: How was that?

I did distilling courses for most of the companies in order to improve knowledge of the processes of whisky making, and I was one of the founders of the Chivas Academy in 1993. We brought in people from marketing and sales all over the world, brought them back to Scotland for a week-long course to teach them about how whisky is made. I'm very proud of the work I did for the Academy. I've been asked back to act as course leader this year for the whisky courses Chivas now runs at The Glenlivet distillery.

SWR: As an expert on grain, tell us why malted barley is so good for making whisky, and what do different barley varieties contribute to the flavour of whisky?

I think it's partly tradition that Scotch whisky is distilled using malted barley. It always has been! And barley is a cereal that grows well in the Scottish climate. It is used for both its flavour and its processing ability. You need a malted cereal, and barley is the most effective of them all. It contains all the enzymes you need, as well as all the nutrition and flavour compounds. No other cereal carries all these. It's a unique raw material, though I'm sure it was stumbled on by accident. As for barley varieties, various distilleries use different varieties and the result isn't actually all that different, provided the barley is always malted properly. Still design and maturation

practices are the two dominant aspects of whisky making. The evidence for significant differences from barley varieties simply is not there.

SWR: What exactly has science contributed to the whisky industry? What was wrong with the old ways of trusting largely to instinct and experience?

Science has been important in telling the industry about the malt quality and spirit yield potential. We were able to help a lot with processing efficiency. What science does is allow you to make more informed and conscious decisions. It can make what you do more cost effective. And there is a myth about 'the good old days.' Nobody ever talks about 'the good old dentists,' for example! Human memory is a very defective instrument. Whisky has never been better than it is today. Control is much better. There's no point in having a brand if you think inconsistency is great. Consistency is now very good.

SWR: So whisky has gained in consistency, but have we inevitably lost character and individuality as a result?

I don't think we've lost a lot of character. By character, do you mean variability? The character is in each individual brand, and you can't have variability in a brand. You don't want one batch of whisky to taste like Highland Park and the next like The Macallan. That's not character – that's just bad distilling!

SWR: So you don't believe whisky has become more homogenised than it used to be?

No, I don't. There are still lots of differences out there between whiskies. The differences are as great as they've ever been, and consistency actually means each brand is always exactly what it says it is. The differences between them are pretty constant, and really clearer than ever.

SWR: What can't science do for the whisky industry? Are there still aspects beyond the scientists' reach?

In terms of flavour, science will probably never wholly explain things. You can have

'fingerprinting' of brands, but when it comes to saying what makes Highland Park taste like Highland Park, or Macallan taste like Macallan, 'the machine' can't do it. The inter-relationship between flavours that people have can't be done by 'the machine.' It can only pick up individual components, it can't inter-relate them as people can.

SWR: What is your view on the snobbery attached to malts compared to blends?

At Heriot Watt my students switched off when I started to talk about blends, but perked up when I talked about malts. To convince them their perception was prejudicial I'd make them do a blind 0 sampling of malts and blends, and they didn't do well at differentiating between them. We should beware the concept of purity. We are led to believe that 'pure wool' is best, for example. But 'purity' in terms of race has got us into a lot of trouble. And around 93 per cent of the market is still for blended whisky, don't forget. A little old lady in Edinburgh once invited me to her house and told me that her late husband had made her drink malt whisky, and actually she preferred blends. She asked if I would swap all his bottles of malt for blends, and I was happy to do that. So don't store up whisky. Drink it before you die, because otherwise your wife will give it to your friends and neighbours when you've gone!

SWR: Which whiskies are your personal favourites?

The whisky I like best is the one I don't have to pay for. Whisky should be drunk in terms of mood. On a cold, rainy day I'd drink a heavier whisky than on a fine summer's day. Any good whisky drinker should have more than one bottle in the cupboard. On some occasions blends are definitely preferable to malts. A piece in the Independent newspaper recently listed 'The Ten Best Whiskies' on the market, and I find that quite annoying. What criteria did they use? I think that damages the industry. It's almost price related. What they were really saying by their selection was that if you buy whisky over £23 it will be good, and anything cheaper is poor. A few years ago I was asked to go to Japan for three months to do work at Kyoto University, in association with Suntory, and the Principal gathered everyone to meet me. In front of the whole university,

all the professors, he asked me one question. "What's the best whisky in the world?" At first I froze, then finally said "Every distiller tries to make the best whisky he can. There are over 100 brands of malts in Scotland at present, so you'll just have to drink them all to discover your favourite."

SWR: What thoughts do you have on how to drink whisky?

A senior whisky company executive was talking at the Whisky Heritage Centre in Edinburgh a while ago to a well-heeled audience. He told them that whisky in Spain is very popular with Coca Cola. Cue lots of uneasy shifting in seats. At the end he was asked how dare his company encourage this? You should only ever add water to whisky. He replied to the effect that if you buy a bottle of our whisky you can drink it any way you like. And it brings in consumers who might not otherwise drink whisky at all. I very much agree with that.

SWR: You retired from Heriot-Watt University in 2005, so what currently occupies your time?

You know, I'm having such a good time, I

can't actually remember when I retired! I'm doing a lot of community work and a little bit for the whisky industry. I'm on the board of Hanover Housing, which provides accommodation for older and disabled people, honorary president of Edinburgh & Lothians Racial Equality Council, and I do work for the Scottish Prison Service. I was asked to give a talk about alcohol at Polmont young Offenders Institute, and the first question I was asked was how to make hooch. I told them that wasn't on the Heriot Watt curriculum. I give quite a few lectures on Scotch whisky and on ethnic foods, and I write, having produced two novelettes in the past. I've also written about the slave trade.

SWR: On the subject of writing, I believe you're an aficionado of Robert Burns?

It's not too widely known, but Robert Burns wanted to go to Jamaica in 1786, he was ready to go when his volume of poems started to sell, so he changed his mind and stayed in Scotland. In fact, he applied to go three times. It was a chance to make his fortune. Burns being the perceptive man he was, maybe knew there was ganja there long before Bob Marley! His poem John Barleycorn has not just a philosophical



aspect, but it's also a very accurate description of whisky-making. To me, whisky is "...a cup o' kindness," as Burns wrote in Auld Lang Syne. My wish for the Scotch whisky industry is summed up in the last verse of John Barleycorn:

"Then let us toast John Barleycorn
Each man a glass in hand;
And may his great posterity
Ne'er fail in old Scotland!"

SWR: Thank you very much. ■

RAY SNYDE Whisky Guru **By Jon Allen**

Ray Snyder has been absent from the stages at the world's great whisky festivals since the publication of his controversial and frankly misleading Bible of Whiskies - the Word of GOD.

But he is attempting to make a comeback...

Hauf-hingit Erchie MacPhunn of Dripp

Charles MacLean

The true story behind the brand

Archiebald MacPhunn of Dripp (sic) lived close to the hamlet of Strachur on the shore of Loch Fyne, Argyll, during the middle years of the 18th Century. His family was one of the most ancient in mid-Argyll – an ancestor had entertained Mary, Queen of Scots, during her progress through the West Highlands in 1563 – but by Archie's day the family had fallen upon hard times. So much so that McPhunn augmented his meagre income by sheep and cattle rustling.

In these rough days, this practice was common, indeed it came close to being a duty, so long as you didn't steal from family or friends.

McPhunn owned a sizeable, flat-bottomed boat, and his tactic was to run ashore under cover of darkness on any of the many sea-lochs which grace this part of the world, drive as many beasts he could down to the shore and aboard his boat, then carry them back to mingle with his own stock at Dripp.

For some years, all went well, then MacPhunn became over-bold. He stole too many sheep from too many neighbours. He sold them too near home, too soon after he had acquired them and without removing distinguishing marks. Worse, it is likely that he killed a man on one of his midnight escapades.

A warrant was issued for his arrest, He was taken to Inveraray, tried and sentenced to be "hanged by the neck until he was dead". The sentence was carried within viewing distance of Loch Fyne Whiskies, on a busy day for the hangman, who had to dispatch a couple of other criminals at the same time. This turned out to be significant...

As well as the staff of LFW, the sad event was watched by Lady MacPhunn of Dripp, who was there to collect the body for burial. Assisted by loyal henchmen, the body, wrapped in a plaid, was laid in the stern of MacPhunn's boat, while the stalwart oarsmen made their slow passage across Loch Fyne to Strachur. To add to the poignancy of the scene, Lady MacPhunn was suckling a



baby as she stared mournfully at the child's late father, and contemplated a life of widowhood...

But lo! What is this? The flicker of an eyelid? Surely just a trick of the light. But now the body seems to give a shudder. A resourceful woman, Lady MacPhunn snatches up the flask of whisky that no Highlander leaves home without and mixes a little with her own breast-milk in the boat's bailer (some say it was a silver cup, but I doubt this). Raising her husband's head she forces a little of the liquid between his lips. Now his eyes open. He mouths the words 'uisge beatha' and drinks deeply.

By the time they reach Strachur, where friends and family are gathered for the funeral feast, Archie MacPhunn is fully revived, and since you cannot be hanged twice for the same crime, he was able to enjoy a ripe old age, known far and wide as 'hauf-hingit Erchie' (i.e. 'half-hanged Archie') and proud to display the rope burns on his neck to interested visitors. He was buried at last in Strachur kirkyard, alongside his loyal wife, under the simple inscription "The Burial Place of the MacPhunn's of Dripp".

The whisky used to revive MacPhunn was not, as you might think, the excellent Loch

Fyne Blend. It was made by MacPhunn himself.

My kinsman, the late Sir Fitzroy Maclean, laird of Strachur and owner of the legendary Creggan's Inn, nearby, registered the brand name in 1987 and offered 'Old MacPhunn' Single Malt to his guests – a mighty, heavily sherried single cask which, I think, came from Blair Athol Distillery.

Now his son and heir, my namesake Charlie Maclean (properly, Sir Charles Maclean of Dunconnel, Bart.) is planning to revive the brand, assisted by myself, and by the well-known whisky fish, Richard Joynson of Loch Fyne Whiskies.

Watch this space.

Charlie and I are often confused. He is also a writer of books – I am registered in the British Library Catalogue with his date of birth. The Russian edition of his classic thriller *The Watcher* has a photo of me on its back cover as 'The Author'. And, to further muddy the waters, he was the founder of The Walrus Club, long before I became known in these pages as 'The Walrus of Whisky'. ■

Letters

Dear Marek,

I'm sorry you chose to leave our recent lunch before we had completed our conversation about your proposal for my involvement in your so-called whisky fair. I was even sorer that you chose to leave before the bill had been paid – you can expect an invoice with my normal 45% mark-up in the post.

To be honest your half-thought out and frankly half-witted proposal for an Ideal Whisky Exhibition is quite possibly the worst idea you have ever shared with me and, believe me, there have been a lot of bad ones. And what, may I ask Maro, is an ideal whisky? A rather nice Tamnavulin 1997 that I tasted recently comes to mind, or was it that Tobermory that I mulled over last week? Well, whatever it might have been, I can't imagine that you or your pen-peddling posse of pay-to-read publicists would have much hope of exercising balanced judgement. And there lies the rub. Not in balance, which is as some have observed my middle name, but in judgement. The exercise of wisdom that can only come with the maturity that I, and no other, can bring to the world of whisky, like a well aged dram of Arran's finest. But no doubt you simply imagined hordes of hirsute housewives queuing to gawp at "whisky's sexiest man", Dave Broom, in an organically friendly show-distillery, nestling with cheap sofas and prematurely geriatric tweed-clad twaddle-mongers from North of the, errr...

Tweed. Live broadcasts from whisky radio stations that are about as captivating as an aural version of the BBC's famous Test Card F. Meet the whisky personality – a very short queue. Tedious tastings from travel-tired tartan-clad tub-thumpers. Cookery exhibitions – "Martine Nouet makes delicious nougat from Bowmore draff and Ardbeg pot ale". Ideal? I think not. What you need, and what the whisky world needs, is a real competition, not a shameful sham of schottische sideshows.

So here is my counter proposal to your Exhibition – the **SWR** Ideals of Whisky Challenge – the quest for the most principled warriors on behalf of truth in the perennially prefabricated world of Scotch. And don't think I'm proposing a competition when you ask people who know little or nothing about the whisky industry to nominate people no-one has ever heard of to be voted for by a rag-bag of superannuated hacks, self-promoting poseurs and mindless marketeers? No – this would be equivalent to a gladiatorial confrontation, where the moral giants of Scotch take the high ground and crush those other insignificant pygmies of potable spirit, like dust on a mill room floor. And nor would the categories you scribbled down do justice to this ultimate conflict. 'Someone who's done something new, but not too new'; 'Some fellow from America'; 'An old bloke who's past his sell by date'; 'A shopkeeper from Scotland'; 'Foreign person'; 'Someone

who frankly no one has ever heard of'; 'Our biggest advertiser' and 'Novelty Irishman'. This, my dear Merlo, will never do.

No Matthew – there is only one contest – one final frontier – and one ultimate winner in the **SWR** Ideals of Whisky Arbiter of Truth Award. And as judge and jury let me make it clear I'll accept no pretenders, tolerate no tearful transcribers of taste, stand no smart-suited snake-oil salesmen, bear no biblical Beelzebubs, and endure no false profits or grinning graven images. And yea, as I am Gog to their Magog, and stand before you humbled and naked but for my crumpled 'lounge' suit, I can declare that only me, the extra-special one, should bear this honoured chalice.

So I'm sorry Macauley but this is one occasion when I'll have to deny you the endorsement, credibility and integrity that only my name would bring to this doomed and ill-fated venture. Unless that is you accept my proposal and of course can meet my normal terms and ensure that advance payment is with my bankers, Baring Brothers of Archiestown, within seven days of receipt of this letter.

Oh yes – and don't forget there's no such thing as a free lunch,

Yours aye,

John Philosophicus-Haydock ■



Scotch Whisky Review is published under licence by Quercus Communications Ltd.

Registered office: 3 The Studio, Netherconesford, King Street, Norwich NR1 1PY. Telephone: 01603 631108.

Scotch Whisky Review is published quarterly; September, December, March and June.

UK subscription rate £10. Overseas rates are available; please visit www.scotchwhiskyreview.com/subscribe for details.

Unfortunately, the views expressed in Scotch Whisky Review are very similar to those of the publisher.