

# Momentous Minutes

Issue 3

August 2002



welcome to \* \*  
*Malt Whisky* \* \*  
\* \* WORLD



Rosie  
Gloucester Road  
Kingston Mill  
Surrey  
June 14th 1920

Dear Sir,

In answer to your letter of May 20th respecting whisky, I should like to have a small octave old Ardbeg at £4/3 per proof gallon sent me 16 under proof strength as soon as possible.

yours faithfully,  
(Mrs) Alice M Disney.

In the last week of May throngs of devoted fans began flocking from far and wide for the third Islay Whisky Festival. By Thursday, the distillery was a-buzz with enthusiasts of every age hoping to come face to face with their heroes – among them the hugely popular 10 year old; the confident yet subtle 17 year old; and the sensational Lord of the Isles. Welcomed with a warming dram (or two), a distillery tour, tastings and story-telling in the snug, we soon had everyone looking animated and lively.

## Are we taking the Mickey?

The world of whisky is so often a surprising one. Who would have thought that, sifting through our

compendious archive, we would stumble across a letter from Disney? Well, alright then, not *the* Disney, but a Mrs Alice M Disney of Kingston Mill in Surrey. Come to think of it, didn't the Disney brothers of Los Angeles first make their name producing short films called the Alice Comedies? Could this somewhat tenuous link run deeper than we first thought? Or is this just the Ardbeg talking?

I digress...

THE  Ardbeg  
Committee



*Veni, vidi, vici: Gaelic for 'you came, you saw, you drank a heck of a lot of whisky.' Meanwhile, we were capturing all the characters...*

## Come to Euro Whisky

For those who didn't make it to Islay this year, fear not! Next on any whisky lover's list of things to do in 2002 must be the International Whisky Fair, held in Frankfurt from 22nd to 24th November. On the 23rd, you'll find us on 21st floor of the Intercontinental Hotel, taking in panoramic views over the city and savouring our favourite tipples together. It's going to be a thoroughly spectacular knees-up with a special surprise for Committee Members who join us. However numbers are restricted, so if you wish to reserve your place, please call (0)1496 300 303 (9am-11am or 3pm-5pm) before 30th September. For more details on the festival as a whole you can visit [www.interwhisky.de](http://www.interwhisky.de).



## IPB in NYC

In April this year, the Islay Pipe Band made their debut in New York, parading down 6th Avenue with 10,000 other pipers and drummers to celebrate National Tartan Day. Surprisingly, IPB was not the only IPB there. Marching with them was the Isle of Islay Pipe Band, Delaware – which turned out to be a single elderly gentleman who had registered himself as a one man pipe band.

## A pantomime horse race. What are the odds on seeing that?

Pretty good actually – if you're on Islay. According to reports, grown men and women have been found galloping round a paddock dressed in pantomime horse suits. It was an impressive event by all accounts, with odds offered and bets placed. Even a group of archaeologists working at Loch Finlaggan joined in at the behest of the convivial Illeachs. Rory Shannon, one of the visitors commented afterwards, "Of course, they may never have extended that invitation had they known we would scoop the grand prize – £20 and a bag of tools."



*the real thing...or are they?*

## Still on the agenda

As many Committee members are aware, there is no rush on Islay. And when it comes to the incorporation of an Ardbeg Committee Room at the distillery, this endearing island quality is very much in evidence. But do rest assured, things are progressing and a final decision on the room's location is imminent. Interestingly though, during the festival a temporary solution came to light. Many Committee members migrated towards the row of barrel seats situated behind the Old Kiln Café in the open air where much swapping of views, imbibing of Ardbeg and loud singing took place... proving that you don't necessarily need a roof to raise one.

IIam...



...II.05am.



## 2I again

The biggest dilemma facing any Committee member is surely whether or not to drink a special bottle of Ardbeg. The problem is twofold. For instance, there are those of you who have already opened, savoured and then finished your bottle of Ardbeg 21 Years Old and are left without. This must be sad. Then, there are those who simply placed their bottle on a shelf to keep and are left to only imagine the delights contained therein. This must be torture.

However, help is at hand in the shape of an amendment to the Rules and Regulations Section 8: rule 21. relating to the

*"restriction of one bottle per member, in an endeavour to be fair to the entire Committee".*

This relaxing of the rule means Committee members are availed of an opportunity to purchase a second bottle of this 'perfect marriage of sweetness and depth'.



Bottles – and there aren't many left – cost £100 plus P&P. Just call the Committee Hotline on +44 (0) 1496 300 303 to place your order. So there you have it. One to keep, one to drink. Problem solved.



*...ve met on camera, among them the Swiss Brotherhood of Malt Whisky Tasters, dressed magnificently in McKinlay tartan and sporting gleaming*

## Getting hammered in the Filling Store



Once again, due to popular demand, one hundred casks were put aside for the Great Festival Cask Filling. Throughout the day we invited visitors to stencil, sign, fill, bung and roll their barrel, which was then taken with great pomp – and much circumstance – to its resting place in one of the warehouses. A certificate was presented to each participant with a record of their individual cask number, should they wish to come back and check on its progress over the next ten years or so.





medallions. Say cheese!

## An artist's impression

As we mentioned earlier, those of you who managed to make it over to Islay for the festival would have seen Ian Gray's beautiful paintings in the Snug. Now living in Germany, Ian has a love of the island of Islay, which clearly shows in his work.

You can see more of his pictures by visiting [www.scotlandart.de](http://www.scotlandart.de)

To win the print shown, just answer the following question and complete the tie breaker (in no more than 15 words.)

Q. What date does the InterWhisky Festival in Frankfurt start?

Ardbeg is the Ultimate Islay Malt for me because...



Send your answer by 30/09/02 in an envelope or on a postcard with your name, address and phone number to: Ardbeg Distillery, Port Ellen, Islay, Argyll PA42 7EA. Or email us at [oldkilm@ardbeg.com](mailto:oldkilm@ardbeg.com), putting 'Competition' in the 'subject' box. Copies of the competition rules are available upon request. Good luck!

## Laying our smalls on the line

While we are happy to report that sales of Ardbeg jumpers are generally up, it appears that the pile of smaller sizes is still not going down. Whether this has anything to do with the curvature of the average Committee Member we wouldn't like to comment, but if those of a more dainty frame would like to come forward and place their orders, please phone the Distillery on +44 (0) 1496 300 303. There's a choice of V or crew neck, in moss or racing green. Medium, large and extra-large jumpers are also available, though in lesser numbers.

## Still standing?

To become Chief Article is a noble ambition for any Committee Member. And while all members undertake sterling work in promoting the delights of Ardbeg to the uninitiated, the bestowing of the title does require a demonstrable effort from someone willing to go just that little bit further. Take Stefan Bugler's sacrifice. He abandoned his scheduled holiday plans so he could travel in a boat with the new still to its destination at Ardbeg. The current Chief Article is Larry Hajek who's mission is "to enlighten the people of Venezuela, the greatest whisky drinking nation on earth, as to the true nectar."

If ever a title was so richly deserved it should go next to the devoted Japanese barman, Tomoaki, who sold all his worldly possessions to come to Islay where he slept beside the old still all through the night.

However, stranger things have happened we're sure, so if you have a tale to tell that had you promoting the interests of Ardbeg over and above the call of duty, we'd love to hear from you. You could even become the next Chief Article.

## Three broken masts and three sheets to the wind...

After our own festival, the start of June saw us at the annual boat racing event in Tarbert Loch Fyne. Around 1500 people sampled Ardbeg in our marquee and it was good to see some familiar faces in the shape of Committee members on their way back from Islay. We were pleased to present bottles of Ardbeg 10 Years Old to the race winners. There were also consolation bottles for three crews with broken masts, which we hope mended their spirits, if not their masts. And as for the culprits who ran away with two of our large banners in the early hours of Sunday morning, we'd like to think that somewhere out there, there is a small boat with Ardbeg sails, making off into the sunset...

## Expressions of delight

*Ardbeg – it tastes as it sounds; raw, sophisticated, literate, true to history and a jewel on the tongue.*

*Hans Sørensen,  
Norway*

*I have written a million words about whisky. But Ardbeg is the first and last of them all....!!*

*Jim Murray*

*Ardbeg 17 is, in my loose opinion, the most flavorful, complex, fascinating and well-balanced whisky on the planet, without doubt.*

*Allyn L. Sweeney, USA  
Membership no. 1997*

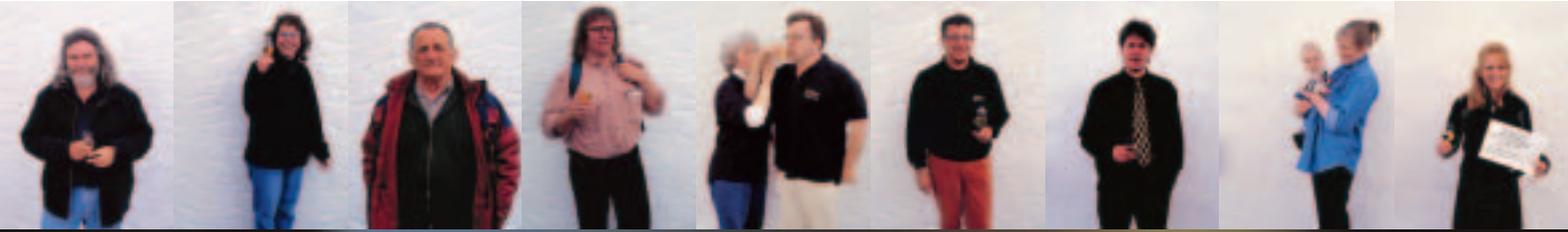
## Ardbeggeddon

Is there a limit to the quantity of single malt one should consume in a single sitting? Until we came across Ardbeggeddon, a gathering of single-minded enthusiasts whose name speaks volumes about the alcohol levels involved, our answer would have been an unequivocal "no." But these self-titled 'single malt whisky cultists' have managed to catapult the activity of drinking Ardbeg into a whole new dimension. Naturally, we're thrilled that our beloved whisky is going down so well in Las Vegas, and we hardly wish to encourage abstinence, but the Chairman would like to put forward the view that all expressions of Ardbeg can be far better enjoyed in moderation.

Then again, they only meet once a year, so who can blame them for celebrating in style?

I verify that the minutes recorded here are correct and complete, and I am pleased to endorse their publication and circulation to Members of the Ardbeg Committee.

Stuart Thomson, Chairman.



# Tales from the snug

With a wave of our magic wand (and quite a bit of hard graft) we transformed an empty store room into a cosy candlelit snug, furnished with a selection of distillery artefacts to peruse and the beautiful and evocative paintings of Ian Gray to purchase. It was the perfect place to dispense drams, meet our visitors, and spin a few yarns...

## Ardbeg's in the genes. 100% proof.

We found Susan rifling through old books, documents and photographs. Such was her thirst for knowledge, which ran a pretty close second to her thirst for Ardbeg, we asked what she was looking for.

She told us that she'd first come over to Islay from her home in Vermont to trace her ancestry. While she was here she took her first sip of Ardbeg and fell in love with it. (She was clearly a woman of taste.) Now it transpires that her great great grandfather was in fact John McMillan, the Distiller here at Ardbeg until 1897. So you see she was always destined to love Ardbeg: it runs in her blood and courses through her veins. Which is wonderful for us, because as a loyal and dutiful Committee Member she'll only buy Ardbeg now, saying "I want to put my money in Islay." Exemplary.

## Every dog has its day

One of the youngest visitors to the distillery was only 6 weeks old but still managed to enjoy a sip of Ardbeg. While visiting Jura, Committee

members Annette Goswell and Pete Sheppard from Devon noticed a sign outside a farm – Good homes wanted for puppies. How could they resist? The next stop on their holiday schedule was Islay and the Ardbeg distillery. Ishabelle, an adorable collie pup, literally lapped up the Ardbeg placed in front of her. "Most people visit the islands and take home whisky," said Annette, "we decided to take home a puppy as well."

## Holey Spirit

The distillery has seen many colourful characters pass through its door over the years, but none so infamous as Jim 'Spike' McGilvray. Jim was an engineer who lived at the distillery in a cottage which used to stand behind the Still House. It was rumoured that he had a secret set of keys and the story about to be divulged certainly supports that.



Dugan in full flow

A sociable and generous man, Jim naturally liked to offer his guests a drink when they dropped by. However, the more unsuspecting visitor may have

got a shock. Guests were simply handed a mug and pointed in the direction of the bathroom. In a move that surely would have severely hampered his daily ablutions, Jim had filled his bath to the brim with new make spirit! So how did Jim's bath come to be full of Ardbeg?

It probably has something to do with a quiet, little-publicised practice, known only to distillery workers. As you'd imagine, there are many metres of pipe running through the Still House carrying the new make spirit to the Filling Store, where it is committed to casks. Now in the old days, each man would find an out-of-view spot along the pipe where he would drill a small hole, then bung it with a spigot. These holes acted as personal taps where their owners could partake of a cup of new make spirit when no one was looking. (Just to test its quality, you understand.)

By our reckoning, Jim must have used a bucket in the middle of the night to convey his illegally gotten gains to his bath. And plenty of trips, at that.

But he can't have been as desperate as the poor chap who once had to lower his shoe into the wash back to quench his thirst – another man with whisky in his sole...

Sadly Jim is no longer with us, nor the practice of 'spiking' the pipe. But his legend lives on. And we're sure he's with us in spirit, if you know what we mean...

[www.ardbeg.com](http://www.ardbeg.com)





## Behind every great whisky there's a great woman....and another....and another....

It's been a rewarding year for Jackie Thomson – and the whole distillery for that matter. Many Committee members who have visited Islay won't be surprised to learn she's been awarded Visitor Centre Manager of the Year by Whisky Magazine. Added to this, the Scottish Tourist Board has awarded the Ardbeg Distillery a 4 star visitor attraction.

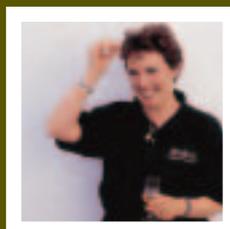
*“What did you think when you arrived and it was all a mess and in disrepair?”*

*“I didn't think. I just got on.”*

Husband and distillery manager Stuart Thomson, has been polishing the metaphorical silverware too – Ardbeg 1977 was one of the highest ever scoring whiskies in the Readers Award, again in Whisky Magazine.

Voted Distillery of the Year in 1998, it was a very different picture when Stuart and Jackie first arrived to take the reins. The distillery had been mothballed since the late 1980s. So what did she think when she arrived to find the place in a state of mess and disrepair? Jackie says, "I didn't think. I just got on." The fact that she was pregnant at the time didn't hinder her either. "It just made me calmer," she says.

Previously visitor centre manager at Glenmorangie Distillery, she had a vision of how the shop and the



café would be, early on. It was important to her that they were tastefully presented, not 'touristy' clichés. You won't find tins of shortbread covered in pipers at Ardbeg and you're more likely to hear Tracey Chapman playing in the café than traditional Scottish Folk music on a loop.

Initially the café was going to serve little more than tea and scones, but demand soon dictated supply and when Mary arrived, the Old Kiln Café was soon well-known on the island for its delicious home cooking and relaxing atmosphere.

Jackie is keen to stress that she couldn't have done it on her own. Paula Lawson and Emma McGeachy have been tour guides since the distillery reopened. Since then, their collective passion for Ardbeg and the distillery has helped to make every tour special. As one visitor put it, "It was a delightful tour with many inspired touches."

Another said, "I enjoyed such a warm welcome. It was a magical day for me."

One journalist wrote, "Jackie has turned around a despondent and depressing pile into a welcoming and comfortable haven. Her enthusiasm for the product and its home is infectious, pulling in even the most hard-bitten and die-hard of Speyside fans to leave them departing singing the virtues of Ardbeg."

Jackie admits that she was heartened to receive the Whisky Magazine award. "It's nice that it's voted by the industry. It vindicates what you're doing."