



# SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW

EDITION 2

AUTUMN 1994

## BIG BROTHERS AND OTHERS

**A cynic reviewing this journal might conclude that Loch Fyne Whiskies is the poodle of United Distillers.**

In the last edition we featured their Master Blender and in this issue we devote two pages to the Chairman responsible for all whisky production in the group. The fact is that United Distillers have devoted a considerable amount of time to our fledgling business without making any demands in return. Surprised by this (it would be easy to throw money at us—time is far more precious) we enquired of one executive, "Why devote so much time to a small outlet?" The reply gives us great heart: "We just thought that if we couldn't look after the small independent we might as well pack up and go home."

Occasionally a customer pronounces: "I don't want any whiskies from Big Distillers plc." Generally they are unaware of the degree of the big players' ownership and ignorant of just how few whiskies they are limiting themselves to. Four companies dominate the industry, producing 80% of all Scotch. They employ thousands of Scots in rural distilleries or inner-city bottling halls, places that need employers desperately. Avoiding their products deprives both these industry employees and also oneself of the many magnificent whiskies they produce.

We are very proud of this edition of SWR and sincerely thank all contributors for lending their name, thoughts and time. All elected to help our business because they recognised our desire to promote Scotch Whisky to a wide audience in a responsible manner reflecting the respect and heritage it has earned.

We hope to see more contribution from other distiller groups in the future, many of which have made little attempt to recognise us yet (they've all had the opportunity), or have only given us an account in the last month after 18 months intense lobbying. Perhaps they are busy packing up and going home.



**£2.00 OFF!**  
your next purchase of  
*cask strength* whisky

## CHRISTMAS LAUNCH FOR LONG-TERM OFFER

This edition of SWR announces a long-term offer and gives you the opportunity to start sampling our huge cask strength selection, now with £2.00 off.

For the foreseeable future, all our independent cask strength bottlings will include a voucher worth £2.00 off a future purchase of a similar bottling.

As a bonus to launch this offer, if you place an order for a cask strength bottle before December 10th you can deduct £2.00 from the list price with our compliments—and get your voucher as well! Offer applies to *Cask*, *C*, *JM* or *S* labels of over 46%Alc. Does not apply to *MH* bottlings or those 46% and under.



## DIFINITIVE BOOK OFFER

If we ever produced a full, all-singing all-dancing catalogue of our whiskies it would look like *Michael Jackson's Malt Whisky Companion*, now available in a third fully revised and expanded edition, price £12.99.

Order the *Companion* from us before December 10th for only £11.99 post free. If we can despatch it with two or more bottles then the price is just ten quid! Nae-bad! Eh?

*Michael Jackson writes for SWR, page 6.*

## TOP OF THE TOTS

Autumn 1994 price

1	Oban 14yo .....	£23.70
2	Glen Moray 15yo Presentation Tin .....	£22.20
3	Glen Moray 12yo* .....	£20.60
4	Inchmurrin 10yo* .....	£18.90
5	Cragganmore 12yo .....	£22.20
6	Port Ellen CC 1977 .....	£25.50
7	Lagavulin .....	£24.60
8	Springbank 15yo* .....	£26.90
9	Talisker 10yo .....	£23.90
10	Highland Park 12yo .....	£21.30

\* Features on the original tasting tray.

Analysis of this summer's Tasting Room league table produced some surprises. Oban rose from ten to the number one slot. Co-incidence that this is Mark's preferred dram? The new reduced price and great packaging of the Glen Moray 15yo has proved very successful—in with a bullet, as they say.

## EARLY CHRISTMAS SET TO SHOCK THOUSANDS!

Our customers are reminded that this year Christmas falls earlier than many would want—on December 25th!

Orders received on or before December 10th will be guaranteed. We will do our very best up to December 17th, which is also our deadline for guaranteed hogmanay orders.

We wish all of our customers a very happy Christmas and as good a New Year as the one we hope for.

## INSIDE

### Mr Whisky

The top man in whisky production talks to us ..... Page 2

### Labels

An explanation of your bottle ..... 4

Casks, vating and filtering ..... 5

### Michael Jackson

Pros and cons of a score system ..... 6

### WhiskEy anyone?

Gavin Smith globe tots ..... 6

### ¡Buenos Dias! Ted Thompson

Our new-age whisky baron ..... 7

Tasters & Snippets ..... 7, 8

# Mr. WHISKY



**Dr. Alan Rutherford is Head of the production subsidiary of United Distillers, the worlds biggest spirit and Scotch Whisky producer. After a life time in the industry he is now Chairman and Managing Director of United Malt and Grain Distillers Ltd and one of the most influential men in the world of Scotch Whisky.**

Loch Fyne Whiskies met with Dr. Rutherford in his office in Edinburgh just after his company had announced the sale of Bladnoch distillery for purposes other than distilling.

## **LFW: What is your job?**

I run the process of Scotch Whisky production for United Distillers—everything from cereals procurement to the warehousing of new make whisky for maturation.

I'm responsible for 5 maltings, 27 active malt distilleries and 2 grain distilleries.

I set the strategy for those parts of the business involved in producing the volume and quality necessary for future requirements and ensuring stocks are available for the demand for various ages—5, 8, 12 years or more.

I work very closely with our commercial department who trade with the industry, exchanging whisky for blenders and buying and selling whisky and casks.

I see that we have well maintained distilleries and am responsible for environmental and health and safety issues.

I am also Chairman of the Malt Distillers Association of Scotland (a management association representing all the distilleries in Scotland and considering practical and technical aspects of whisky distillation).

## **LFW: Who makes the decisions, you as the producer or the Marketing department?**

We do. We always ask the Marketing people for their forecasts of demand for the future and over the years we have learned to interpret these “forecasts” which will often be over-optimistic and require tempering. This tem-

pering is very important. Even as recently as the late '70s an over estimating of whisky future sales caused the so-called “Whisky Loch” and the subsequent down turn in production that we see now.

Up to that time we had experienced a growth for twenty years of 6% each year which encouraged the production of an awfully large amount of whisky—particularly when an allowance for evaporation of 2% per year is added in. Nowadays the industry is geared to avoiding such errors, there are fewer key players, information on stocks and production levels is shared through the Scotch Whisky Association and producers are much more in control.

The Whisky Loch is historically interesting, but it will not happen again. We'll never get it right—you can't forecast twelve years ahead—and we'll always get a surplus but we have ways of dealing with that, such as tweaking our blends.

The marketers create well thought through and developed marketing concepts for the whiskies. For the malts there are The Classic Six—the regional malts, Cardhu—the after dinner malt, Royal Lochnagar—the exclusive ‘Royal’ malt, Glen Ord—our mainstream malt for Europe and finally Royal Brackla—our price-positioned fighting brand.

We came late into malts. The Distillers Company as was thought that malts would detract from the image of the blends and that people would become confused in their minds that blends are inferior, which of course they are not, they are a different sector. Now we've got going with malts we're extremely pleased, particularly with the Classic Six and Cardhu.

## **LFW: Do you ever fear running out of a whisky?**

If I had taken the growth of Lagavulin sales in the early nineties and extrapolated that for sixteen years, (the age at which it is bottled,) in order to achieve the “forecasted” capacity I should be doubling the distillery immediately, now, and planning to quadruple it in the future. What I think will happen is that Lagavulin sales will grow less bullishly as time goes on as it starts to fill the market. Of the Classic Six, Lagavulin is the greatest seller,—50,000 cases in 1993.

Malt whisky is only 4% of the total whisky market and almost all distilleries in Scotland are for blending; single malt sales are the icing on the cake. For instance Cardhu, which is number six in volume sales worldwide sells 100,000 cases a year. A small distillery, like Lagavulin, is capable of producing five times that amount.

## **LFW: Of the Classic Six, why was Glenkinchie chosen? It's hardly a typical Lowland malt.**

Glenkinchie has a bit of body to it and is more robust than a typical Lowland malt—in fact some consider the Highland Dalwhinnie to be a lighter malt than our Lowland! The contenders for the Lowland malt were Rosebank and Glenkinchie; Bladnoch was not a contender at that time for a number of reasons. In quality terms Rosebank and Glenkinchie were very close and there was no easy decision. Our marketing people favoured

Glenkinchie as it has a more Scottish name and the location in a very nice part of rolling East Lothian countryside is far more attractive than a busy junction in Falkirk! Those two reasons alone swung it. I'm not saying Glenkinchie was inferior to Rosebank—both had their defenders—but a decision had to be made and in this case marketing factors won the day.

## **LFW: Have you considered changing the rate of peating to create a different style?**

A Lowland distillery is capable of producing a heavy, peaty whisky just as Jura can produce a light whisky. We once made some unpeated Caol Ila, owing to a surplus of peated whisky at that time and to keep the distillery open. Very nice whisky it was too! Heritage and continuity of peating is important and there is no reason to change.

## **LFW: Couldn't you keep more distilleries open?**

Ideally we would keep them all going and just wind them down a bit, which is what we do most of the time.

In Scotland there have been 750 distilleries since Ferrintosh was burned down in 1689 (that's legitimate distilleries!). At the present there are 95 malt and 7 grain distilleries. In 1886 there were 150 distilleries who collectively produced just over 3 million cases that year—a figure now possible in *two months* at Cameronbridge. In those days they were tiny distilleries, with additional limitations. Customs & Excise would only allow either mashing or distillation under the supervision of the officer, never both at the same time.

It's not big business that is closing distilleries, it's an industrial Darwinism.

We recently closed four distilleries after we looked at the output that we needed in the years ahead and we realised we had excessive capacity. We looked at our portfolio and divided them into groups. The ten whiskies with investment in the brands as single malts (including the Classic Six) were safe. The second group are the modern or recently refurbished distilleries; these are efficient, cost-effective ones such as Glendullan, Caol Ila, Mannochnore or Clynelish, all re-built in the last thirty years. Next are the distilleries that are desirable because of the quality and high demand of the product such as Mortlach or Benrinnes—whiskies demanded by blenders throughout the industry and important to our own blends. What remains are the distilleries that we can do without—either a distillery that requires a lot of capital spend on it, or one that no longer fits the blender's requirements.

Since our change of ownership in 1986 we have re-opened Teaninich and Royal Brackla; we have sold to Allied Distillers who have re-opened Glentauchers and Imperial and we have sold (to Inver House Distillers) Speyburn and Knockdhu, which has also been re-opened. So in that time we have facilitated the re-opening of more distilleries than we have closed!

Of the distilleries we have closed, Bladnoch, Rosebank and Balmenach are unlikely to operate again. I have hopes for Balmenach but

sadly not for the other two. Pittyvaich will be distilling this year on an experimental basis to evaluate different types of barley and distilling techniques under our research department with Dufftown-Glenlivet employees working there. Of the long closed, Glenury, North Port, Banff and Coleburn are shells or dismantled and will never work again. Brora at Clynelish and Port Ellen are intact but will not be required—unless the business really took off and justified re-building. However in that event I think we would enlarge what we've got.

**LFW: What is the biggest influence on taste in a malt?**

Peat; not in the supply water, but in the kiln for malting you should consider the degree of peating versus non-peating. Fermentation is quite important; the type of yeast, the length of fermentation and the gravity at which you ferment. Very important is the still house; the size and shape of stills and how fast you run them. A short squat still, driven hard with a lot of heat will send a lot of heavies over. Alternatively with a long tall still, driven gently, only the lights will get over the top and you'll have a lot more reflux. Cut point is very important; where a still man chooses where to come on to spirit and go off spirit to feints, how much you re-cycle and how much you collect. The last big influence is the cask type; sherry cask, new cask, re-fill or bourbon, and of course the years spent in the cask. More subtle influences are water supply (in fact a very small influence) and location of maturation. A Macallan matured on Islay would not be significantly different from the norm, nor a Lagavulin matured on the mainland. Altitude and humidity and the relative position of a cask within a warehouse do have some influence. At the top of a modern warehouse summer/winter temperatures will cycle more than at the bottom of an earth floor warehouse. A half empty warehouse will vary more than a full one because of thermal inertia in a full warehouse—it's best to keep them filled.

This is the beauty of Scotch Whisky; 100 distilleries, a host of ways of running those distilleries, half a dozen types of cask and then a whole range of ages from 3 to 33 years—the number of variations available is almost infinite.

**LFW: Could a Still Man be replaced?**

Yes, the technology is there, but we must consider if it is financially worthwhile or if it is something we want to do. I'm told you can do without the pilot of an aeroplane but no airline will consider it because of passenger expectations!

Malt whisky is about heritage and craft. There is automation in many malt distilleries but we're in the hand crafting business and we believe that the mash-man and the still-man have a role to play and are very important.

**LFW: What about diluting water?**

Dilution at the distillery is done with natural, untreated water off the hill. At the bottling hall de-mineralised mains water is used which has no character at all. We have a few minor blends that are shipped overseas at

high strength and bottled outside Scotland but we have enough science to ensure the water is de-mineralised to our specification so that the result in Australia is the same as in Scotland. Where the whisky is diluted to 40% is irrelevant. In fact almost all of our brands are bottled in Scotland.

At the time of bottling, all our whiskies are filtered at a temperature of plus 4°C. Our research shows that this removes the bulk of the undesirable, cloud producing oils without discernibly removing flavour for the experienced whisky drinker. Some of our competitors' brands are filtered at considerably lower temperatures removing many more flavour elements. Some of the pale blends from other companies are filtered at minus 10°!

*“It's arrogant for people to say that the way they like their whisky is correct”*

**LFW: It must be difficult producing a consistent product.**

There are seven hundred components in Scotch whisky. Some have a low flavour threshold but the interplay amongst those that have flavour is tremendous. Producing a consistent single malt is very difficult.

We can achieve consistency by vatting about 100 casks prior to bottling. These will all be pre-selected; those that are not selected go for blending. We also have a cask type mix recipe, specifying the proportion of various types of cask. Throughout the company we have about 10% sherry casks but the usage varies from brand to brand. We don't bottle a 100% sherrywood whisky as we feel that the sherry masks the flavour of the whisky itself. When we select a style, Lagavulin or Dalwhinnie for example, we will also select a cask recipe. Having played with it we will decide that, say, one in five casks should be sherry wood—20% is quite high for us. We will also specify refill and Bourbon casks.

Individual cask strength whiskies will never give consistency, they are fine and different but not necessarily the best. I'm worried that there are those who consider single cask whiskies to be better. It's arrogant for people to say that the way they like their whisky is correct and the way you like yours is not; it's a matter of personal taste just as is how you drink it. Single cask whiskies are bound to be a niche in the market compared to mainstream products.

We're trying to produce a malt that tells you about a distillery and reflects the character

of that distillery, and keep it consistent from year to year. That involves everything, from the buying of barley, the mix of casks, to the age of maturation.

**LFW: What is the thinking behind Royal Brackla, no age statement and selling at about £15?**

Brackla is at least a ten year old and will remain so. We have a gap in Brackla production as the distillery was closed between 1983 and 1991 so the whisky being bottled now has to be at least twelve years old. We were worried because supermarkets and the like were bringing out their own label malts with awful descriptions like 'Speyside' or 'Islay single malt' and whilst we haven't dropped to the sort of prices that they have, we decided to put in a fighting brand with very little marketing behind it. We deliberately gave it no age to give us the flexibility to choose whatever casks we need, bearing in mind we've got this eight year gap to jump in the near future.

We've shown quite categorically that what determines maturity in taste and smell terms is average age. Legally, the stated age is that of the youngest whisky, and quite rightly so, but you can mix older and younger. For instance a malt of all ten year old whisky will taste similar, in terms of maturity, to a mix of eight and twelve year olds. Immaturity can be counteracted with maturity—within limits!

**LFW: Loch Fyne Whiskies stock The Distillery Malts, those of your other distilleries apart from the core ten.**

The distillery malts do not interest our marketers at present; they did consider them to be a possible distraction from their strategy for the core brands. Employees at all the other distilleries said to me “We'd like to drink our own whisky—if I work in Glenlossie I want to give my neighbours and family a bottle of Glenlossie for Christmas.” Having worked in distilleries, I totally agreed with them. I gave the go ahead for every distillery to bottle its own, primarily for employees and visitors and only to be sold at the distillery, but of course it generated interest, as you might imagine. This was not supposed to be a commercial plan at all. Gordon & MacPhail wanted to distribute them so we got talking and now they are available through specialists like yourselves but without any marketing or promotion. In fact bottling runs of these malts are very small and you will see some variation there. We're not talking about a vatting of 100 casks—it's just two or three at a time, so there will be some variation in character.

**LFW: Is Scotch Whisky production safe in the ownership of Guinness?**

Certainly. I can't really speak for future generations but all the people involved at the moment, from the Chairman down, are all very devoted to the industry. Being the biggest in the industry and the market leader in so many countries, we've really got to take that very seriously.

**LFW: Thank you for talking with us—I'm sorry we've gone over time.**

Not at all, I could talk about whisky for weeks!

## LABELS DEMYSTIFIED

Our stock policy regarding single malts is to carry a representative of every distillery available and, where possible, a range of independent options from that distillery. At the time of writing we hold in excess of 450 different bottlings in stock.

Our Stock List describes the different bottlings that we hold. These are described (where available) by vintage (the year of distillation)/age, alcoholic strength and, in the first column — **LABEL**, for which there is a brief key at the top of the list. This description gives the buyer an insight to the presentation of each bottle.

What do these label definitions mean?

### OFFICIAL BOTTLINGS

**MH=Market House (distillery owner's bottling)**

Market House bottlings are those that you may see in an off-licence, bar or supermarket. The lavish presentations and marketing are examples of the best in packaging and promotion. You are assured a quality whisky that will be the same as the last time you bought it, in-so-much-as the producer will be trying to achieve consistency by selecting and mixing (in a vat, *vatting*) a large number of barrels so that a homogenisation is achieved. MH bottlings are usually at about the legal minimum of 40% and the whisky will have been treated to achieve consistency of colour and quality.

We stock all the principal Market House bottlings; some age variations are not in stock due to space constraints but are quickly available on demand.

Apart from Market House bottlings we attempt to offer at least one alternative which will be, by definition, from an independent bottler.

We favour those of the long established Gordon & MacPhail, Wm. Cadenhead and of the recently formed Signatory Vintage Scotch Whisky.

**G&M=Gordon & MacPhail on behalf of the owner**

Although G&M labelled whisky is bottled by an independent bottler, it is sanctioned by the distillery owner. A long established agreement remains between Gordon & MacPhail and some distillery owners to mature, bottle and sell single malt whiskies at differing ages. The presentation of these bottlings, whilst not as lavish as the

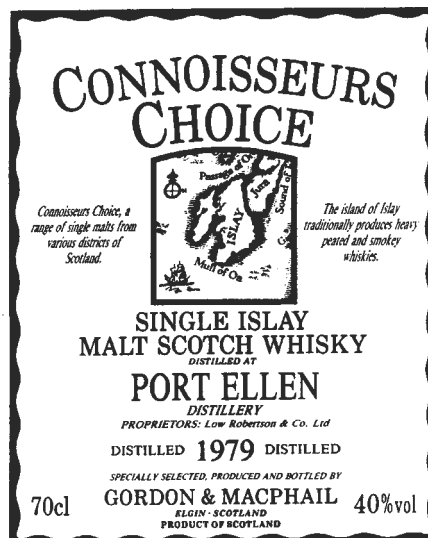


Market House bottlings, do show some imagination and design flair, each label having its own distinctive design e.g. Scapa. All these bottles are of a round traditional spirit shape, have screw caps and come in a uniform G&M cardboard presentation box with perspex window revealing the label. Recent bottlings have seen embellishment of foil caps and ribbons.

The style of age descriptions differs; occasionally the age is specified but often only the year of distillation is proclaimed, leaving the customer wondering when the whisky was bottled. All these bottlings are at 40% alcohol; a degree of consistency is assured by vatting about ten casks for each bottling run. This compares with a major brand which will vat as many as 100 casks. Colour correction is employed.

### INDEPENDENT BOTTLINGS

Whisky is produced by distilleries and is usually immediately for sale to anyone with the money and inclination, just as apples, coffee or steel. You or I could buy some bulk whisky.



### The Independent Bottlers

#### Gordon & MacPhail, Elgin

G&M will be celebrating its 100th Anniversary next year and are one of only two surviving long-established independent merchants and bottlers, (the other being Wm. Cadenhead). In days gone by, most single malt whiskies were sold and (hardly) marketed by independent merchants. Producers concentrated on the demand for blended whiskies.

Gordon & MacPhail are exceptional within the independent sector because of their long-term filling and laying down of whiskies for future presentation and this policy must be applauded. Casks are bought at time of distillation and matured either at the distillery or at G&M's warehouse complex at Elgin under their supervision. Each year they reconsider their 50 year stocking plan. They bottle at the optimum age and

present to the consumers the largest and most diverse range of whiskies from any organisation. Gordon & MacPhail are warehousemen and marketeers. Two years ago they bought the shell and licence of Benromach distillery; in time they will be distillers.

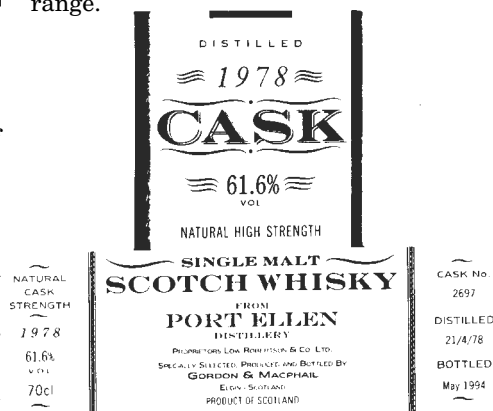
All Gordon & MacPhail product is colour corrected and chill filtered to a temperature that they decline to reveal.

**CC=Connoisseurs Choice (Gordon & MacPhail)**

The Connoisseurs Choice range of whiskies is one of Scotland's best kept secrets. Within this excellent range are some of the last remaining product of many long gone distilleries and lesser known malts. The range also provides an opportunity to try some favourites at increased ages. A uniform label is employed and occasionally retailers are dismayed by the request for "A bottle of Connoisseurs Choice Whisky, please."

All CC bottlings are coloured, chill filtered, at 40% alcohol and presented in a round traditional spirit bottle with a cream and orange label. A small map showing the contents' region of origin adds to the confusion. Screw caps, G&M window carton, no fuss. Great mind and body, shame about the clothes.

The range totals some 60 different distilleries, from a 9yo Bladnoch to a 30yo Ardbeg. In response to criticism of the glaring omission of an age statement on these whiskies, G&M have recently started adding a small sticker to the shoulder of the bottle stating that the whisky was "Bottled 1993" for example. Unfortunately this simple solution was too simple to be perfect—the sticker is concealed when the bottle is in its box! The Connoisseurs Choice label is undergoing a re-think at present. Hopefully the vintage and the age will be given equal prominence, as will the distillery source rather than the name of the range.



**Cask=Gordon & MacPhail's undiluted series**

G&M are introducing cask strength bottlings to replace what was their 100% (57%) range. Careful study of the label is required to determine if this is a single cask of a vatting of two or three. These whiskies are chill filtered but G&M declined to tell us at what

temperature. An attractive and informative label reveals much, even the age, to anyone with a magnifying glass and calculator; straight round bottle, screw cap, G&M box.

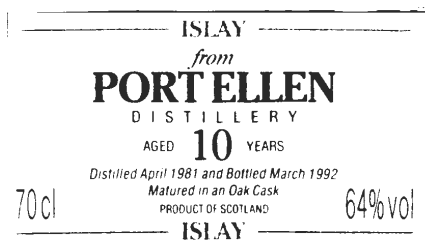
### Wm. Cadenhead, Campbeltown

C=Cadenhead

Cadenhead's were established in Aberdeen over 150 years ago and 35 years ago were acquired by J & A Mitchell, owners of Springbank Distillery. The Authentic Collection features the most comprehensive range of distilleries available as single cask whiskies. No chill filtering, no colorant—straight from one selected cask. Maturation is completed at the distillery; bottling at Campbeltown, Argyll.

# CADENHEAD'S

Authentic  
Collection



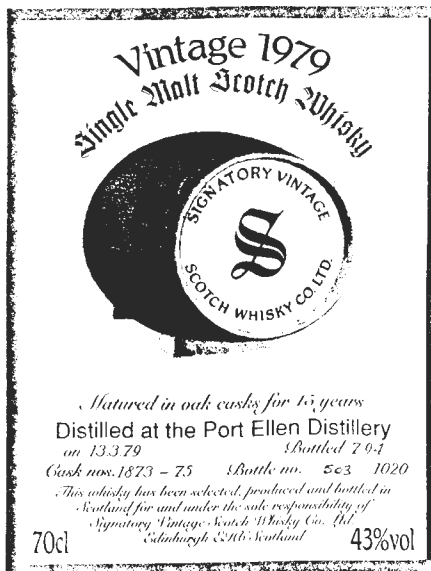
## SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY

The last year has seen the latest of many re-packaging exercises and this time they have got it spot-on. The new presentation features a green bottle with title and description of the bottler in gold lettering on the bottle. A small unfussed paper label describes the contents in terms of region, distillery, age, date of distillation, date of bottling and alcoholic strength. The stout cardboard box is black with gold lettering and the same label. We understand that since the re-package, sales have risen dramatically and it is easy to understand why. A few of the Cadenhead bottlings stocked by Loch Fyne Whiskies are not in the new presentation; please phone if concerned.

### Signatory, Edinburgh

S=Signatory

A small hands-on company with a great reputation in front of them. Signatory is a young (5 years) company bottling at their own premises in Edinburgh.



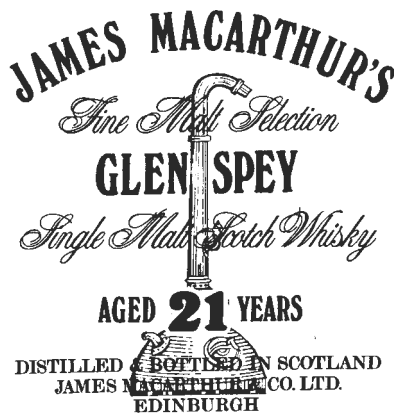
They acquire casks of exceptional age and quality and bottle either diluted to 40%, 43% or 46%, or at cask strength. No colorant is employed in their bottlings and the diluted range is chill filtered "where desirable" at temperatures of between 0°C and +2°C to remove any oiliness. The cask strength whiskies are not chill filtered because, they say, at high alcohol levels there is less cloudiness produced at low temperatures. There will be variation from bottling to bottling as the number of casks vatted varies; a clue is available in the number of bottles in the series, as described on the label.

Diluted whiskies are presented in a tall round bottle with tube and carry string. Cask strength whiskies are in a dumpy round bottle with a black leatherette box with perspex window. The whole range is corked and there is small variation in the appearance of the labels.

### James MacArthur, Edinburgh

JM=James MacArthur

Actually based in High Wycombe, James MacArthur & Co market their own range of selected unfiltered, undiluted, single cask whiskies from an interesting, small selection of distilleries. A green, round bottle is employed with cork stopper and a uniform but not unpleasant label describing the age and source of the whisky within.



## THE STORY OF STRATHAGGIS

As a retailer, we need to be assured that the bottle of *Strathaggis* Single Malt Scotch Whisky we sell you will be the same as the one you bought at the Strathaggis distillery visitor centre or at the duty-free shop.

In order to achieve this, the owner of the brand *Strathaggis*, Biggish Distillers plc will gather around 100 casks of Strathaggis Malt of appropriate age and, ensuring that there are no duff barrels, vat them together so that no one cask dominates the outcome. BD will then filter out any bits of wood, charring from the barrel etc., and then **chill-filter** the whisky at a temperature of between minus 5°C to plus 5°C. Chill filtering removes those oils that would otherwise emulsify in cold climates producing a cloudiness in the whisky. The bottler will then **dilute** with some tasteless, de-ionised water to take the alcoholic strength to 40% (the legal minimum and incurring the least duty) and finally, for visual consistency, add some spirit caramel (or burnt sugar) to deepen the **colour** to a determined degree. The addition of water or spirit caramel contributes nothing to the whisky except their desired effects. The chill filtering will affect the taste depending on the degree of cooling employed; the greater the chilling the more flavour removal. There has been a significant growth in what is termed **cask strength** whiskies in the last ten years, instigated by The Scotch Malt Whisky Society of Edinburgh who bottle **single casks** for their members. The independent bottlers have been quick to appreciate this niche market.

Generally Cask Strength whiskies are expected not to have been diluted, chill-filtered or coloured. There is a danger that an independent bottling of 'whisky from *Strathaggis* distillery' will differ from BD's branded *Strathaggis* but persistence will create familiarity between whisky and drinker. BD are considering placing on the market in selected outlets a limited Cask Strength version called *Rare Strathaggis*. This will not be a single cask bottling but a vatting of 12 casks which are then bottled without dilution or chill-filtering at just under 60% alcohol. If the market response is good then BD will market *Strathaggis Full Proof*, this will be diluted to 57%, and very slightly coloured for consistency. Sales of *Strathaggis Full Proof* are expected to be in the region of 25,000 cases per year worldwide. The *Strathaggis Full Proof* that you may buy in the duty free shop will be the same as that from the distillery visitor centre two years later. Neither *Rare Strathaggis* or *Strathaggis Full Proof* is a single cask whisky.



## POINTS? — OU NIL POINTS?

Michael Jackson

It was controversial from the first. Can any personal experience be given scores? Would it be fair to rate the pleasure given by a rugby match, a jazz concert, a symphony, a love affair, or a bowl of cherries (especially in comparison with raspberries) by awarding points out of ten or out of a hundred?

It depends, I would argue, on how seriously one takes the scores. Everyone has engaged in, or been subjected to, such ratings at one time or another, even if it was only as a pupil having an essay marked.

The American wine-writer Robert Parker is the critic most associated in the drinks trade with such scores. "Creeping Parkerism!" snarled one of my contemporaries when I introduced the 100-score to single malt whiskies.

It was, I confess, my publisher's idea. He already published Parker and wanted to treat my Malt Whisky Companion as a similar volume. I resisted, but hopelessly. My Pocket Beer Book already had a star system (from one to four). My publisher knew that scores would help sell the book and I know from my readers he was right. Ratings out of 100 give much more room for manoeuvre than four stars.

Does a lightweight like Auchentoshan 10 year old really deserve 85 points? Should Macallan 25 score more than a less woody and sherryish Speysider? Do 95 points for Lagavulin suggest a bias toward island malts? I have been asked all of these questions and more.

The answer is that these are my judgements. They are not carved in stone: they are printed in a book that clearly bears my name. You are not obliged to agree with my scores, but they are the result of extensive tasting and considerable thought. I wish them to be nothing more than a useful guide for the buyer. Judging from the numbers of companies in the industry that ask me to sample products and offer opinions, it seems that I may be succeeding.

Other writers have resisted the temptation to score the whiskies they describe, and that is their judgement, which I respect. While I am prepared to accept reviews good and bad, I especially favoured the one that said:

"Jackson's book is best because he puts his opinions on the line. He tells us what he thinks."

*Michael Jackson's Malt Whisky Companion 3rd Edition is now available.*

## THE WORLD OF WHISKIES

Gavin D Smith

I forget who wrote 'There is no such thing as a bad whisky', but we can all recall examples of what we would consider 'less good' whiskies, even if we cannot bring ourselves to use the word 'bad' in relation to the greatest of all drinks.

I do remember, however, who wrote 'There is no such thing as a large whisky'. It was Oliver St John Gogarty, and few of us have much difficulty swallowing that declaration.

With whiskies, as with almost everything else in life, one man's meat is another man's supermarket own-brand loss leader, and one of the greatest fascinations of 'the cratur' is its sheer diversity.

Within Scotland, there is, of course, a vast range of whisky types, from the single malt extremes of Laphroaig to Lowlands like Glenkinchie, but even the most dedicated and patriotic supporter of the Scotch whisky industry ought to extend his or her sampling beyond the home product from time to time to gain a truly rounded picture of the 'world of whisky'.

The first port of call should be Ireland, almost all of whose whiskeys—we must be careful with variations of spelling here—are produced by Irish Distillers in the vast modern complex at Midleton in County Cork, though their range of Bushmills whiskeys are distilled in what is claimed to be the world's oldest licensed distillery on the Antrim coast of Northern Ireland.

In terms of flavour, the likes of Jameson, Paddy, Bushmills and Powers tend to be oilier than most Scotch whiskies, and their undoubted 'refinement' owes much to the process of triple distillation.

All the major Irish whiskies are blends of pot still malts, made with both malted and unmalted barley, and grain spirit, and there is a deliberate absence of any peat influence during kilning. Bushmills Malt is, however, made from one hundred percent malted barley, and harks back to an earlier age of more assertively styled Irish whiskeys.

Bourbons are the principal whiskeys of the USA, distilled from not less than

51% corn, usually in column stills, and matured in charred barrels. This maturation gives the whiskey its distinctive flavours of vanilla and caramel. Names such as Jim Beam, Wild Turkey and particularly Jack Daniel's have become familiar to British drinkers in recent years and are excellent examples of the Bourbon style.

To be pedantic, Jack Daniel's is in fact part of a sub-category of Bourbons known as Tennessee whiskeys, which employ a pre-barrelling process of charcoal filtering. This is said to remove undesirable congeners and fusel oils and also imparts a slight smokiness to the character of the finished product. Tennessee whiskies tend to be drier than most Bourbons which are now principally produced in Kentucky.

To a significant extent, Bourbons have upstaged America's older whisky style of Rye, which legally has to have a minimum 51% rye content mixed with some barley and corn. Ryes tend to possess a slight bitterness, with an oily and somewhat spicy flavour, and this rather characterful nature may account for why their popularity decreased in an era when blandness in whiskeys (or whiskies) became, sadly, an important purchasing criteria.

For a taste of something close to 'moonshine' try an American corn whiskey, distilled from at least 80% corn in uncharred barrels. In a business where euphemisms tend to be the order of the day, the words 'unsophisticated' and even 'fiery' have been applied to corn whiskeys.

Renowned North Carolina corn whiskey moonshiner, Quill Rose, was supposedly asked by a judge before whom she appeared whether ageing improved her product. "Your honour has been misinformed", replied Rose, "I have kept some for a week one time and I couldn't tell it was a bit better than when it was new and fresh"!

*Gavin Smith is author of Whisky, A book of Words. A dictionary of whisky terms and phrases that provides the quickest, most concise solution to your unanswered questions. 213 pp, hardback, £14.95. Gavin is currently finishing a Whisky audio cassette. (Ideal for blind tastings?)*

## DAMN YANKEE HOOTCH

Whilst on the subject of whiskies from The Rest of the World we have in stock some very rare bottlings of *Old Rip Van Winkle Bourbon*. This is a unique product, hardly ever seen—even in the States. A mellow bourbon with a strong caramel and soft fruit character.

Out any day now is Jim Murray's *Irish Whisky Almanac—A Tasters Guide*. A companion volume to Wallace Milroy's. Murray considers a wide range of known and little known samples of *the original stuff*. In stock this week, price £7.99(a).

## THE SCOTCH WHISKY INDUSTRY RECORD

Book by H. Charles Craig

Charles Craig retired after fifty years in the Scotch Whisky Industry having achieved chairmanship of Invergordon Distillers. In three years and with the absolute support of the industry he has compiled this magnificent tome, recording industry events and statistics from 1494 to 1993. Only 1,500 copies have been printed, 200 of which remain unsold. Hardback, two bookmarks and 658 pages—£85(c).

## ¡BUENOS DIAS! READERS

Ted Thompson — MacDuff International

*Ted, co-founder of the whisky company with ownership of such classic brands as Islay Mist and Grand Macnish, describes for SWR the experiences of a modern day Johnnie Walker or Tommy Dewar.*

Having travelled throughout North America for many years, I always nursed an ambition to visit South America. My previous corporate positions prevented this opportunity due to a lack of linguistic expertise, but circumstances differ since we started our own company and I am responsible for the whole of the Americas.

Latin America has always been a good market for Scotch Whisky but in the past was viewed extremely cautiously either for political or economic reasons. However, most Latin American countries are now more politically secure, and many have aligned their currencies against the US dollar.

The main markets are Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Chile and Argentina. The major whisky companies have set up their own distribution network in those countries, but opportunities still exist for smaller companies to operate in the area. My first visit was in March 1994 and it was fascinating to see how business is conducted in these markets. I arrived in Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, after an exhausting 22 hour journey to a welcome reception which went on until the next day! Despite my language limitations, I was made to feel completely at ease.

Paraguay is at the centre of South America and along its western border lies Brazil. Six border towns depend on "visitors" who twice weekly make a 3-day return trip to buy liquor, tobacco, electronics and perfumes for resale in Brazil. I visited one of these towns accompanied by our local agent and was intrigued to see the myriad of buses, vans, lorries and cars crossing the bridge to make their purchases. It was just like Aladdin's Cave with hundreds of stores, shops and street stalls laden with goodies which crowds were keenly negotiating to buy.

The most popular Scotch Whisky brands

included Johnny Walker Black Label, Chivas Regal, Ballantine's, Old Parr and Grand Macnish. The Latin American prefers aged whiskies, gift boxed with non-refillable fitments to ensure the integrity of the product. They eagerly look for free gifts and will accept anything with the same enthusiasm, from a small key-ring to a quality ice-bucket, just as long as it is free. Pricing is also a key element in the selection of brands and I saw new brands on display which recognised the importance of this business.

The same situation also applies in Uruguay, south of Brazil and I was fascinated by the lack of border control between the two countries.

South again to Buenos Aires in Argentina—a sophisticated city of over 7 million people, where the distribution of brands is very similar to other western countries. This city is also "served" by Paraguay and Uruguay, but the in-transit trade is somewhat smaller than that which is smuggled into Brazil! However this is an important market and sales of Scotch whisky have been growing over the past few years.

In 10 days touring these three countries I gained a greater understanding of the requirements of the South American market and its people. The distributors and agents are acutely aware of the importance of market visits and seize every opportunity during these visits to present one to key customers. Their entertaining and hospitality were somewhat overwhelming but genuine and one is expected to be available until the early hours of the morning.

Since my return I have arranged to attend a language school to learn Spanish, and due to the success of the first visit have organised my next trip to South America in the beginning of next year. In addition to re-visiting Argentine, Paraguay and Uruguay, I will be including Brazil, Columbia, Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela in my itinerary. I only hope my constitution will stand up to all the long nights and early mornings! It's a tough job but somebody has to do it!

*Next issue, Ted describes why he goes to Cannes every year—purely business!*

## MY MEMORABLE DRAM

It was one Spring day 1963 when I worked in my spare time for a farmer clearing scrub. On this particular day I was asked to creosote the byre. I worked all day and in the evening when I had finished he took me to the Bridgend Hotel. He called for drinks and what would I have? A Whyte & Mackay, I replied. I duly downed the dram, smooth as silk as it slipped over the throat. I had another; the same effect. Now by this time I would be feeling the two

*Alec Neish, Still-man, Bruichladdich Distillery*

drams but no, I felt fine, so I had another and missed the bar completely as I went for the water that I was advised to take as I was going so strong. After a good evening I stood to go home. All was well till I went outside. I missed the car by ten feet and it took three others to round me up as I had sailed in good steam across the road and ended up near the petrol pumps. It was a good dram that night but now I go easy on the creosote.

tasters tasters tasters tasters tasters

*What's new in the shop, Richard?*

**The Heritage Selection** is the name given to four speyside whiskies selected by Seagrams; a re-packaging of **Longmorn** and **Strathisla** and the introduction of the first MH bottlings of **Benriach** and **Glen Keith**—all very attractive. **Springbank** have re-packaged, 15 and 21yo's come in tall round bottles with stiff card carton. To celebrate this we have been able to **reduce the price on Springbank. Glen Moray** are circulating a new regiment on their 15yo tins—now it's The Black Watch, and Glen Moray 12yo has an on-pack offer of free 4oz Smoked Scottish Salmon, **Highland Park** will return a video of the Orkneys and Macallan a water jug when you return proof of purchase. We have two of this year's **Black Bowmore** 30yo remaining and, a real rarity, Scottish Island produced 200 ceramic decanters commemorating the annual Gaelic festival, this year held in Dunoon, Argyll. The **Scottish Island MOD'94** decanter is £42.50—we have three left. **Dalmore** 12yo has changed shape and label—for the better. **Glenmorangie Portwood**-finish has been very popular and its tasting notes are sufficiently eloquent to make Jackson blush. Also in is Glenmorangie **1971** £75.00. **Glen Rothes** is now available as a 15yo limited edition in what appears to be a sample bottle (of what?)—we like it anyway. Two bottlings celebrating the 500th anniversary of Scotch in stock, **Tomatin** 1964, £43.00—only 84 bottles produced, and an **Ardbeg** 1974, £32.00—496 produced. The **1994 Bells Christmas Decanter** (£32.50) depicts *SWR* correspondent Ian Grieve; this journal is now a must on the ladder to success! On the blend side, **Bailie Nicol Jarvie** looks even more authentic and Wm. Grants **Gordon Highlander** issue is superb. We are now carrying **Avonside 57%** in case you feel your flask is a wee bit too small or the fairways too cold.

MINIATURE COLLECTORS

(sorry, couldn't resist it!)

The entire re-package of **Springbank** is worthwhile as are the 4 **Heritage** bottlings mentioned above plus an unaged **Glen Grant**. We also have some MH **Glen Elgin** with a Japanese label on the back, (big bottles too). A few of the new presentation, very limited **Cadenhead** miniatures remain.

Time for a quick review of **Jackson's Companion**; 3rd Edition; as good as ever with many additional new bottlings alongside the old, plus commendable new **house style** for each distillery that cuts through the prose to understandable phrases like 'smokey' or 'sweet'. One concern is that availability is not revealed, so you should always have your **Loch Fyne Whiskies** Stock List to hand—the most comprehensive range there is!

## FEATURED DISTILLERY

# PORT ELLEN



Space prevents our intended spread on Port Ellen Distillery but in a comparison of the bottlings listed we decided that the CC bottling was our favourite by a very narrow margin. Equal runners up were the Cask and C. bottlings.

Now permanently closed, Port Ellen was regarded by many islanders as the best. It is the most honest of the heavy Islay whiskies being pure peat and smoke; the CC bottling is very slightly sweet and citrusy.

To the best of our knowledge all of the Islay fans who've been in the shop have been delighted with their CC bottle of Port Ellen.

### A BOTTLE OF SPRINGBANK FOR £2.83?

Where's the catch? Well several really. Buy a cask of new make whisky from Springbank Distillery for £850 and you can collect, or sell, 30 cases in ten years' time—after paying the duty. If interested get in touch with us; we are now brokers for Springbank.

### LONGROW UPDATE

We get many requests for information regarding the availability of Longrow. Production ceased between 1974 and 1987 but the stocks maturing that were distilled in 1987 will, it is hoped, be suitable for drinking in 1997. In the meantime we do have a few 1974 miniatures left.

### THE WOODEN BOX IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE AFFORDABLE MALT!

United Distillers have discontinued the packaging of the Distillery (Fauna & Flora) Malts and substituted an elegant card carton. Whilst the loss of the very attractive box is lamented, we applaud the consequent reduction in price across the range of between £4 and £6.

We still have some wooden boxes in stock—'phone immediately if you seek some.

At Christies recent auction we were successful in our bid for a rare, original bottle of Loch Fyne Whisky...

### AND TALKING TELEPHONE NUMBERS...

Please note our new telephone numbers. Our 'phone is now **01 499 302219**, our fax **01 499 302238**.

## LETTERS

Thanks to all who wrote in response to the last issue and for those unsolicited comments and letters which continue to arrive from the round the world. The interest in whisky is reassuring!

Such is the rapport with some customers when ringing for advice on their dram that they respond to our "come up and see us sometime", thereby discovering the delights of our emporium first hand. Our first pilgrim was Wilf Grove of Streatham who documented his Boswell & Johnson-esque trip thus...

*"The trip was taken over 3 days—a very tight trip but worthwhile. The Amazing Columns of bottles all together! (Not to mention the free dram or two.) This was during the winter so a nice warming feeling all through with the added attraction of an open fire within the shop made this a luxury against the London Concrete lifestyle. The weather was freezing but the whisky I drank and purchased made up for everything. I took home a bottle of 28yo Clynelish 50.7%. Having tried the golden nectar I now have some more words to add to the Dictionary:*

*DRINKABLE—goes down like a dream MORISH—where is the Clynelish?"*

*What a concept! Loch Fyne Whiskies appeals, particularly here where the nearest most people get to whisky is that poor Canadian imitation called Rye. The best my friends can do is give me bottles of duty-free Glenlivet for Christmas. We pass them on, the same bottles no doubt being recycled as presents amongst our small group—unopened. Oh for a Talisker! That would not pass beyond my doors.*

Ted Needham, exiled in Canada.

Thanks to the prolific Paul Butler, University of Auckland, for the following suggestions for Ted Thomson's blends. (Does your boss realise you're under-worked, Paul?)

*Speycats, Pad Loch (think about it) Ben There-donne That, Famous Mouse Malt (Disney) Windy Kilt, R&R Babe (apologies to J&B Rare), VAT 17.5 (likewise to VAT 69) and Pipe Dream (or was that Piper's Dram—sound familiar?).*

**SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW is free to all bona fide mail order customers. If you have not bought by mail order from the last (Spring) catalogue and do not buy from the accompanying (Autumn) list then we will not be troubling you again.**

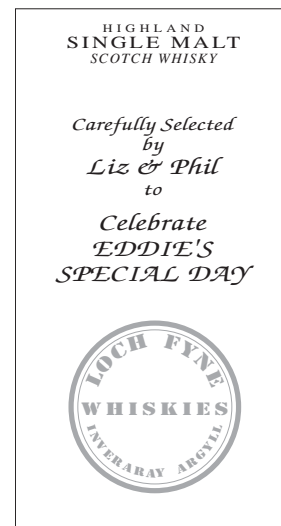
**PLEASE TELL YOUR FRIENDS ABOUT US!**

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## YOUR MEMORABLE DRAM

A one-off label such as that shown below adds only £2.50 to your bottle price and turns a present into a very special and memorable gift.

We can prepare a special label with your details and apply it to the back of a MH bottle or else prepare a specific one-off 'bottling'—substituting the original label for yours. Labels can be tailored to include your business logo for a well-noticed and much appreciated corporate gift.



### ANNIVERSARY MALTS

Our stock list now gives information about the year of distillation of many bottlings. Why not consider a vintage tied into a particular anniversary or occasion, such as a 25yo malt for a silver wedding or a 1955 vintage for a 40th birthday. Or even a vintage whisky with a personalised label? Other vintages available if you cannot find the year you require.

'Phone us to discuss your requirements.

### THE LAST DROP

Again lack of space means some items have to wait till next time. Charlie MacLean (Pocket Whisky Book) and Carol Shaw (Collins Gem) have volunteered pieces and we hope to have news of Gordon & MacPhail's 100th anniversary in 1995.

If you have any questions, ideas for articles or contributions of your own please let us know. The more we can get others to contribute, the more time we can devote to you the customer.

We particularly want to hear from any distillery workers and others in the industry; be it for your memorable dram or your thoughts on the recent receivership of the owners of Glen Scotia and Littlemill Distilleries, or whatever. These are interesting times for the SWR, without your input it may end up under the control of one school of thought!

Richard & Lyndsay