



SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW™

EDITION 9

SPRING 1998

A SAD DAY

In the last SWR we thought that the 'merger' between Guinness (UD) and GrandMet (IDV) would be harmless for the whisky biz. We thought the importance of Scotch to the new company would result in an unchanged United Distillers while International Distillers & Vintners would be inconvenienced.

We were wrong.

The world's greatest Scotch whisky company has closed Bell's Cherrybank at Perth, its last non-essential Scottish office which for ten years has been relatively small, dealing with spirit sales for UDUK. Its closure leaves only those involved in production at home, presumably a tiresome necessity rather akin to maintaining off-shore oil platforms.

The reasons given for the closure are to be closer to the major UK customers and 'system compatibility'. Pah! What this proves is that this is a take-over of Guinness and that GrandMet's obsession with efficiency is prevailing.

Cherrybank was the creation of 'ruthless' Raymond Miquel, who was hired as an efficiency expert. Under his leadership during the '70's a regiment of well drilled Bell's men buttoned their jackets and pushed Bell's Finest to the UK number one by increasing sales from £25m to £187m. Miquel didn't think he was too far from his customers, even without the benefits of cheap, frequent shuttle flights, faxes, email or ISDN.

This is a bad decision. Fewer Scots will be recruited to sell Scotch world-wide and it fails to appreciate that the world likes to buy Scotch from a Scot. It is a very severe blow to the morale of the entire Scotch whisky industry and to the producing nation as a whole. Public reaction is akin to the slaughter that was the aftermath of the DCL takeover, with Bell's being boycotted nation-wide. It fails to recognise the importance of the heritage required in promoting the world's preferred spirit and smacks of a commercial arrogance that wipes out carefully nurtured characters and flair for the sake of short-term efficiencies.



Photo
John H Paul

BALMENACH'S FUTURE TOASTED

One of the last bottles of Balmenach in the 'fauna & flora' livery is opened by manager Billy Fowler and shared with Dr Alan Rutherford and Bob Boyle, Production Directors of United Distillers and Inver House Distillers respectively. The toast was the transfer of ownership to Inver House in December last year after the distillery had been mothballed since 1993. Distilling restarts in April.

Dr Rutherford explained that equipment had been retained in the hope of restarting. "At the time of closure, Balmenach unfortunately did not fit in with our plans and forecasts for the future. However, we always wanted to retain the option of making whisky again or enable someone else to bring it back into production."

This is Inver House's fifth distillery and the third acquired in as many years.

NEW EXPORT RECORDS

Thirty-one bottles or £76 per second! That's the exports of Scotch in 1997.

The value of exports rose 5% to £2,400m and volumes by 8% to the equivalent of 989 million bottles—finally beating the previous record set in 1978.

The top market, USA, rose 14% to over £300m. Japan also increased imports as tax discrimination is removed. However the industry is concerned about difficult trading in Asia generally.

The strong pound and tax hikes caused a drop in exports to France, Germany and Greece but the rest of the EU reported strong growth. Spain has overtaken France as number two market. Discriminatory tax alone caused a 4% drop in the UK market.

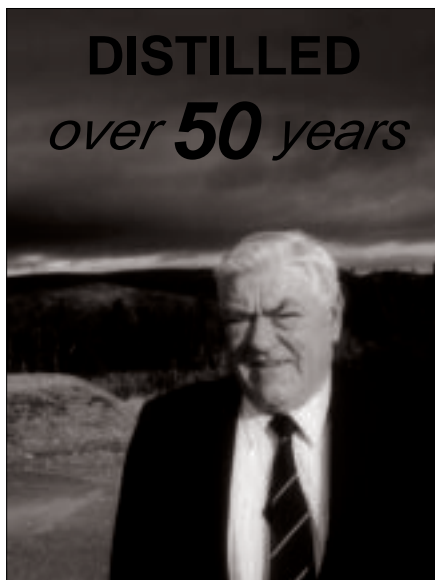
HOORAY!

BRUICHLADDICH BACK

Islay's lightest dram is to be produced once again. The superb Bruichladdich single malt is to be created during May and June of this year in order to replenish the stocks. Manager Willie Tate told us that he can make plenty of malt in two months, all of which will be warehoused on site.

Although there are presently no plans to distil permanently, this is a positive move by the owner's, Whyte & Mackay. Workers from the sister Jura Distillery will be responsible for production, so although there are no new jobs it is good news in every other respect.

Bruichladdich was closed in 1994.



John McDonald has worked at Tomatin Distillery for over 50 years. LFW: What's your job?

I am managing director of Tomatin Distillery, south of Inverness. We produce malt whisky and just recently my company bought The Antiquary brand of 12 years old blended Scotch.

LFW: How is 'Tomatin' properly pronounced?

It rhymes with satin, Tom-atin.

LFW: Have you been here long?

My father came to Tomatin as brewer in 1937. My grandfather and my great grandfather were also distillers. For some strange reason my son is not a distiller, he studied geography.

Father became the manager shortly after I started working here in October 1945 which was for one of the first distillations to take place after the war. Production was restricted in those days: the amount of barley that we could make into malt was governed by a quota based on the distillery's output in 1939 and 1940. The last whisky made during the war was in 1942: after that all the grain was used for food. After the war you didn't have to sell whisky—people came to you, they wanted whisky.

The quota system was lifted two or three years later, at which time everybody went flat out to make as much whisky as possible because stocks were so depleted. All distilleries did the same and expanded. We doubled our output from two stills to four stills and so it went on until 1974, by which time we had twenty three stills.

When I started, Tomatin Distillery was a private company of a consortium of London businessmen up until 1958 when it went public. Once public, we proceeded merrily on our way but we started to hit trouble in the 1980's and went into liquidation in 1985. In March 1986 the Japanese companies Takara Shuzo Co. and Okura & Co. bought the company and they still own it to this day.

LFW: What was the cause of the problem?

Too much stock. We were locked in a buy-back situation, that is that we would make whisky for investors, banks or pension funds with a guaranteed buy-back price of not less than their investment. Soon the buy-back price was much higher than the market value which dropped dramatically. So the company just kept losing money, and in the end the bank and our major shareholders said 'enough is enough' and the liquidators sought a new owner. We were resurrected by our current owners in March 1986 and since then we have gone from strength to strength.

LFW: How do you get on with your owners?

Very well. They don't interfere with us in any way about the running of the company. I see my Chairman only about twice a year and all the other Directors are Japanese apart from myself and Jim Milne, who joined us recently. The Chairman comes over with proxies from the others, so our AGM takes about an hour. He only stays two days, or three if he is going to play golf! He will then return for another visit in October each year. Nice people, no problems—they are happy and we are happy. The last twelve years have been good.

the liquidator asked me to run the company

Our owners are not involved in distilling but they are one of the largest suppliers of *shochu* in Japan, but not a producer. The company is pretty big with 2,200 employees. In 1968 they became Tomatin's distributors in Japan, so they knew about Tomatin and I knew many of them from their visits to the distillery. They decided to purchase a distillery, I think one of the reasons being that Suntory had a 26% stake in Macallan, and now own Morrison Bowmore, and so they bought Tomatin. After that the other big whisky company, Nikka, bought Ben Nevis Distillery.

With the liquidation, the head office in London was closed and the liquidator asked me to run the company. I had been just the Production Director, but as I had nothing else to do, I just did it, and with a certain degree of success, even if I say so myself.

LFW: Where does the bulk of your product go?

We fill whisky for different companies, and I buy their whisky for our own blends. I would say 90% of our whisky

goes overseas but in somebody else's bottles. We do some bulk whisky—as most companies do—but the rest is bottled in Scotland.

Our main brands are the Tomatin 10 year old single malt and the Big T blend. We were fortunate to buy The Antiquary brand from United Distillers in February 1996. We wanted the brand and they were not putting much effort into it. It is a good name, and it is now doing well. We have a stock agreement with UD whereby they supply the stock in blended form for us to have bottled and this agreement lasts for ten years. So we are now on a filling program preparing for the year 2008 because after the supply agreement runs out we will have to produce the 12 year old whiskies ourselves. That costs a lot of money, to lay whisky down for such a long period. Antiquary is a good product for the top end of the blended whisky market, definitely not cheap; Scotch doesn't have to be cheap to sell well.

We are very pleased, although currently some of our overseas customers are struggling with the strength of the pound; but the pound isn't going to stay as strong as it is. Diageo recently announced that they have to write off £160m because of the rate of exchange, so if we lose a few thousand pounds of sales, we're relatively content.

LFW: Who does your blending?

I do, or rather did before Jim Milne came to us. He is the real expert, an acknowledged Master Blender. Our bottling requirement is subcontracted to commercial bottlers.

Marketing was done from Tomatin and now by Jim, who used to be Master Blender with J&B and joined us when we acquired The Antiquary. Jim is Managing Director of J & W Hardie, the company that owns The Antiquary licence. We handle the production of it, the bottling and exports from here and Jim is responsible for the marketing. We don't employ a lot of people; I always run a lean machine. We've got just over 40 people and that includes the office cleaners! I believe that the fewer people, the fewer troubles.

LFW: Are your owners responsible for marketing in the Far East?

No, although they do sell Big T in Japan and they are now launching The Antiquary there to coincide with the beneficial tax changes that come into force this Spring. Apart from that we do it all from here.

Antiquary is selling well, but you always want to sell more.

LFW: How busy is the distillery; it has a huge capacity.

The capacity was always grossly overstated. If it was working 168 hours a week, 52 weeks a year we could achieve these figures but plants just don't work like that, even with the best will in the world. You get breakdowns and people

need holidays. Our capacity is about six million litres in a 48 week year. We're at about 60% at the moment. That's reasonably busy.

Tomatin Single Malt sales are quite good. They are not much compared with the likes of Macallan or The Glenlivet but it is about 12,000 cases and with a good margin, being malt. We don't push Tomatin hard here at home because there are many other malts. We do very well in the States, Spain and France but we don't sell any malt in Japan. There are just too many whiskies out there, including malts.

The Antiquary takes a lot of our time but it is going very well, in the States, Portugal, duty free, Andorra, South America, and hopefully in Japan soon. We are busy trying to stitch up a deal in Germany for The Antiquary at the moment and we are in negotiations with the Swedes but it is essential that you have the right distributor in a market which is not easy.

For the Antiquary we have a ten year supply agreement with United Distillers which is based on an increasing increment of sales and, the way things are going, we could have a situation where we do not have enough whisky secured for the future. This is not a bad sign—it's a nice position to be in.

Producing whisky in Scotland is a very friendly business; there is a tendency to help each other. There are no secrets of how to make whisky. We've all got mash-tuns, washbacks and stills, the only difference is the shape of the stills and the water supplies; there are no longer any secrets of how to produce the spirit.

The only secrets are the blend recipes. We know the recipe of The Antiquary, that was the very last thing we got, the last document we were given. So that is how we know what whiskies and what percentages of different malts and grain we should be laying down. If we get short of whisky we have two options: we could try and buy these whiskies in the broking market, or go back to UD and say we want some more, but there would then be a big difference in the price, and so not such a viable proposition.

There are going to be no changes to the style of the whisky. It is going to be kept as close to the original as we can. It is a good dram already.

This success reflects the old story that if something is scarce, people will want it. Good money has been made in the last few years by selling older and rarer malts and blends. If you can sell an 18yo for £80 all good and well, much better than £9! We did a limited edition of 800 decanters of 30yo Tomatin for our centenary selling for £144 each and we sell a lot of them.

LFW: It's not just whisky that you have produced here.

Ha! Eels were forced upon me by a research and development man in London.

This was before the liquidation and the chief executive said we should use our hot water waste. Eels like warm water and can be farmed but when whisky production was decreased because of the problems the eels also suffered stress because they got nice warm water Monday to Friday and then freezing cold at the weekend. So that took its toll on them. Other distillers have tried trout, mushrooms and, the most successful, toma-toes (at Glen Garioch).

LFW: Tell us about the MDAS.

I recently stepped down from being President of the Malt Distillers Association of Scotland. This is the organisation that deals with the sharp end of any production problems that the industry has. Environmental issues take up a lot of time, especially dealing with the rubbish that emanates from Brussels. Health and Safety is important and there are committees for animal feed products, Customs & Excise, wages—it is a good organisation.

*I'm two
years past
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but the owners
don't want me
to retire*

It's the practical association for whisky production, and is well run by the secretaries in Elgin. There are lots of meetings and plenty of discussion. By far the most active committee is Environment which tackles European Community legislation bumph and tries to conform. Some of the stuff is unnecessary, water temperature elevation for example—because we discharge water warmer than the original it's considered bad for fish but for over 100 years the Spey has attracted the best fish!

We always conform, we can't change it. But we get a lot of aggravation. The association has done a lot recently regarding removal of copper from distillery effluent; it's not legislated for at the moment but we have to be prepared. Our rivers are clean, probably the cleanest in the world. Have you seen the 'Blue Danube'? It's brown!

The Secretary of the Malt Distillers goes to the operations meetings of the Scotch Whisky Association. The SWA and MDAS are two separate bodies, we are at the sharp end. I was delighted to be

President, a great moment both for Tomatin and also for my own personal satisfaction, the pinnacle of my career.

LFW: You have achieved a great deal.

That's not all, I am honorary life president of the Inverness based Caledonian Thistle Football Club! I was a part time professional player and I had several good appointments including travelling the world as a committee member of the Scottish Football Association.

I fish, I golf, and I work. I'm two years past retirement but the owners don't want me to retire. Anyway, I think I'd be divorced after six weeks at home!

I have good staff, (I hired them all myself) with few changes and everyone seems happy. We've got thirty-two houses owned by the company so I suppose I could be considered the laird of the community.

LFW: How do you view the whisky industry now?

I'm concerned about number of people who come into the industry in very high positions and then leave after just two or three years.

The (SWA) Director General's job is hard because he has more changes in his team than any football manager. Ever changing personnel is never good and there are many people coming in with no knowledge of the whisky industry. You are not going to learn much in two years and it is bad for the people down the ladder who always have to educate new people, people who are their bosses!

LFW: Finally, what is your Desert Island dram?

Cragganmore, a cracking dram, with Aultmore my number two. Cragganmore has been a well looked after place; it is small, but produces a consistently good spirit. For blends, Johnnie Walker Black Label, you can't beat it—unless you can find Antiquary!

LFW: Thank you, enjoy your retirement—if it ever comes!

MALT DISTILLERS ASSOCIATION OF SCOTLAND

MDAS was founded in 1874 as the North of Scotland Malt Distillers Association. It became The Pot Still Malt Distillers Association of Scotland in 1925 finally changing to its present name in 1971.

In 1994 it was granted its own 'ensigns armorial' by the Court of the Lord Lyon in Edinburgh.



A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY



Expensive—but a bargain, a 52 year old 1946 vintage Macallan has been released. Mahogany boxed, numbered and certificated this very exclusive malt comes with a recommended selling price of ‘fifteen hundred guineas’ (that’s £ 1,575 for those too young to remember) this is definitely a very desirable collector’s item. Until now the occasional bottlings of OB 50yo Macallan have sold for about £10,000 so you can see why we call this a bargain.

Charlie MacLean has tried it (it’s a hard job but someone has to do it etc.) and tells us, “It’s mind-blowing—unbelievably phenolic. You would think it came from south Islay; perhaps it’s because of the wartime coke and coal shortages.” We take delivery after this SWR goes to press but we plan to crack one open to try for ourselves. This means we will be able to offer a **free sample, dispensed from our 35ml optic, to anyone buying a bottle of the 1946 Macallan from Loch Fyne Whiskies*** so collectors can appreciate their dram while it appreciates.

OB MACALLAN '46/52 40% £1,575
*Obviously stocks of freebies will be limited so don’t hesitate too long.

Macallan have also released 1,500 bottles of *Gran Reserva*, a particularly well sherried 18yo, much richer and spicier than the 18yo standard. There’s one open in the shop if you’re calling...

MACALLAN — Gran Reserva 40% £75.00



DIAGEO EXPLAINED

The ‘merger’ of Guinness and GrandMet has created a new giant—Diageo (Dee-ajio). Some bright spark (for a mere £250,000, cf. BBC or BA) thought up the name from the Latin ‘diary’ meaning ‘every day’ and the Greek ‘geography’—‘all around the world’. Hence, *every day, worldwide* to express the global nature of the company (Perth excepted).

The distilling arms United Distillers and International Distillers & Vintners will become United Distillers & Vintners or UDV.

SELF WHISKY COURSE

Roddy Charles—Loch Fyne Whiskies

Pass with distinction while enjoying a few drams studying Moray College’s new course in Scotch Whisky. Created in association with Gordon & MacPhail, this self-study course covers the history and production of Scotch whiskies in some detail and touches upon Irish and American whiskies and, interestingly, Brandy (*pourquoi?*) before finishing with my favourite section, some serious facts and figures on the industry. Regular activities and questions help make sure this is all absorbed and the ‘Instant Whisky Expert Checklist’ takes you through the tasting of the eight G&M miniatures provided with the pack. If this all sounds easy, a pass mark of 90% is required to obtain your certificate of whisky boffinery—although it is an ‘open book’ exam.

At £75 it suggests the course is aimed at providing employees (wine-waiters etc.) with a good basic knowledge rather than for the enthusiast or connoisseur who will have read up to this level on self-interest alone. Details from Moray College on 01343 554321.

REVISED POCKET GUIDE

Anyone unwilling to splash out £75 on the above should consider a book which in the last SWR we recommended as the single most useful book for the Scotch whisky enthusiast or professional. Charlie MacLean’s *Pocket Guide* has now been revised, expanded and updated and is even better. £ 8.99.



DISTILLERS EDITION

By June we should be stocking the new *Classic Six-Distillers Edition*, six new wood-finishes (or ‘double matured’). Referring to Michael Jackson’s notes: Glenkinchie+Amontillado; lovely soothing malt. Dalwhinnie+Oloroso; peatiness becoming rooty and licorice-like. Cragganmore+ruby port; cherryish fruitiness. Oban+Manzanilla; flowery sweetness accentuating the peat and salt. Talisker+ Amoroso; pepper and nutty and for Lagavulin+Pedro Ximenez; deeper and more rounded.

BOOZE BLUES

Not that we condone illegal activity of any sort, but there is a kind of comfort in discovering that the old Scottish tradition of making ‘peat-reek’—illicitly-distilled whisky—is alive and well and flourishing by the banks of the Tay. Perhaps that should be ‘was flourishing’ since the distillers appear to have taken to the hills and glens of Angus before the gaugers closed in a few weeks ago.

The unlikely setting for one of Scotland’s smaller whisky-making enterprises was a unit in Dundee’s North Tayworks Industrial Estate, where a locksmith discovered a still, boilers, and hundreds of bottles when he called to change the locks after the tenant fell behind with his rent payments.

Apparently the tenant, whose identity cannot be revealed, had told Dundee Industrial Association that he was making animal proteins in the building. When police and Customs & Excise officials arrived it required a curtain-sided truck to carry away all the equipment and bottles. It is believed that the still was operating for some months, and that several hundred bottles of the bootleg liquor are in circulation.

According to a car mechanic who rented the unit next door to the ‘distillery’, “There were two men used to come about the place but they never had much to say for themselves. They seemed to do all their work at night and they never seemed to take any deliveries during daylight hours. Now I can understand why.”

Rumours that Inver House Distillers are buying the distillery are being denied.

FLATTERY

Whyte & Mackay have unveiled a new livery for their popular brand. Gone is the cream label, replaced with a radical blue ground.

According to the label’s creator, “The blue says it’s distinctive. It’s challenging the conventions of the category,” while W&M claim “It’s a revolutionary change, not only for the brand but for the market as a whole.”

Two years ago the Loch Fyne was launched—complete with blue label.



MORE BLUES

For those of you reading in black& white, the jar on the left has a blue label—it’s “challenging the conventions”; the double strength one on the right has a red label—it’s challenging the taste-buds.

THE BROKER'S TALE

Gavin D. Smith

The fact that there is so much fascination with whisky is good news for the 13,000 people directly employed in the industry in Scotland, and the 60,000 others indirectly supported by it. Most enthusiastic members of the public are happy enough to drink a few bottles of the product, perhaps visit some distilleries, and buy a book or two on the subject, but others cherish the dream of playing a part in the world of whisky by owning their own casks of the 'cratur'.

In many cases, these dreams turned into nightmares a few months ago, as a number of unscrupulous whisky-broking companies appeared almost overnight, spotting a way of making easy profits by taking advantage of some people's naive enthusiasm for involvement in whisky ownership.

The firms involved produced inviting promotional literature which used the same emotive images of fast-flowing Highland burns, ears of barley blowing in the breeze, and glasses of whisky by candle light that are so beloved of the legitimate whisky industry. They also projected returns as extravagant as 18% on malt whisky cask investments and painted the picture of a ready market eager to buy back the casks at a future date. That market was then, and remains now, largely nonexistent. In some cases, the initial purchase price per cask was around twice the true market value of the whisky in question.

Having taken "investors" money, a number of the companies concerned disappeared almost as swiftly as they had arrived, and after extensive Serious Fraud Office enquiries, the Department of Trade and Industry closed down several whisky-broking concerns. The Scotch Whisky Association took the step of publishing a leaflet entitled *Personal Investment in Scotch Whisky in Cask*, which points out the pitfalls that can await the unwary buyer.

Inevitably, the established and entirely legitimate whisky-broking trade was badly affected by all the adverse publicity generated in the press and on television, where the BBC programme *Watchdog* featured the whisky-related rip-offs being perpetrated on gullible members of the public.

So what of the established whisky broker, plying his honest trade, whose reputation slumped to somewhere between that of a back street second-hand car salesman and a timeshare tout?

John McDougall has spent 35 years in the whisky industry, and for the last decade he has operated his own brokering company under the name Lifton House Scotch Whisky, formerly based in Campbeltown, but now in the Scottish Borders.

According to John, "The *Watchdog* television programme probably did a lot to kill off the wide boys, but unfortunately all brokers became tarred with the same brush. The perception of many people who saw *Watchdog* was that it called into question the reputation and integrity of the whole whisky industry. It was very difficult to get across that we weren't all rogues and vagabonds.

"This is a long-term business, and one's reputation is of great importance. The sort of investment that a broker will make in buying and holding stocks is considerable. When you have capital tied up in this way you are certainly not going to make a quick buck, and don't expect to.

"Sometimes, if you have the money, there may be a good buy to be made for cash, and that is stock you have got for further down the line in two or three years' time perhaps. Then you would hope that the market is firm enough to at least get your money back, but hopefully your money back plus a profit. It can be quite speculative.

"Broking is an exceptionally interesting business, albeit one that can be a bit hair-raising at times—especially when you are sitting on stock and not much is moving, and you are talking to your bank manager fairly regularly! On the other hand, it can be very rewarding. I don't mean just from the financial point of view, but if someone has asked you to look out for a particular whisky and you can get it for them at a price they are happy with, it can be very rewarding to actually do that deal."

John McDougall considers that the role of the whisky-broker has changed considerably over the years. "Traditionally, brokers in the industry were very often people who bought new fillings at source and maturing and mature stocks in order to stockhold, which was



Not whisky brokers, but important chaps from UD and the North British (grain) Distillery marking the opening of a co-operative cask filling facility. Or perhaps it's a caption competition for a bottle of Ancestral—you decide.

an asset to the industry because it meant that whisky was not being produced by a distiller and just held, but it was actually being sold on and money was being turned around. These brokers at some point in time very often sold the whisky back to the producers, so in a way some of them were acting almost as bankers. There was also the opportunity to swap old for new whisky, and new for old. All of that kept the wheels of the industry moving.

"That was the traditional role for the whisky broker, but in more recent times brokers have tended to become fewer and fewer, but possibly more specialist. The way the industry has rationalised over the past ten years or so has meant that more and more of the stock has been held by the producers themselves. This has served to reduce the number of brokers and therefore the overall involvement of brokers in relation to the main producers.

"I believe that brokers and stockholders such as ourselves at Lifton House continue to have a very responsible role to play. We can still buy whisky from some distillers, and we can also buy whisky on the brokerage market between brokers. Some of the brokers have gone down the route of establishing their own brands, and are actually bottling their own stocks."

As well as trading within the industry, McDougall's company offers a broking service to individual members of the public. "We offer casks of whisky on the private market where people want to become involved. I don't think members of the public would be advised to go into that to make big profits by buying a commodity to sell on or sell back again. There is, however absolutely no reason for the public to be frightened to buy a cask of whisky, provided they realise why they want to buy it. They may wish to buy it as a different type of gift, for the birth of a grandchild or an anniversary, for example. They could then have it bottled and put their own label on it, and so to that extent it can be an enjoyable investment. However, it should be pointed out that if responsible prices are paid initially, it is perfectly feasible to expect a realistic return.

"If you buy a cask of whisky it would be very unlikely that in the medium to long term you would lose your 'stake' of money, but to look for the sort of year on year profits that were being projected by some of the rogue companies that appeared is totally unrealistic. The value of the investment is more likely to increase in value, but the increase can not be predicted, as it is like the stock market. Stocks and shares can go up and go down and so can whisky."

Gavin Smith is author of *The A-Z of Whisky*. Anyone considering buying a cask from Lifton House can make contact through Loch Fyne Whiskies.



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

David Milstead

Bluffer's Guide to Whisky

NEW CUSTOMER PAGE

The busy summer season in the shop is the time when Loch Fyne Whiskies welcomes new customers to our growing band of happy whisky fans. The following pages are for those who are developing an interest in the marvels of Scotch Whisky. We feature some explanation of the bottlings from our Stock List—OB, C, G&M, MM, S etc., but we'll start with by far the most often asked question:

I can't remember the name but it came in a dumpy green bottle, can you help?

Bunnahabhain! (Boo-na-ha-venn).

What is whisky?

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

Scotch Whisky is the world's most popular spirit and must be (amongst other things) made and matured in an oak barrel for not less than **three years** and **in Scotland**, otherwise it cannot be called *Scotch*.

How is whisky made?

Easy, mix some processed grain with water, add yeast and let it ferment in the same way that beer is produced. Boil up your beer and collect the steam which will be mostly alcohol. Voilà, whisky! Throw this away as it is probably poison, your hair will fall out—and apart from that it's illegal.

Scotch whisky must contain barley and Malt Whisky be made exclusively from



OFFICIAL, OWNERS OR ORIGINAL BOTTLINGS (OB)

When bottled by the owner of the distillery, we call such bottlings official, owners or original bottlings. These 'official' presentations are examples of the best in quality, packaging and design. Here is the range of ages and strengths from Glenfarclas.

water, *malted* barley and yeast only.

What is the difference between a single malt and a double malt?

A **single malt** is the product of one malt whisky distillery and that one distillery only. There is no such thing as a double malt unless you are with your rich father-in-law at the bar (technically—'a large one'). Single malts are enjoying considerable acclaim at the moment, they are no longer Scotland's biggest secret. Their intensity and complexity of flavours, previously a handicap to wider sales, are now being sought throughout the world.

Malt whisky is one of four types of Scotch. The most common is **blended whisky**, a mix of many different single malts and grain whiskies prepared by a blender using his sense of smell and years of experience. 92% of all bottled whisky sold is blended whisky and it is appreciated the world over for its satisfying subtlety and complexity.

Grain whisky is industrially produced from a variety of cereals including malted barley. The spirit is not fully distilled—a degree of impurity is required

to add character. It is also matured in Scotland in oak barrels for at least three years before being used for blending. Occasionally you may come across a single grain whisky but its use is mainly as a carrier for malts in blends.

The fourth category of whisky is a **vatted malt** which is a blend of several malts but no grain. Malt bottles lacking the word 'single' may well be vatted; other clues are descriptions such as 'Pure Malt' or '100% malt'.

A single malt is a happy accident of science, nature and circumstance. Blended and vatted whiskies are one man's opinion of what he thinks you think a good whisky should taste like. Many members of the industry claim to appreciate blended Scotch the most.

Why don't you stock a certain brand I had once?

Whisky brands tend to fade away faster than get created as the industry changes from hundreds of brand owners to just a few. As big companies expand by the acquisition of small they find that they have two brands on the same shop shelf at the same price so one has to go. Some

CADENHEAD (C)

Campbeltown in Argyll is home to independent bottler Cadenhead's, who buy and mature casks of whisky and bottle each cask individually at natural cask strength, occasionally as high as 67% alcohol.



MURRAY

McDAVID (MM)

A new name on the Loch Fyne Whiskies list, Murray McDavid are gaining great respect for a small range of excellent and unusual whiskies bottled at 46%, in our view this is the perfect bottling strength, just strong enough to tingle the tongue!



SIGNATORY

(S)

A range of malts bottled at both 43% and at cask strength. Edinburgh based Signatory Vintage Whisky Company has been enjoying success with some excellent rare bottlings.



brands are only available overseas because they are better established there than in the UK.

How many Scotch Whiskies are there?

The Scotch Whisky Association draws attention to the Clavie Vidiz collection in Brazil of over 4,000 bottles of Scotch. Not all of these will be available today and Campbell Evans of the SWA reckons that there are about 200 in the UK and 2,000 around the world.

Loch Fyne Whiskies has the most comprehensive range of UK available malts with examples from about 120 distilleries. There are currently about 85 open and working; others are either mothballed, closed or demolished. There have been about 750 distilleries licensed since Ferintosh in 1689.

How am I supposed to drink my malt whisky?

How you like! Although it does seem a shame to mix a £25 malt with a sweet, fizzy mixer. Addition of water (anything from a drop to 50:50, depends on the bottling) often reveals more character because your nose is happier at lower alcoholic strengths, so experiment with each new bottling. Bear in mind you have four senses of taste and these are on your tongue, not in the back of your throat. Plus you have some 30 or more senses of smell so use the schnoz. Ice in malts is a no-no; you put ice on bruises and in blended Scotch in hot climates.

How do I know which malts I will like?

Most single malts will have the region of origin on the label, either Lowland, Highland, Speyside or Islay and these give a clue to the character of the contents—but there are many exceptions to the rule. The **Lowlands** are the most gentle; mild, almost wine-like. The **Highlands** can be further divided; those

from the south are akin to the lowlands, those from the north are fuller flavoured. **Speyside** is a category of its own within the Highlands. These whiskies are complex and half of Scotland's distilleries are found here. The most fully flavoured whisky is produced on the island of **Islay** (pronounced eye-la). Islay whiskies are unguided missiles in the wrong hands—you will either love them or wonder what the attraction is in smelling hospitals.

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

Value for money—*Collins Gem Whisky* £3.99. Most informed—Charles MacLean's *Malt Whisky* £20.00 or *Scotch Whisky Pocket Guide* £8.99. Taster's bible—Michael Jackson's *Malt Whisky Companion* £12.99.

How come they taste so different?

Malted (germinated) barley has to be dried before milling and fermentation and traditionally this has been done over an open fire. In Scotland a variety of fuels is found locally including peat (decomposing heather) and coal. The amount of **peat** that is used to dry the barley has a big influence (on Islay it is the only source of fuel). Other influences are the style of apparatus employed in the production, particularly the **still** and how that still is operated by the stillman. The final major influence is the type of oak **cask** or barrel employed to mature the spirit; it could be one of many categories from a brand new barrel to a well-used second-hand sherry or bourbon cask.

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

These bottles are from Independent bottlers who buy the malt whisky from a distillery and bottle it with their name foremost as their badge of quality. With



The right glass for malt whisky.

A traditional whisky tumbler is fine for a blended whisky with a mixer but for malt whisky appreciation a tulip or balloon glass is preferred.

A classic nosing glass has a generous belly to accumulate aromas, a narrow rim to focus those delights for consideration and a watch glass lid to keep them for you rather than the fairies. Engraved graduations allow accurate dilution.

For relaxed whisky drinking we recommend a port glass. A wider rim and better balance aids contemplative enjoyment. We also enjoy using the simple water carafe, far less fuss than a lipped jug.

Classic Nosing Glass	£7.50(a)
Port Glass	£3.50(a)
Carafe	£3.50(a)

all independent bottlings look for the distillery name which will be in smaller print.

What are 'Cask Strength' Whiskies?

Whisky matures in the barrel at about 65%. Prior to bottling it is diluted to 40% so as to incur the least alcohol duty (originally a wartime measure). Cask strength whiskies are at natural, barrel strength which provides more impact and immediate flavour. These whiskies should be diluted in the glass after exploratory sips otherwise anaesthesia will numb the pleasure. Because of the variety of casks employed in the industry each *single-cask* bottling will have the character of the barrel variety as well as that of the distillery so there is great variation.

Why are some whiskies so expensive?

The first thing to check is the age of the whisky. If it is say 21 years old (the time spent in the cask—once bottled it does not 'age'), it will be dearer because of the additional storage required. Also whisky evaporates in the barrel by about 2% each year so after 21 years only two thirds remain. The other thing to look out for is the degree of alcohol strength as duty is applied according to percentage alcohol. Most whiskies are bottled at 40% alcohol by volume (abv), some at 43% or 46%—15% stronger and so dearer than the 40%. We stock many whiskies with strengths of up to 65% so these are the equivalent of over a bottle and a half!



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

The leading and most respected independent bottler, G&M bottle a bewildering range of single, vatted and blended whiskies from their Elgin home. G&M are unique amongst independent bottlers in that they mature all their whiskies from new and have done so for 100 years.

Shown above are examples of the *Connoisseurs Choice*, *Cask* and *G&M* range.



The LOCH FYNE™

Blend of

SCOTCH WHISKIES

THE MALT DRINKERS BLEND™

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

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

Michael Jackson's note is characteristically analytical;

Colour; rich, sunny, gold.

Aroma; fruity (honeydew melon?).

Body; medium, slightly syrupy.

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

With typical eloquence, Charlie MacLean's tasting note wins by a nose: *"The deep amber colour of this whisky, (darker than many blends) implies age and this is supported by the (undilute) nose, which is rich and vinous, with no trace of grain. All the indications of mature fillings.*

There is an interesting aroma of apple dumpling (suet crust), and this remains when water is added, enlivened by lighter citric notes (oranges and tangerines), and by some oil-related aromas (walnuts, linseed oil). Phenolic notes are slight, and express themselves more as 'roast meat' than peat smoke. Medicinal phenols are present in a very slight trace of oilskins. Overall the nose is subtle and relatively closed. Not much water is needed for this whisky.

The mouth-feel is smooth and well balanced, engaging the whole palate with acidic, salty, sweet and dry flavours, and coming down ultimately on the side of sweetness. The overall impression is fresh and smooth—mellow without being flat. The finish is quick and clean, and surprisingly warming. It is extremely easy to drink.

Conclusion: A true premium blend which has clearly used well matured fillings. There is no harshness in it, no cereal notes or feints, no artificial caramel notes. A whisky which is appropriate for any time of the day. Perilously smooth, mellow and easy to drink."



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

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

Scotland's Gourmet magazine called it a 'gem', and noted that *'only a little more expensive than a standard blend, it appeared to be of a higher quality.'*



LOCH FYNE	70cl	£ 14.60
LOCH FYNE	20cl	£ 5.90
LOCH FYNE	10cl	£ 3.90
LOCH FYNE	miniature 5cl	£ 2.60



THE DISTILLERY

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

The cameo by Gail Gordon depicts the distillery at the time of Alfred Barnard's visit in 1885. Barnard's detailed description of the buildings enabled us to recreate the floor plan and Gail was able to complete her task from this combined with etchings in his book.

Barnard was clearly taken by the setting, the distillery and hospitality afforded him. His book devotes six pages to his visit, much taken up with details of the buildings e.g. "a new kiln, one of the finest we have seen in Scotland, it is 51 feet square" but also with the location: "It is built at the foot of the Robber's Glen which runs upwards from the banks of the canal into the heart of the hills in the background; this glen was once the haunt of smugglers, and no more romantic spot could have been chosen for the distillery."

Glendarroch was complete and well laid out. Barley was unloaded from the canal direct to the malt barns then moved through the process clockwise around a courtyard to the kiln, tun room, still house and warehouses. Whisky was then shipped to market via the canal. Eight houses were available for the workers and two for the excisemen. There was also Glengilp House and Glendarroch House for the manager and the owner respectively. At the end of his day's visit Barnard's party "donned our 'war paint' and proceeded to Glendarroch House to enjoy the hospitality of the owner".

The distillery closed in 1937, unusually as there was a distilling boom at that time, although the warehouses continued to be used for storing whisky until the mid seventies. A brief life as a joinery followed until the eighties when a salmon hatchery made use of the buildings and water which was also the drinking water supply for Lochgilphead.

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

Additional Information

Brian Townsend, SCOTCH MISSED.

MY FIRST DRAM

Jim Murray

Your first car, your first kiss, that magical moment when your dad takes you to your first football game—all milestones in your life. Just like your first whisky. There was little warning, though, that the occasion my Uncle George mischievously gave me a very large Bell's when I was about ten would one day lead to a job which is, unquestionably, the most satisfying and fun to be found anywhere in the world.

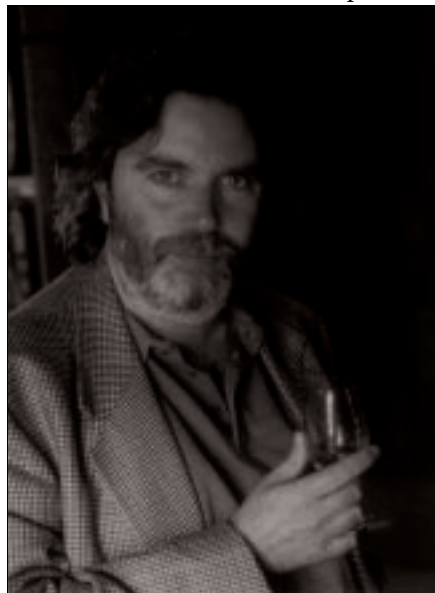
To say that my late Uncle George was a character is putting it mildly and, truth be told, kindly. He surreptitiously offered me the glass when my Aunt Charlotte was out of the room. My brother David five years my senior said "no." Somehow our opposing responses to those proffered drams demonstrated the chalk and cheese nature of our characters that became more pronounced as time went on. Of course I didn't think about that at the time; I was far more fascinated with the illicit glass of golden mystery.

I remember to this day my Aunt walking in as I held it in my hand. She warned me not to drink it, scolding her husband in the process. My brother also offered the suitable words of a more responsible and conservative elder sibling. But it was too late. There was something about the aroma, something I recognised from when I had poured glasses at family gatherings at my home, that I found intriguing. To the horror of two of the three present I drank first a very small sip and finding it nothing like as pungent and fiery as the nose suggested, poured the remainder of the contents into my mouth and held it there for a very long time, allowing a myriad of flavours so unlike the cream soda, orange squash and chocolate milkshake "Mickys" I had been weaned on, to unfurl on my tender palate.

I had what I now recognise as a slight alcoholic "buzz" from the encounter with this mouthful. But there were no tears or choking. For me it was a revelation;

I could with extraordinary clarity see why adults made such a point of buying this expensive stuff and why cowboys always ordered a bottle after a long day in the saddle and shooting up a few pesky injuns.

Like *Oliver Twist* I asked for more. And got about the same response, except for my slightly strange uncle who was entirely in favour of repeating the dose. I walked home feeling none the worse for wear, but acutely aware of my taste buds still tingling and a plethora of gastric sensations I had never believed possible.



It was not until I was 16 that I tasted whisky again. Or to be precise, whiskey. I was playing for an American soccer team called Baltimore Sportsfields, doing everything I could to get over a knee injury that threatened my sporting future. Inevitably, I met a beautiful girl and went to a party at her place. One guy was determined to smoke dope and became pretty upset when I refused to test the quality. So upset he actually put a gun to my head and promised to blow me away if I didn't join him. I didn't (and never have) even smoke a cigarette and my girlfriend used all her beauty and charm to defuse a terrifyingly tense moment.

I don't like to think what happened to the guy when some of his friends took him outside, but I remember to make amends she took me to a club and we had a few whiskeys. And it was then I tasted my first Bourbon, then another, then another. But I also remember that I never got drunk and could not believe the intense, controlled fury of the sweet vanilla-ed, spicy spirit I was drinking, some at 100 proof. This really was love and not just with the girl with the copper coloured hair and the blue eyes.

It was a further year before I encountered my first ever single malt. I was hitch-hiking around Scotland, having taken a couple of weeks off from the Press Agency I had joined. I landed at Talisker distillery on Skye thanks to a young chap with a car that hummed like a Spitfire fighter plane at full throttle. I recall the distillery was a lot more stark than I expected. But, 23 years on, I can still remember my fascination with the copper rot stills, the heat and their hiss and whine as they worked away.

Then at the end of the tour I tasted Talisker fresh from the cask. There was an internal explosion that momentarily left me senseless. Then when I realised I was still alive and in touch with at least some surviving neurones, I became acutely aware of the unbelievable things happening to my tastebuds.

That was the priceless moment I was really hooked and from then on every single whisky I ever encountered would become the subject of little tasting notes I would write in a series of specially set-aside reporter's notebooks. It became an epic voyage of discovery, beginning in Scotland, and one that has taken me to a dozen nations to visit distilleries, and half a dozen more just to carry out tastings.

There are one or two distilleries in the world I have not yet visited, but no more. And it all stems from my old Uncle George who, for all his faults and failings and just like the oversized dram he introduced me to, certainly knew how to make an enduring impression.

NEW TASTING NOTES!

"Crumbly bodied with a sweet aroma disguising a rich fruity flavour with a long finger-licking finish" is how Customer Alan Smith of Morpeth described his birthday cake made by his wife with a great understanding of his needs!



BREAKFAST!

We know about whisky and we know we like great marmalade. So do our customers, judging by the response to the Loch Fyne-fortified marmalade duo, premium seville and dark double scotch.

Premium — £ 2.50 Double scotch — £ 2.90
or £ 5.00 for the pair

ARBEG NEWS

Glenmorangie continue to invest heavily in their new acquisition. Somehow they seem to have converted a kiln into a visitor centre for Ardbeg faster than it has taken us to get a quote for fixing a flat roof. Islanders reckon that every Transit van on the Islay is travelling to or from the distillery as builders work flat out to have stage one completed by May. This is all part of a £1.5 million package including new production equipment (not including the cost of restoring the floor maltings which is still being considered). On the stock front, the 1978 vintage bottling should be available for most of the summer; the next vintage available is probably to be older.

SOMEONE HAS TO DO IT...

Leaves from Charlie MacLean's Diary

OCTOBER

At last my magnum opus, *Malt Whisky*, is published. Authors tend to feel they have done their bit when they deliver the manuscript—the fruits of months of work (10 months in my case), months of no income, with an increasingly unsympathetic bank manager. We forget the long, frustrating final haul through editing and proof reading, and this is particularly tiresome for illustrated books, such as mine, since the text has to be trimmed or expanded to fit the photographs on each spread. By the time the book is finally put to bed you are heartily sick of it, and by the time of the launch party, six months later, you have forgotten all about it.

Mitchell Beazley arranged two parties—a dinner in Terrace Conran's minimalist and uncomfortable restaurant, Mezzo, and a full blown piss up in the Scotch Malt Whisky Society in Edinburgh, graciously floated by The Macallan. Next night I had to do a tasting at Waterstone's, the following night in Perth and later in Glasgow. Peter Clarke, who writes a column for *The Sunday Times*, phoned me for a gossip. I told him to leave me alone: I had given up whisky for life. He said: 'That'll do nicely', and opened his piece with the news that 'Scotland's whisky guru' had gone tee-total!

During the week of the launch, I was invited by United Distillers to attend the International Wine & Spirits Awards annual dinner in London's ancient Guildhall. By way of stomach-lining, a couple of distinguished American journalists and I were given an afternoon tasting of the new Rare Malts bottlings—so good they are very difficult to spit—and, having reached the Guildhall, politeness dictated that one taste as many of the prize-winning wines and spirits as one decently could, all lined up in the crypts beneath the hall itself. A splendid occasion, with trumpeters and toasts galore, first rate food and wines. The 'whisky tables'—UD, Morrison Bowmore and Allied, mainly—were on a raised platform at one end of the hall. Perhaps not such a good idea, as those present became somewhat exuberant and over-excited, looking down on the wine trade. At least we showed how much we were enjoying ourselves.

NOVEMBER

I never tire of listening to Dr Swan, surely one of the greatest living independent experts on whisky production and maturation. If you read this magazine closely, you will remember that he and I are collaborating on re-drawing the whisky tasting wheel—although, since its publisher died, this is temporarily on hold. In the autumn he was

delivering the Scotch Malt Whisky Society's Whisky School, and invited me to make a small contribution on the language of whisky tasting.

The Whisky School is now in its third year; one session in Edinburgh, one in London. It lasts for a day—nine until nine (concluding with a dinner)—and Jim Swan takes a group of twelve enthusiasts (you don't have to be a member of the Society to attend) through an in-depth (dread word) investigation of every stage of production and how it relates to flavour, supported by copious tastings. It is riveting. I learn more every time I attend. I will encourage the SMWS to publicise them in this excellent journal, so you can sign up.

JANUARY

Macallan launched their new 18 year old Gran Reserva in London soon after the turn of the year. I chaired a panel of 'noses'—comprising a perfumier, a tea man (Mr Twinning, no less) and David Robertson, the distillery manager—for a tasting of some of the component casks (all exceptionally fine, first-fill ex-sherry butts) before an invited audience of journos and retailers.

'Scotland's whisky guru' had gone tee-total!

The organisers put me up in a small hotel behind Harrods in Knightsbridge. I arranged to meet four friends there, prior to going out for supper, and insisted (brand loyalty) that we drink the new product. We had two rounds. When I picked up my tab the following morning, my bar bill was £246. 'There must be shom mistake', I said confidently. Unfortunately not. They were charging £24 a measure, and £3 for a small bottle of water!

The following week I led a Classic Malts tasting at Novelli W6, a smart new restaurant in Kensington. The idea was matching food with whiskies, and the chef came up with some interesting creations for each of the six courses. Unfortunately for us, he clearly believed that malt whisky goes best with fairly heavy dishes: roast scallops with lentils; warm salad of ox tongue; aubergine soup; haggis and neeps; cassoulet; creme brulee. Lagavulin goes better with marinated herrings or smoked salmon than with cassoulet, in my view, but I was reminded that haggis anointed with Talisker, and with a glass of the same on the side, is one of the combinations invented in Heaven's kitchens.

My kinsman, the late Sir Fitzroy

Maclean, used to drink nothing but whisky and water at large dinners, where he was not sure about the quality of the wines. He always knew where he was with whisky, thought it went very well with most dishes and felt infinitely better the following day.

FEBRUARY

ClearCut, the creators and managers of scotchwhisky.com, the internet's leading whisky site (on which I have a 'presence'—the 'Ask Charlie' forum!) organised a cask selection event with Glengoyne Distillery. It was a resounding success.

The distillery manager selected six casks which he believed to be of exceptional interest—too good to be vatted up in a standard bottling. They were from 1968, '69, '70 (two casks), '71 and '72, and among the best whiskies I have ever tasted. Samples were sent to the main panel, here in Edinburgh, and to experts in New Zealand, Iceland, Germany and the USA. The notes from each panel were posted on site and, based on these, and on questions asked of the panel, the manager or each other, participants voted which cask they wanted to have bottled up. Then they could order bottles—at unbelievably reasonable prices, forby.

Talk about tailoring your product to the wants of the market-place! The event was a huge success. Perhaps predictably, the oldest cask was chosen (it was blissful, but I thought the youngest, 1972, was even better). It was sold out in a fortnight.

Plans are well advanced to do a similar tasting of Highland Park in late March/early April. I have already done a run-through of the samples selected, and can assure you they are splendid. Check out scotchwhisky.com if you are on-line.

NOW

As this goes to press, I have just heard that *Malt Whisky* has received two nominations in the Glenfiddich Awards (the 'food and booze Oscars'): Jason Low, who took the pics, as Photographer of the Year and myself as Drinks Writer of the Year. Somehow it puts all the effort—and the harassment from the bank—into a broader, grander context.

Cheers!



DÀ MHÌLE — means 2,000

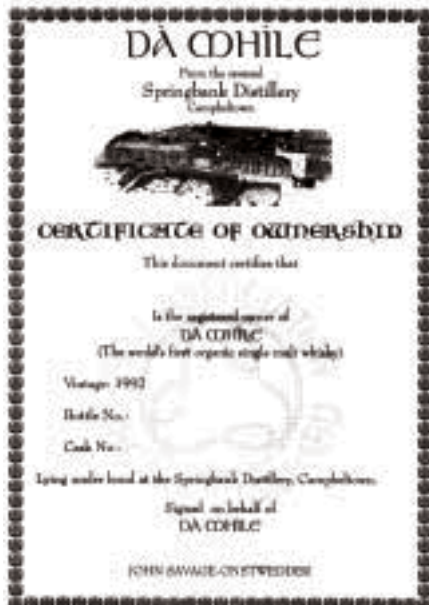
It's time to secure your bottles of Dà Mhìle, the millennium malt which is the world's first organic single malt, made possible by renowned Welsh organic farmer John Savage-Onstwedder and Springbank Distillers.

In 1992 John persuaded Springbank to suspend normal production and scrub out all the apparatus to the satisfaction of the Soil Association, the regulating body for the appellation 'organic'. This is the first truly organic malt whisky to be produced since modern distilling began some 150 years ago since non-organic chemical fertilisers were introduced in farming.

John delivered ten tonnes of approved 'green' barley to Campbeltown for malting and distilling. The entire process was scrutinised by the Soil Association and Dà Mhìle malt whisky has been awarded Registration as an organic product. Fifteen sherry hogsheads now lie at Campbeltown absorbing the organic atmosphere of Springbank's traditional earth and stone warehouses.

The first 4,000 bottles will be released during November 1999 and you can secure your cask strength 70cl bottle now for £29.50. However before you take delivery you will be billed by Dà Mhìle for the then current duty and VAT payable on removal from bond plus any delivery charges. At today's rates this additional charge would be £14.82 + delivery. (How come? Excise Duty on spirits is currently £19.56 per litre of pure alcohol so you would have duty of about £8.22 (assuming 60%alc. in a 70cl bottle = £ 19.56 x 0.6 x 0.7) PLUS VAT on the total (the old tax-on-a-tax trick) of £ 6.60).

To reserve your bottle(s) of Dà Mhìle at £29.50 per bottle, just order from us in the normal way; there is no additional charge for postage of your certificate of ownership which will be delivered to you in due course from Dà Mhìle Ltd, (please allow up to six weeks for this).



BOTTLING OF THE YEAR — HIGHLAND PARK 18yo

As a very busy whisky specialist with a large tasting stock to help us find the ideal dram for our customers, we can get a very quick and accurate understanding of the quality of a whisky by reason of democracy, with our customers voting with their taste buds.

For this reason there are many whiskies that are a real pleasure for us to sell. The list includes, (in no particular order): Springbank 21, Glenfarclas 15 & 30, Inverarity (both), Clynelish (and the new Sig. '84 bottling especially), Dailuaine 16, Ardbeg 17 and '78, the CC Port Ellen, G&M's Strathisla, OB Longmorn 15, Glenmorangie Port Wood, Bowmore 17, the Rare Malts Glenury and Brora '72 (sadly now finished), Bruichladdich 15, the new Old Pultney 12yo, Macallan 18 and the new Glendronach 15...

Various attributes make these memorable but a good response from our customers comes about as a result of quality, value and a wish for 'something I won't find in the supermarket.'

In 1997 we were so impressed with the saleability of Murray McDavid's Laphroaig that we started describing it as our 'bottling of the year'. This year we have decided to introduce a proper designation, logo and certificate for our favoured bottling.



Last September during our Heilan' Banquet, hosted by Iain Stothard of Matthew Gloag, we were told of the forthcoming new Highland Parks, an 18 and a 25yo. "They're superb", Iain told us, "Open the 18 and try it for yourselves. I love it."

Duly opened, we shared it with our autumn customers and found a very satisfying response—most tastes resulting in a swiping of credit cards. Not a difficult choice for a bottling of the year.

We told Sara Gilchrist, the brand manager responsible for Highland Park, of our choice and she was delighted, "It's a great idea and it's reassuring that the real experts, the people who are tasting with a view to buying, are enjoying our whisky. We look forward to receiving our certificate which comes in time for our bicentenary celebrations."

"If I smoked, I'd have this with a cigar" is how Michael Jackson described this great single malt in the last SWR. "It gains in richness, and spiciness: ginger, cinnamon, vanilla, fresh oak, leafiness, tobacco."



Charles MacLean compares it with the popular 12yo; "(Heathery sweetish aroma, with wisps of smoke and flavour which starts with heather honey and finishes with dry peat). The 18yo is more succulent, fruitier, hotter on the tongue and sweeter overall." (He also found a *whoosh* of chilli-pepper in the 25yo!)

For ourselves, we never really understood what the fuss about the 12yo was. Jackson described it as the 'greatest all rounder in the world of malt whiskies' but we thought it just fussy and confused. The 18yo put us straight. As with many things, in order to appreciate one you need to experience the better and we now have a good understanding of the 12 as a result of experiencing the 18. Full-bodied, a rich deep sherry-wood bouquet, soft taste of honey first then smoky-tary-peat, tongue clinging but not at all cloying, long warming flavoursome finish—clearly a great single malt.

Not content with awarding the 18 our hefty recommendation, we've also got it for a special price:

OB HIGHLAND PARK 18 43% £35.90

HP COMPETITION

To celebrate the bicentenary of the distillery, there will be a limited edition vintage bottling out this summer. Highland Park have kindly offered a bottle for us to award in a wee test.

Just write to us, stating how many times the letter 'h' appears on the UK presentation of Highland Park 18 years old, including the bottle, tube and neck tag—oh, and your name and address! The first correct answer out of the barrel at the end of October will win the prize, which will be despatched in November.

Like the whisky, entrants must be over 18.



ANOTHER HOUSE MALT?

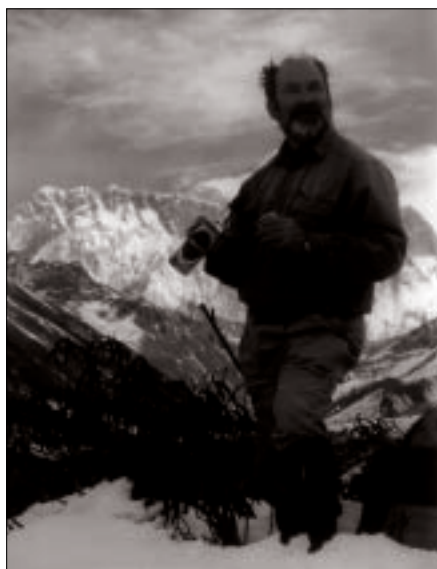
Our friends at Inverarity Vaults who are responsible for our house malt have released a second single malt called *Ancestral*. Like the much-appreciated Inverarity, this single malt is from Aultmore, one of the very few *top-class* Speyside distilleries. The difference from the standard Inverarity, matured for eight years in bourbon casks, is that *Ancestral* is 14 years old and, more dramatically (and in the case of Aultmore fillings, unusually), a 100% sherry cask matured whisky—truly wonderful!

The nose is soft, woody-sherry. Mouth feel is voluptuous, akin to red velvet but with none of the cloying that many sherried whiskies can have. The flavours are multi-complex, ranging from malt through to cherryade and the finish is long and lingering (ten minutes up to the time of writing!) Tasting trials in the shop show customers voting with their wallets to give nearly 100% conversion to sales, a very rare score.

So it would appear that we now have a choice of two House Malts:

Inverarity an all day every day dram, ideal for the novice or connoisseur or **Ancestral** a well-bodied complex after dinner dram. Why not try both!

OB INVERARITY 8 40% £18.90
OB ANCESTRAL 14 40% £27.90



WHAT WOULD YOU TAKE?

Pictured by Everest base camp is customer Woolaston who took his Xmas deal free sixth bottle of Inverarity with him. We understand the sherpa who had to lug the thing about enjoyed it too!

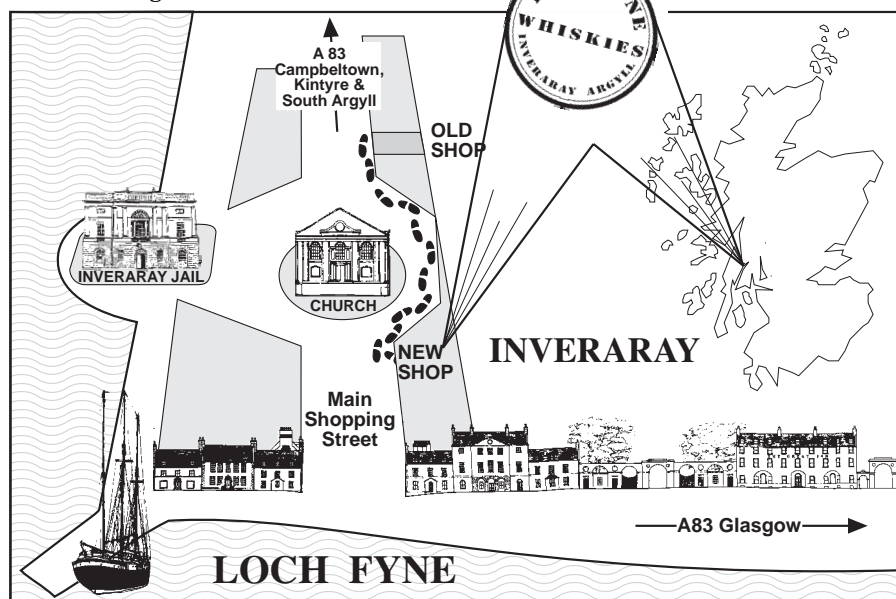


AND JUST WHEN WE'D GOT IT FINISHED...

This is possibly the last glimpse you will have of our current shop situated in Arkland, 'beyond the Church' in the centre of Inverarity. During May we are packing our trunk and moving 80 paces north to the other side of the church (just behind our delivery elephant, below right), to the top of Main Street opposite the George Hotel.

Here we will enjoy more space to ensnare even more unsuspecting punters and convert them into whisky fans.

The eagle-eyed among you will have spotted the new 'collector's loft' in the picture, installed during the winter, housing our collection of discontinued, old and rare bottlings. This will move with us.



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

We are no longer sending out Stock Lists and SWR's to prospective customers more than once. If you or a friend would like a current stock list please ask and you will be sent one with a back-issue SWR. Your name will not be placed on our mailing list for further mailings until you have bought by mail order from us. Your name will not be passed to any other organisation.



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itsup.itsrunning and you should really be outside getting some sun! As with all internet sites, ours will evolve over time, so watch that space.

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