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Dear Jurgen - for your newsletter as promised

Malt whisky Development

The Scotch whisky Industry in broad terms for too many years from the late 1950's until comparatively recently, was guilty of taking year on year growth in sales of Scotch (particularly blended Scotch whisky) for granted.

As a result, although this would be denied by the large producers, who were the most guilty, complacency was allowed to creep in, and so long as the competition did not alter their methods of competing, then everything looked to be in good shape so far as Scotch whisky was concerned.

Things do not stand still however, and the drinks industry is no exception to that rule.

Some of the smaller Scotch whisky distillers had identified problems in the future, with changing socio/economic and other factors coming into play as well as new more trendy products, and began seriously from around the early 1960's to develop the promotion of the single malts from their distilleries into increased sales of these products in the bottle.

Traditionally much of the production from these smaller independently minded companies had been sold to or exchanged with the larger companies who usually found a use for them in their blended whiskies. This changed dramatically however as time passed, and the larger groupings gradually began to become more self sufficient to the extent that it really did become essential for the smaller businesses to develop in other directions such as bottling their own malts, much in the same way as a wine producer bottles the single wine from his own vineyard.

Independent bottlers such as Wm Cadenhead and Gordon & MacPhail had for many years previously been busy bottling and selling malts from distilleries all over Scotland and introducing an eager public to the delights of drinking single malt Scotch whisky which had been denied to them by the Industry in general and the larger companies in particular.

In the last 20 years several additional independent specialist malt bottlers have appeared on the scene and along with the growth of sales from their own distilleries of malts such as Glenfiddich, Glenfarclas, Macallan, Springbank and Bowmore to mention a few, the enthusiasm for malt whisky drinking has increased world wide.

This inevitably, belatedly, jolted the large moribund concerns into action and the result is that most of the malt whiskies produced in Scotland can today probably be found in a bottle somewhere. The small, more entrepreneurial firms as is so often the case, blazed the trail only for the larger groupings to have to follow, and instead of leading the industry they were forced to concede that perhaps there was a sound case for taking heed of what was going on around them.

The obvious danger of course is that because of the financial clout at the disposal of the large companies they have the capability to make life very difficult for the little firms who have done so much of the work that ought to have been done by their big brothers.

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Newsletter from Scotland No 2

This month has seen two areas of natural beauty, and which are situated close to distilleries put up for sale. The first area of outstanding interest is the Black Cuillin in the Isle of Skye, and the second area is the top section, including the peak, of the highest mountain in Britain, Ben Nevis.

The Isle of Skye is of course also famous for the Talisker Distillery, which produces one of the most distinctive malt whiskies (fantastic, actually) in Scotland and which, although Skye is a northerly island situated off the west coast of Scotland the whisky produced from the stills of Talisker is very different in style and character to that which is produced at **Ledaig - which is smoky and peaty, slightly salty, and dry** - on the Isle of Mull which is further south, and which is a 15 minute boat trip by car ferry from the ancient and rather eccentric looking west coast town of **Oban**, which also boasts the distillery of that name and whose **single malt** is one in the **Classic six** UDV range, and very pleasant it is too; **slightly smoky, creamy, with a sweet richness**.

However, back to the Black Cuillin and why it has been put on the market for sale. This land mass is owned by John Macleod of Macleod, 29th clan chief of the Clan Macleod. It has been valued at £10m and the reason it is for sale according to the Macleods, is to pay for much needed repairs to the roof of Dunvegan Castle, the clan seat, which apparently leaks a lot of water and therefore requires a new roof. It has created astonishment and controversy that such a region of outstanding grandeur and sheer natural beauty should be allowed to potentially be sold to the highest bidder, and has raised the vexatious question not for the first time of just who does own the land and what they do with it? Meanwhile this island which has been in the news also for the protests regarding having to pay tolls, in order to cross the new road bridge, continues to distil a spirit at **Talisker** with a **character as complicated** as the local issues (of the day) which surround it. - **Huge peatiness, copious smokiness, salty, extremely pungent and very dry - As I said earlier, complicated and Fantastic!** This is another of the UDV **Classic Six** range - In my opinion it the most interesting of the six.

Skye is it's own world and Talisker is part of that world and also it's only distillery. In days gone by even the money was issued by the distillery, and was in denominations of whether or not you had worked ½ day or one complete day. It could then be exchanged for the necessities of everyday life such as bread and meat.

Back on the mainland in the wild west highlands at the foot of Ben Nevis lies the distillery called Ben Nevis. This distillery has had an interesting life passing through several owners hands including the gregarious and ingenious Canadian Joseph Hobbs who was far ahead of his time so far as the Scotch Whisky business was concerned. It is my opinion that he was not given the respect he deserved, firstly because he was not Scottish, and secondly, because he advocated production methods that were so radical as to appear to be quite heinous to the "Scotch" establishment of the day. After all who in their right mind would produce both Malt & Grain whisky in the same building (using different plant of course), as new spirit, blend it at birth, and fill into wooden casks to mature as a "Proper" blend?? Who indeed ? Mr Joseph Hobbs did, and it is interesting to note that there is currently a distillery in Scotland today doing almost exactly what Mr Hobbs pioneered in the late 1950's/early 1960's!!!

04 APRIL 2000

The message is clear, if we now return to the Ben Nevis distillery; the mountain top is owned by an English domiciled accountant, Duncan Fairfax-Lucy, who has "generously" offered it to a conservation Trust for £450k, the distillery is currently in foreign hands, but at least the director of the distillery is a Scot! Now there is a good Blend!

Incidentally the **Ben Nevis single malt is a superb dram, (Hints of fresh vanilla, spicy and very spirituous, very full and well rounded)** and, as I was partly responsible for the distillery's re-starting in the early 1980's, it gives me great pleasure to **thoroughly recommend it**, and especially under the leadership of my great friend Colin Ross.

Finally, something of **Real** "national" importance, Scotland beat England at rugby (our modern day equivalent of tribal warfare!!) on Sunday 02 April 2000 for the first time in 10 years; that almost forgives all other wrongs, and it certainly gave us something to really get excited about!! First time for a long time !!!

It's good to know that the Spirit of Bannockburn (our most famous victory over the English, in 1314) lives on, and that some things never change!!

04 APRIL 2000

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Newsletter from Scotland No 3

On 20 April 2000 the last of the milking cows were transported from Islay to the mainland of Scotland to be slaughtered. This brought to an end 1000 years of milk/dairy farming to this most southerly of the Hebridean group of islands and of course it will also bring to an end a way of life for many of the population of this remote piece of land in the ocean, which is situated to the west of the Mull of Kintyre and to the north of Ireland. Inevitably there will be job losses, and this will only add to the social disadvantages which are bound to follow. The main cause of this disaster was the closure of the creamery at Port Charlotte and therefore the inability of the farmers to be able to dispose of their milk locally. I remember very well, and with great affection, when I went to Laphroaig distillery as manager exactly 30 years ago this month, that one of the first adventures I embarked upon outside of the distillery was to find the Port Charlotte creamery and buy some Islay cheese. It was supposed to possess some sort of magical powers of potency according to a party of Italians who had visited the island at an earlier time; bought loads of the cheese then went back home to Italy. Some months later there was a mini population explosion in the area where these Italians lived and everybody said it must have been as a result of eating the Islay cheese! I do not suppose we will ever know whether this is true or false, but it made no difference to our lives!!

I am returning to Islay as host for the Islay Whisky Society's first organised tour there, on the weekend of 19 to 22 May. Our schedule will consist of distillery visits Bunnahabhain, Bowmore and Ardbeg with talks, tastings, dinners and a "Grand" tasting to be held in the Bridgend hotel on Saturday 20 May at which I will be very much involved. We will have guests from different parts of the world and they will also have the opportunity to sample fresh seafood from the waters surrounding Islay, witness a demonstration of how to make porage by the world champion porage maker (maybe some Islay malt in the porage!) and we will charter the ferry from Islay to Jura on the Friday night of 19 May to have our dinner there, and we will also do some sampling and tasting before returning across the Sound of Islay much later and after dinner, hopefully by bright moonlight. I will inform you of everything to do with this tour in my next newsletter.

With regard to sampling and tasting it is interesting that the chief noser and taster of the Glenmorangie company which also owns Ardbeg distillery on Islay is a 30 years old lady called Rachel Barrie. Nothing very earth shattering about this revelation or even the suggestion that women have better noses for the job, and while welcoming more involvement of women in the male dominated industry one of it's elder statesmen Harold Currie, who set up Scotland's newest distillery on Arran in 1995 seriously doubts that there is any difference in the nosing abilities of the sexes.

According to Rachel Barrie women are more able to identify subtleties or aromas and can also describe smells or tastes which are not always familiar.

It has been suggested that it is perhaps due to the fact that the female of the species usually takes an interest in perfumes from a young age and as a result possibly possesses more highly developed sensory perceptions than the male of the species.

This argument could run forever, and it most probably would never be resolved amicably, who "nose" ?!!

It would be interesting to learn what you think and your views generally on this, or any other whisky related matters. Your views would be much appreciated so please get in touch with me.

05 MAY 2000

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Newsletter from Scotland No 4

Islay Whisky Society - 1st Trip 19 - 22 May 2000

By and large this weekend could be deemed successful.

So far as the writer is concerned the following visits/events were good.

- 1) The visit to Bowmore distillery on Saturday morning when we were given an excellent tour around the complex by Christine Logan followed by a vertical tasting of 17 Y/O, Darkest and Cask Strength .
- 2) Norman Campbell's peat cutting demo was very informative for those of the party who attended, but unfortunately it was a pretty filthy afternoon and because the bus had to double back to Bowmore to collect those who had not made the trip to the Peat Moss, those left at the moss got a bit of a soaking. However everyone who attended the peat cutting exercise all had a shot at it . So now they are all able to cut peat!
- 3) The bus eventually re-appeared and off we went to Lagavulin. As everyone knows, for some perverse reason, presumably only known to himself, the Manager did not wish me to tour his distillery; (Paranoia??) so I didn't. I believe nevertheless that our party received a reasonable tour. Probably the typical UDV/"Cooks" tour, but at least they saw the place and received a taste! - Which is more than the nil courtesy accorded to me. Very strange behaviour.
- 4) Dinner at Bridgend on Saturday night & Formal Tasting. This is where I really felt that Iain McKenzie - actually a Canadian - (My associate) and myself really got going! The Whiskies tasted were as follows:

Vatted Inverarity Islay Malt

For a vating this was full, well rounded, certainly Islay, and I liked it very much.

Bruichladdich 15 Y/O

Good all rounder, typical Bruichladdich, and for any time of day.

Bowmore Darkest (Sherried)

Good, but too much overkill. (i.e. too dark) Not a patch on their 17 Y/O, interesting nevertheless.

Lagavulin Distillers Edition (Sherried)

Remarks could almost be identical in essence to those regarding Bowmore Darkest.

In my opinion not as well finished as the Bowmore Darkest, and certainly no match for the Lagavulin 16 Y/O.

Rare 24 Y/O Ardbeg 50% abv

Without any doubt the show stopper. Brilliant full aroma, smoky, peaty, hints of the sea breaking over the shore warehouses. This whisky had everything Islay rolled into one bottle. If any one remark described this dram it was from Bernt Viklund when after a long time pondering, he proclaimed "this is a fluid/liquid post card" This whisky was truly huge brilliant and simply magnificent.

The occasion was marked by Iain and me wearing our Kilts. He in his younger man "Braveheart" outfit, and me in my more traditional outfit of Highland Evening dress.

The dinner produced by Joan Mottram and her staff earlier on, was of a very high standard.

5) Sunday 21 May started with a demonstration of how to make proper traditional porage prior to us partaking of breakfast. This was an interesting and informative demonstration conducted by Scott Chance of the Harbour Inn, Bowmore. Scott is the World Champion porage maker, and although he originally hails from Stafford, England (But we will not hold that against him!!) which is certainly not in Scotland, he can make darned good porage. Needless to say everyone enjoyed a good bowlful!

6) Following breakfast the party went to Ardbeg distillery where they were accorded a fine welcome by Stuart Thomson - Distillery Manager. I did not go on this trip, because I did not want any potential difficulties such as those encountered at Lagavulin the previous day. In the event, it would not have mattered because Stuart Made it clear to Iain, that I would have been made to feel welcome. I certainly look forward to the visit to that fine Distillery on the next Islay Whisky Society tour to The Island! Everyone thoroughly enjoyed their visit to Ardbeg, saying that it was as memorable as the whisky itself!

7) In the afternoon following a detour to Finlaggan, (which was interesting for a few of the guests) we visited **Mr Covell at his world famous Islay Woollen Mill. What a place and what a man! This was fantastic in my opinion, a tribute to the man and his family who have rigidly stuck to the old ways.** Well done to them and keep up the good work, your products are brilliant!!

8) Dinner and Tasting on Sunday was memorable, truly. The venue was The Harbour Inn, Bowmore. Scott Chance again, (**Brilliant Chef**) and he gave us a talk on the benefits of using all local produce which as can be imagined on Islay is all "Free Range" from the fish to the cheese, which sadly is soon to be no more because of the closure of the Islay creamery at Port Charlotte. Our dinner was accompanied by appropriate Islay whiskies in one form or another, either as a sauce or in a small glass, to sip instead of wine. I had the following: Seared scallops, sirloin steak with haggis done in a whisky sauce, and finishing with a fine selection of cheeses including Islay. The meal was superb!!

Iain and I then conducted the tasting using the following whiskies:

Caol Ila 8 Y/O from Murray McDavid

Good all rounder and full for it's age. Truly Islay in character and could be drunk at most times of the day.

Ardbeg 1992 from Signatory

This was very light in both colour and character. Not surprising really, given the youngness of it, and also that it was matured in refill whisky Hogsheads. In my opinion not yet matured enough for bottling.

Lagavulin 16 Y/O

Iain's personal preference. He just adores this malt. It is certainly a big improvement on the Distillers Edition and yes, it does capture most of what is unique about Islay malts. Personally, I found it to be dry, and a bit wearsh - a good old Scottish description for slightly bitter -

Ardbeg 10 Y/O

Different in it's complexity to the Signatory bottling, has all the essential ingredients to make it "Big" but not quite there yet.

Laphroaig Cask Strength

Full aroma, rounded, salty, iodiny, smoky, full of complexity and quite frankly I like it very much.

Finally my book Wort Worms & Washbacks is on sale in Germany. In it you will be able to capture the "Spirit of Islay" in the chapters covering my years as Manager of Laphroaig. When you have read it please contact me and let me know what you thought of my experiences.

Thank You.

03 JUNE 2000

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Newsletter from Scotland No 5

Secrets of Long Life

James Hogg - a shepherd from the Ettrick area in the Scottish Border country - wrote in previous times that "if a body knew the exact quantity of whisky to take each day and stuck to that dose, I verily trow that he might leeve for ever, and that doctors and Kirkyards (Church graveyards) would go out o' fashion" (out of business).

Whisky - Scotch Whisky - "The Water of Life" has had many claims made of it and it is fair to assume that at least some of these claims has credibility.

We read and hear more and more of people living longer than ever before and all kinds of explanations are given for this phenomenon, but what do doctors really know? I asked a doctor recently what I would need to do to live to be 100 years old, and was told that I should eat a balanced diet; plenty of fish, fruit and vegetables, cut out the red meat, take plenty of exercise, limit the levels of stress, and definitely do not smoke. I was also told that alcohol in moderation was acceptable. GOOD, some sensible advice!! Then I thought a bit more about Long Life and read that a Lady in Staffordshire, England who was recently 114 years old and was declared the worlds oldest person by the Guinness book of records attributed longevity to "a balanced diet and hard work" but more specifically to a daily glass of Scotch Whisky and a portion of boiled onions! Well, I'm not sure about the onions but I agree with the Whisky!

Drink seems to loom large in the lives of centenarians. I read that a gentleman who was the previous holder of the "Oldest Man in Britain" title and who died in 1997 aged 109 years, enjoyed a daily dram which he mixed with orange and honey. Sounds better than boiled onions to me, but then again he was only 109 and not 114. So maybe the blend of whisky and boiled onions is the answer, I don't suppose that we will ever know.

What I can say with absolute certainty is that I have a relative who is now in his 97th year, and he has taken a measured amount of Scotch Whisky in two cups of tea per day (one in the morning at breakfast, and one last thing before bedtime) since he retired over 30 years ago. He is quite amazing, and he talks about all of the other old people he knows, who mostly are at least 15 to 25 years younger than he is!! He advises them to adopt his blend of tea and whisky if they wish to lengthen and enjoy good health and many more years on this earth!! So, my family is doing it's best to promote our National product, I do not know if I will live to be 100, but I intend to give it my best shot!

I have advised my relative on various malts for his "tea blend" and he has tried them from all of the producing regions.

His favourite by far is Glenfarclas

JMcD 07 July 2000

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Newsletter from Scotland No 6

Favourite Malt Whiskies

I am often asked "what is your favourite malt whisky and how should you drink it?" The question of what is anybody's favourite malt whisky must eventually come down to the individual and his or hers personal choice. It is much the same argument that could be applied to almost any consumer product, as in motor cars for instance, as to why would you buy one model in preference to another model. However there is a subtle difference of course, because with non edible products the choice may be due to looks, practicality, or possibly only the price. With malt whisky, although price is not unimportant, we tend to become totally consumed (pardon the choice of words!) in the smallest of organoleptic detail, and because there are no two people with exactly identical sensory perceptions the debate may be opened and developed in any gathering of individuals, whether from the whisky industry or purely enthusiasts of "The water of life". Also, the manner in which each and every one of us judges and assess different malts from the various producing regions is an education in itself.

We who have been trained and worked in the business can give informed pointers to the non whisky trained population, as to the differences of whiskies from one region to another, and we can also give our opinions on the different whiskies which have been produced in the same region, but what we cannot do is to tell you what you should like, or dislike, as the case may be. That is entirely the decision and choice of the individual. The question of how it should be drunk, whether without water or with water is also individual, although it should never be forgotten that for pure reasons of sobriety it is probably sensible to add at least a little water to the stronger bottlings which are more widely available today than in the past!! These offerings are usually presented by the small independent bottlers and give the drinker a more varied and interesting experience than the more run of the mill (ordinary) proprietary bottlings which are produced on a commercial scale for a wider audience by the larger companies. - That is not to suggest that there is anything wrong with the proprietary brands of course. -

The fact that we all have different perceptions of taste is a good thing, because it provokes debate, and therefore tempts us to try different whiskies and to experience and share the preferences of other people and not necessarily just to stick rigidly to what we ourselves may think is best. Therefore we may all have our own favourite malt whisky, and that is good, but to try others is a lot of fun and you should nose and taste each and everyone of them the way it suits you best and not be dictated to as to how you must enjoy it. As stated earlier we can only give you pointers, the final decision is always the drinker's.

NOTE: Later this year "John McDougall's Selection" Premium Speyside Single Scotch Malt Whisky matured in sherry casks from birth to bottle will be launched, and at the ages of 25Y/O - Strength 50% Alc/Vol, and 40 Y/O - Strength 45% Alc/Vol.

This my favourite malt whisky, that is why I have decide to bottle it, and I am fortunate to have it made available to me.

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Newsletter from Scotland No.9

I have been privileged this year to have been involved in many areas of the World of Scotch Whisky. As an Independent Consultant I take on a wide and extremely diverse variety of jobs which is most stimulating and at times thought provoking.

I am delighted to be able to use and share (at a price, but not a ridiculous one!) my experience and knowledge gained over the past 38 years directly in the distilling/whisky business and before that, in learning about grain, particularly barley- in my Father's grain business. So I have been in contact with our great industry for 45 years as an adult, and for probably another 5 years additionally, because as a boy in the late 1940's and during the 1950's, I would accompany my Father around farms and the grain markets looking, listening and learning. What I call the three "L's".

There is no substitute for experience, provided that one is always willing to learn new skills and to acknowledge that with every new and emerging generation we can all learn from each other.

This latter point became very obvious to me on a recent talk, tasting and educational tour which I undertook in all three Scandinavian countries. The thirst (please excuse the pun!) for information and knowledge regarding Scotch whisky in general and Malt whisky in particular at each venue in these countries was unbelievable. I operate on a "No holds barred" basis while delivering my talks, on the principle that there is always likely to be someone (or indeed some people) who knows more than you in certain areas of the subject. This of course tends to liven up proceedings and allows all participants to participate if they want to. I feel that it is a form of negativity to present a subject- no matter what subject- where the audience is subdued and unresponsive and the subject of Scotch Whisky is no exception. That, in my opinion would be a golden opportunity lost; after all, in the final analysis it is the very people who make up the audience who ultimately give us our livelihood, so they are entitled to have their say!!

- A point which should never be forgotten - In any case, the presenter should be kept on his/her toes otherwise the whole talk, nosing and tasting experience could easily become very uninteresting and extremely boring. If that happens you've lost the audience, and the argument which you came in front of them to promote would just evaporate like the "Angels" share, except this would be more like a situation of the whole event "Going up in flames" and ending in Hell. - The exact opposite of what was intended.

It has been an absolute pleasure to have had the opportunity to contribute my monthly newsletter during this year 2000 - especially as it is the Millenium year, because for sure I will not be contributing to anything when the next Millenium comes around!!

I am due to visit a few countries next year and maybe I will have the opportunity to meet some of the people who read these newsletters, I sincerely hope that that will be the case, but in the meantime as this year end approaches and another New Year beckons, let us all raise a glass for peace and prosperity for everyone, no matter who or where they are.

Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year.

JMcD 30 November 2000

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Newsletter from Scotland No.8

The May edition of SCOMA News (Nr.5) contained an article regarding **Bladnoch Distillery**. This distillery was "mothballed" in 1993 following the earlier controversial takeover by Guinness, of the Distillers Co. Ltd. - Later to be re-named United Distillers -. In November 1994 the Irishman Raymond Armstrong bought the distillery and he now has less than two weeks to bring it back into production within the six year span since he purchased it. It is interesting and poignant that in 1993 the distillery was closed by an Irish controlled conglomerate and that in the year 2000 (Millennium) it will be re-opened by it's present owner also from Ireland.

The distillery originally commenced production in 1817, one of only very few Lowland Malts, and it is pleasing to see that the fires of this particular malt distillery are being re-kindled under the direction of Mr Armstrong who has already laid out around £200,000 -of his own money- on essential equipment and other necessities, but as he says "this is a shoe string budget" compared to the big companies. Maybe so, but I wonder if the big companies really need to "spend" so much money to begin with? They could probably learn a few lessons in money management from people such as Raymond Armstrong,(who spend their own, and not shareholders money) and others, but how often has that been said in the past?? It is just so nice to be able to report something positive in relation to Lowland malts, because not only did United Distillers close Bladnoch they also closed St. Magdalene Distillery at Linlithgow, and worst of all they closed the distillery which (after many years of that wrong decision being taken) many people regarded as producer of the ultimate Lowland malt.-

Rosebank.

Initially Bladnoch plans to produce 100,000 litres of spirit per annum. **My tasting note of Bladnoch from around 22 years ago states the following: "Fruity, grappa type of sweetness, citrus fruit also, with a slightly dry finish."**

It will be interesting to carry out an assessment of the new production in ten years time!!

The Scots are not -so we are constantly told- an optimistic people but I would challenge that assertion; yes we have had our "highs" and our "lows", but as anyone who has personally experienced these "mountains and valleys" (and I am one of those) will tell you that "unless you have been "there", you are not qualified to pass judgement". It is the same with whisky, (Malt Whisky) we produce the best in the world so we really should celebrate the fact that Scotland's most southern distillery, **Bladnoch**, is to reopen seven years after closing down. After all when it was first distilled in 1817, Napoleon was alive, and it is really satisfying to think that this fine single malt is back with us at a point in our development, when even the French, euro or no euro, drink more whisky than they drink cognac!!

As would befit Robert Burns, Scotland's National Bard, let's raise a cup of kindness with him: A generous dram of **Bladnoch** to absent friends in the spirit of Auld Lang Syne.

The Scots are therefore optimistic after all, with just a little help from the Irish!!

JMcD 15 October 2000

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Newsletter from Scotland No.10

BRUICHLADDICH

It is said that this is the preferred malt of the people of Islay.

Whether true or not is open to question, but one thing for certain that is true, is that Bruichladdich Distillery, all warehouse buildings and the entire maturing stocks of the distillery have been purchased by a consortium led by the Independent whisky firm of Murray McDavid Ltd.

This can only be good news for Islay and in particular the immediate area around the distillery which of course includes Port Charlotte, where the Port Charlotte creamery was located until it closed last year with the disastrous consequence that 1000 years of dairy farming came to an abrupt end on the Isle of Islay. (Ref. News Letter from Scotland No.3)

The Ileachs are a proud people who over centuries, have had to endure hardships and difficulties not associated with other areas of the UK. Theirs is a fragile economy at the best of times, and the visitor does not usually see what is below the facade presented to him/her by the tourist board and others involved with tourism on the island. There is however a natural stoicism inbuilt into the populace and that, coupled with the attitude to "just get on with things" is probably the most important element of their make up. In other words the ability to take the rough with the smooth is an enduring one, and one of which the Ileachs should be justifiably proud. You could only really understand this fact if you have lived on the Island, and people who have never lived that experience, could not possibly be expected to fully understand what makes this piece of God's earth (and it's people) just such a special place.

The fact that the world renowned Jim McEwan - himself an Ileach - is involved in the consortium and will indeed be in charge of production, is not only a source of great rejoicing on Islay, but has been greeted world wide as a very positive move. It also must be extremely pleasing for an islander such as Jim to be "coming home" to re-open a silent distillery. - I well remember attending an outstanding social event in the Bruichladdich filling store almost 30 years ago. It was a wonderful party, perhaps they will have a re-opening event and we may once again proclaim that the good times are back whilst enjoying a Bruichladdich or three!!! -

I am also personally very happy that another good friend of mine, Gordon Wright (an ex colleague of mine at Springbank) the nephew of Hedley Wright, the owner of Springbank is part of the Murray McDavid company and that he is making his own impression in the whisky world without the need to live off the family name. This is the type of approach which will be absolutely necessary in the resurrection of Bruichladdich. - Pronounced "Brook Laddie"

Soon, therefore, we can hope to see the neat white distillery buildings set back a few metres from the sea, with smoke issuing forth from the north west shore of Loch Indaal, and inside the buildings, nose and consume all the delights of the distillery smells while the stills with their unusually high necks produce spirit to become Islay malt whisky for generations yet to come.

Whether or not this really is the preferred malt of the people of Islay we may never know, but it is good to know that for the foreseeable future Bruichladdich lives on.
I'll Drink To That!!

JMcD 11/01/01

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Newsletter from Scotland No.11

It never ceases to amaze me just how different we all are, and in our tastes regarding food and drink this is most amply demonstrated. I suppose that our respective climates and environments must contribute greatly to these perceptions, but also, I suspect, our cultures must obviously shape the way in which we interpret different smells and tastes.

For example, in the world today, the demand for Islay Malt Whiskies in general seems insatiable, and for some in particular almost impossible to satisfy. It is true to assert that no two people will possess exactly identical powers of organoleptical assessment, but when it comes to Islay's most enthusiasts will at least be capable of picking out an Islay in a row of glasses. Quite a number will even be able to identify the distillery of origin. They may, or may not like Islay's but a keen sense of smell joined with an idea of what to expect will probably help to separate Islay's from others.

NOTE: At Tasting events which I conduct, I never recommend that more than six whiskies are tasted, as no matter how well one cleanses the palate between drams, the senses inevitably become less sensitive.

At a recent Tasting which I conducted in the south of England, it was noticeable that people from the Antipodes preferred the **Lowland Glenkinchie** to all the others on show. The general consensus was as follows: **Nose: Light, fragrant and with a delicate sweetness. Taste: Well rounded flavour, with a dry spicy and smooth finish. Slight hint of smoke and a nice aftertaste.**

Quite a number of the attendees were from the north east of England and they, like some Irish people who were also present, preferred **Glenfiddich Solera Reserve 15 Y/O**. Their general comments were: **Nose: Powerful, spirity, sweet and medium sherry. Taste: Big on flavour, with all three constituent cask types contributing to produce an extremely complex expression from this distillery. Big finish and aftertaste.**

Of the six whiskies tasted **Oban** from the coast in the **West Highlands** was the preferred malt of most of the people from the south and south east of England. For information the opinions expressed for this dram were as follows: **Nose: Light peat reek (smoke), slightly fruity. Taste: Malty, creamy and rich, but with a subtle sweetness and a hint of saltiness. Medium/Long finish, and quite dry.**

In this group of people therefore, the nearest the taste buds reached to Islay, was Oban on the Scottish west coast. This was a very strange outcome, but as I stated earlier people are different and although they appreciated the Islay, and other Island malt in the line up, on this occasion the aforementioned three were preferred approx. 1/3, 1/3 & 1/3.

There were 45 people at this event, so it was indeed an intriguing situation.

This is what makes Scotch malt whisky so infuriatingly interesting, the fact that there are so many diverse views expressed on our drams.

Taste buds being what they are, who knows, on an other day we might well have had a completely different set of circumstances.

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Newsletter from Scotland No.12

I have had an eventful time since the last newsletter. The Borders (Border with England) region where I now live, has been victim to the worst winter weather for about 50 years. We had snow in some places 3 metres deep, the temperature dropped to around minus 25 degrees celcius, the overhead power lines which deliver electricity to this area collapsed, and many people were without power for one week. I myself was without power for around three days, and in an all electrically heated house this was very unfunny!! To complete this list of little local difficulties I was also suffering from toothache, and the dental surgery was not operational due to having no electricity, so I had to wait for almost one week before the lady dentist would pull out my bad tooth, but life must go on and my thoughts inevitably turned to Scotch whisky, and in particular Malt whisky. That's what kept me sane during this crazy week!! Freezing cold weather brings benefits as well as problems, and one of the benefits is that the distilling process is always easier, and as a general rule the spirit produced in these conditions obviously runs very cool, because the cooling water is extremely cold. As a result it is possible to collect much more potable spirit than is the case when operating in the middle of summer for example.

In my **Newsletter from Scotland No.8** I talked about **Bladnoch Distillery** re-commencing production and last week I had the pleasure and privilege of spending some hours in the company of the owner Raymond Armstrong who you may recall bought the place from United Distillers in November 1994. He has invested his time and importantly, his money - around 650,000 DM - and has brought back life to this remote little corner of **lowland** Scotland at a time in the development of the area which could not be more crucial. It was a wonderful experience for me to step back in time, and to feel the excitement of watching the process going on in the knowledge that here I was in the presence of one of life's enthusiasts, ably assisted by distillery operator John Herries who was with the distillery for at least 10 years before it was closed in 1993 and who has obviously seen the good, the bad, and now again is seeing the good side of the industry. John is known as the millman, mashman, stillman and barman!!

(He helps out as barman at functions which are regularly held in the absolutely first class reception facility.) **Bladnoch Distillery** is, as we all know, the most southerly of Scotland's distilleries and is located in the lowland region along with Glenkinchie (UDV) which is situated around 30 miles from my house near Edinburgh, and Auchentoshan (Morrison) just outside of the west of Glasgow. **Bladnoch** is the most remote of the three and is situated in a beautiful location, much nicer than the other two, and is a joy to visit. I would recommend any enthusiast of malt whisky to make time to visit this little "jewel". You will not be disappointed.

Anyway, back to the cold weather and distilling. I have now had the opportunity of assessing the new spirit being produced at **Bladnoch** and it is everything a good lowland malt ought to be. I can't wait to see the fully mature whisky which will roll out in 8 years time and onwards but life being what it is, I suppose I will just have to!!

JMcD 21 March 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No.13

I was not surprised to read in the Scotland on Sunday newspaper dated 25 March 2001, the article which was entitled: **Big-shot whisky makers turn vibrant villages to ghost towns.** As some of you may know, I have been involved with the whisky industry one way or another for a very long time; probably 40 years and a little more. I therefore understand the dismay which must be affecting many of the small townships and communities, that were the villages, surrounding some of Scotland's malt whisky distilleries.

Some of the large multi-nationals, most notably Allied Distillers, Seagrams, and there are others, have embarked upon a trail of devastation and desolation by emptying the distillery villages at some of their distilleries most notably in Speyside, by adopting a policy of distilling campaigns for short periods by visiting "Hit Squads". - Sounds good and romantic doesn't it? - Most poignant for me of course is the situation at Tormore distillery on the A95 Grantown on Spey to Aberlour on Spey road, which by location is deep in the heart of Speyside. I stopped there one Saturday afternoon at the end of September last year, and was deeply shocked and saddened at what I saw. Here was a previously vibrant and prosperous community which had been emptied, apart from one house so I was told. I had had the good fortune to be Manager of Tormore for three and a half years in the mid 1970's, and was so proud of the fact that I had been asked to manage the first completely new malt distillery to be built last century, and when I went there it was just 13 years old. Apart from making the very best malt whisky which was possible to make, one of my principal tasks was to bring together the workers and their families who nearly all lived in the distillery village which had been specifically created at the distillery. We fostered the concept of community and built up a spirit of camaraderie, and brought life to an otherwise lifeless area, but now because of decisions (presumably to "Maximise Shareholder Value") taken 100's of Kms. away from Speyside and probably by non distilling people crunching numbers, the distillery and it's village is a sad looking effigy of what had been built up over a period of 40 years. The same thing has happened at Ardmore distillery in Aberdeenshire which has been established for over 100 years, both of these distilleries are owned and operated? by Allied Distillers Ltd. Seagrams are no better, having done exactly the same with The Glenlivet distillery, one of Scotland's most famous, and also the first distillery to operate under a distillers licence granted by H.M. Customs and Excise in 1824. These are indeed modern day Highland clearances, no more justified than their unillustrious predecessors of earlier times, the decisions to clear everyone out taken with the same disdain as in those dark former times. It is obvious that some of these companies have totally lost their whisky direction, and that they are like rudderless ships on a rough sea. Greed avarice and questionable management by "Armchair Distillers" have now disrupted, and possibly wrecked the lives of good honest working men and women in some of the remotest parts of Scotland.

Why? I doubt that even those who took the decisions really understand that question, and even worse, probably do not want to understand.

JMcD 10 April 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No.14

Pulteney distillery, which is the most northerly of Scotland's mainland distilleries and is owned by the Independent company Inverhouse Distillers, has just seen the sales of it's malt - "Old Pulteney" - from that distillery, increase by over 30% this year. The company says that one of the reasons for this progress has been due to increasing popularity with the younger trendy pub-going drinkers. Inverhouse launched the malt seriously in 1997, and they report that turnover has risen by 25% each year since then, culminating in the excellent figure of 30% for this year. Personally I am not surprised, as I have long regarded Old Pulteney as a top class malt and it is extremely gratifying to know that in this dram at least, there is a product that not only the older person can enjoy, but also the younger sisters and brethren amongst us. I was asked to produce a brief Tasting note on a single cask sample (cask strength) of this whisky only last week; 1990 distillation, here it is: **Colour:** Mid golden, **Nose:** Slight smell of the sea, peaty and smoky, **Taste:** Slightly salty, earthy and malty, with a firm body, **Finish:** Salty, warming and long. - Looks like they have a winner on their hands and good luck to them!

Campbeltown has been in the news in recent weeks, for positive and negative reasons. The good news is that the people who own and run Springbank distillery - Scotland's oldest family owned distillery - have procured the buildings of the old Glengyle distillery in Glengyle Street, with the stated intention of refurbishing it and installing the necessary equipment in order to restart operations around five years from now. This building now has a new sign on the wall which proudly proclaims: "Mitchell's Glengyle Distillery Co." It was, I am informed, founded in 1873 by William Mitchell & Co., and was bought from them in 1919 by West Highland Malt Distilleries Ltd who also bought Ardlussa distillery in the same year, only to close both of them, Ardlussa in 1923, and Glengyle in 1925. West Highland Malt Distilleries Ltd was a consortium led by Robertson & Baxter and was dissolved in 1926-7. Robertson & Baxter however went from strength to strength over the years, becoming a seriously influential player in the development of Highland Distillers and elsewhere in the industry. Anyway, good luck also to J & A Mitchell & Co Ltd in their project

of re-incarnation. We all hope to still (pardon the pun) inhabit this planet when the first drams of mature Glengyle are available in around fifteen years time. - I will have been receiving an old age pension for some ten years when that happens!!

The bad news for Campbeltown is the announcement of the closure of the Jaeger menswear clothing factory in the town with the loss of 145 jobs. This has been partly offset by the news that a wind farm is to be established on part of the site of the old RAF airfield at Machrihanish (might make for an interesting flight path in and out, for the civil aviation operators!!) and that over 100 jobs are to be created. Campbeltown is one of those unfortunate places, because of geographical location principally, the town has suffered more than most over the years, and needs all the encouragement it can get, I enjoyed, and am proud of my 10 years as Manager of Springbank, but the town was always economically deprived, and therefore for me at least, a very difficult place where one could come to terms with life,

outside of Springbank. The distillery has however amazingly managed to survive not only the local problems over the years, but also the fearsome ups and downs of the Whisky industry, which ravaged the area initially early last century, and over the ensuing years not least, due to the ambitions of world domination by the larger groupings. It is testimony to their resilience, and of course a brilliant whisky.

JMcD 03 May 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No.15

Islay! Islay! Islay! That seems to be what has been in everyone's mind and on everyone's lips this past few weeks. I was there from the 22 May thru' 31 May and of course this period encompassed a good proportion of the Islay Whisky and Music Festival. My reasons for being on the island at this time were twofold: first and foremost I was involved for the second successive year in co-hosting visitors from New Zealand, Austria, America, Canada and England on behalf of the Islay Whisky Society and secondly I, along with hundreds (it felt like thousands!) of others from all around the world wished to be present to witness a piece of modern distilling history being made. - Yes, the re-opening of Bruichladdich Distillery on Tuesday 29 May 2001. Islay Whisky Society guests were present to see this event and they were thrilled to be present. What, with a "fly past" and a couple of victory rolls from a private executive jet, over from Italy I am informed, plus all kinds of other interesting "goings on" culminating in a fantastic fireworks display from Bruichladdich pier after nightfall it was quite a day to remember! Of course we were involved in taking our guests to various other establishments including Bowmore distillery (Christine was fantastic again) Caol Ila where Neil Ferguson did us really proud, Laphroaig which was savoured to the full, especially by those of our group who are "Friends of Laphroaig", Lagavulin which was appreciated, especially the unpretentious reception area, where our guests were treated to their after tour dram. Let us not also forget Ardbeg, where John our tour guide didn't quite break his own record of around two hours for a most impressive expose of the distillers art!!

In the evenings the group, who were staying in Octovulin House situated on the Islay Estate, sat down and were treated to the most magnificent meals - all traditional Islay dishes from Islay meat, fish, fowl etc. cooked to perfection by Rae Adams, the wife of the Estate's Head Gamekeeper - which were then usually followed by a tasting of old, not so old, and some very rare and expensive bottlings of various expressions of Islay Malts. I was privileged to be able to talk about these whiskies from an Islay distiller's perspective, passing on much of the background to some of them. We were joined for part of our stay by Marcin Miller, Editor of Whisky Magazine, who was an interesting and illuminating presence at two of our evening soirees.

Yes it was a memorable week, **good** company, **good** food, and Very **Good** Islay Malt Whiskies. You could say that this was Islay's answer to the Isle of Man's Tourist Trophy motor cycle race week (which unfortunately was cancelled this year due to the foot and mouth epidemic), only we had "the Peat Bog Faraes" and also Norman (Master Peat Cutter) Campbell, and that's something that they cannot aspire to.

JMcD 12 June 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No.16

There are some extremely interesting bottlings from independent bottlers at the present time. I had the exciting task of assessing and conducting tastings with the following bottlings during the past two weeks:

Bottlings

26 years old Ardbeg OMC from Douglas Laing at 50% abv - this was absolutely stunning - 23 years old Caol Ila from Hart Bros. at 43% abv - this whisky was obviously quite a bit lighter in body and of course less spirituous than the Ardbeg but was nevertheless very good. I also had a good tasting with Cadenheads 10 years old Laphroaig from their Authentic Collection at a strength of 61.9% abv. This was, as you would expect a very strong, powerful dram indeed.

It is a source of great debate among some aficionados as to what the ideal bottling strength ought to be. Certainly if bottlings are at natural cask strength the individual drinker can make his/her own choice as to how much dilution takes place in the glass and therefore is able to drink the whisky to their own individual taste and to suit their palates.

I also had the opportunity of tasting an old bottling of 12 years old Lagavulin - distillery bottling at 43% abv and compared it to the present day offering of 16 years old. Then I compared these two with 1980 distillation Distillers Edition, double matured. This was a fascinating experience, and I must say that the 12 Years old stood up very well indeed. In fact it was a really superb dram, smooth well rounded nice body weight and a good long aftertaste. The 16 years old and the Distillers Edition were also first class but it was intriguing to taste the 12 years old, which was probably bottled around 1980 and was of course the preferred bottling age for Lagavulin at that point in time.

The final bottle that I looked at was a 1980 bottling of Laphroaig - distillery bottling -. At 10 years old it was distilled in 1970, and I therefore was probably responsible for the distillation as I took up my managerial position at Laphroaig at the end of April in that year. The whisky would have been distilled before we doubled the capacity of the distillery. As a result, the large spirit still which was installed at the re-building, would not have been involved with this distillation. Although it is fair to point out that direct coal firing had given way to indirect heating by steam coils. Another interesting aspect of this particular bottling is that by the time it was bottled I was in charge of Quality Control for the Company (Long John International) so therefore was also responsible for the final quality of the whisky and of course it's presentation.

In this business one's past has a habit of catching up with you!!

JMcD 17 July 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 17

This year it is safe to say that we have not had good summer weather and in fact there has been so much rain that one could be forgiven for thinking that we should be running our malt distilleries during the months of June, July and August.

Perhaps it is only my imagination, but I seem to remember as a young man, nearly 40 years ago, that we were constantly short of water in the summer months, and that was one of the main reasons for the 'silent seasons' being so long. Of course there were other reasons, such as most of the distilleries having their own traditional floor maltings, so when the distillery was silent the workers could be usefully employed cutting and collecting the peat required for the next season. Also we used to cut and gather up huge bundles of heather which were taken back to the distillery, and made into what we termed 'heather besoms'. These were essentially natural brushes formed, then securely tied onto the end of a long wooden pole the length being such, that from the bottom of a washback whilst standing in the centre, the top of the vessel could be reached. Of course, most of the fermenters were of wooden construction in these days something which I very much favour - and in order to keep the wood "sweet" and also because it is a natural occurring flower, heather was - and still is - an excellent medium for cleaning wooden washbacks. In those days, the work was very much more physically demanding than it is today, and it was felt that it would be good for the health of the workforce to spend some time out of doors in the fresh summer air. Money was not plentiful at that time, and distillery workers were no exception to that rule, so all of the outside work which was performed in these long silent seasons was also quite theraputic, (or at least perceived to be), as it was not at all unusual for the workers not to be able to afford to go away on holiday. Things have changed dramatically over the years however with the modernisation of old distilleries, and different, updated working practices, such as the larger companies only operating a particular distillery for literally a very short period before closing it again and moving on to another group distillery using the same 'flying squad'.

I suppose in the 21st century this way of operating possibly makes economic sense, but the mystique disappears in this situation, the passion and sense of belonging that was so cherished by the previous generations disappears. In short, an entire way of life is in danger of being extinguished. Thankfully, not all distillers operate in this fashion - mostly it is the small companies who do not - and long may they remain independent and different. As young managers we were always told that the most important resource which a company possessed was the human resource.

Oh for the days of peat cutting and heather collecting, or maybe it's just my age !!

JMcD 13 August 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No.18

In the wake of the atrocious events in the USA, and given that the World already seemed to be sliding into economic recession, it is a daunting prospect that now faces all businesses and the Scotch Whisky Industry is no exception.

Many distilleries are already working at well below capacity, and indeed with stocks having grown too much over the last two years there have been cutbacks of 10% in 1999 and 12% last year with industry analysts recommending more cuts for this year and also next. The stillman at Strathisla - one of the country's prettiest distilleries - and only one of five people, is unsure of whether he is now working for bosses in Montreal's Seagram, or Paris's Pernod-Ricard. He is also having to cover two distilleries because there is so little to do.

Unfortunately it is suggested that whisky even today is perceived as a drink not for young people, but for your father and grandfather. The traditional whisky market as we know it is literally dying out and since 1979 the quantity consumed is down by 41% in Britain and by 63% in the USA. However the dram's world wide appeal has continued to grow, with most of that action taking place in Spain where demand has rocketed in recent years making it now one of the largest of the world markets. This is most likely to be more true of the blended product than malts, although the latter category is also being drunk increasingly. Interestingly, and not surprising is the fact that a recent survey showed that nearly 65% of all whisky sold in Spain is in bars and happens between 1 am and 4 am.

According to the Scotch Whisky Association, Greeks now drink more whisky than ouzo, and the Italians, like the Spanish, are big late night/early morning drinkers especially of Glen Grant. In France, more Scotch Whisky is sold than Cognac and Asia, especially Japan, they already are great enthusiasts of all things Celtic. Germany is a very mature market in that malts are very much to the fore and appreciated, and of course Scandinavia especially Sweden, is increasingly becoming more influential.

So, even allowing for all of the world's difficulties, and they should be minimised at our peril, life must continue, and it can only achieve that target by all of us keeping cool, calm and collected. We must resist all temptation to withdraw, and remember that as whisky people we have one common denominator - "The Water of Life"- Finally, in this newsletter I feel that it is wholly and completely appropriate that we all spare one minute of our time to reflect how fortunate we are, and when we are enjoying our next dram pay our own personal respects to the many from more than fifty countries who have not been so fortunate.

Sincerely yours,

John McDougall. 19 September 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No.19

I recently read a newspaper article entitled "Is the water of life slowly draining from our glens? "

This was quite thought provoking and is a question we should not treat lightly, and if you look at a partly filled glass of our amber nectar one could almost be forgiven for asking "Is it half full or half empty? " like one part of the world when compared with another part, and that is a matter which the industry will require to address in the not too distant future. Certainly the huge conglomerates will find it increasingly necessary to identify where the market is headed for, when it's produce matures in the next several years. This is the biggest challenge which they inevitably must confront in a world where their traditional markets have evaporated like the 'angels share' over the past 20 years, and unfortunately continue to evaporate. The problem that the big boys have is that for nearly 100 years the industry has thrived and prospered for the most part, on the back of ever increasing sales of their blended products, and while that was happening product innovation, speed of thought, fleetness of foot and basic street credibility (common sense) were things that seemed to disappear from the scene. As is well known, things do not remain the same forever and the need for fresh thinking is as important today, if not more important, than it was in the early pioneering days of the Dewars, Buchanans and Grants of this world to name but a few.

Of course there is no shortage of good talent around and it is pleasing to see that some of this talent is manifesting itself in ways which would have pleased the great men of the past. In recent times there have been a number of interesting and exciting developments such as the buy out a few years ago of the Inverhouse business by it's management, and they have progressed their business in a positive fashion. Then there is Signatory Vintage, the world's second largest independent whisky bottler under the leadership of Andrew Symington and which company is reportedly in negotiation for one distillery on Speyside and another one in the Highland region. He missed out on Ardbeg, and it is stated that he also considered the recently re-opened Bruichladdich, also on Islay and Glencadam at Brechin. Bruichladdich as most malt drinkers will by now be aware re-opened as a single distillery company in May of this year, under the watchful, experienced and very capable hands of the Murray McDavid (independent whisky bottlers) management team and have breathed new life into a small area of Islay and elsewhere. In the Lowland region the intrepid and mercurial Irishman Raymond Armstrong, with no defined whisky pedigree background has taken Bladnoch Distillery by the "scruff of the neck" and breathed fresh life into another otherwise sad and silent area, so it can be done but it takes guts (or as we might say 'Bottle'), determination, self belief, skill, and not least an enormous amount of effort. There IS a place for the smaller more specialist companies, the customers want them, otherwise there would be none. Obviously, they cannot compete on the scale of the large legions, nor would they wish or attempt to do so, but it would be surprising if this is not the start of a new revolution in the industry, and something that will continue to evolve; if the glass is to remain at least "half full!!"

John McDougall 16 October 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No.20

Since last month I have been extremely busy on design work for what will be the first malt distillery to be built this century in Scotland. It is going to be located in old disused farm buildings at Rockside Farm west of Bruichladdich, and close to the old celtic cross at Kilchoman. Indeed the name of this "baby" distillery will be Kilchoman and what we are really doing is turning the clock back to the traditions of how malt whisky was originally produced. We will grow our own barley on the farm, we are going to construct old fashioned floor maltings, install a mashtun with wedgewire floor, little wooden washbacks and two little stills. The wash still will be heated using a live flame which will give a roasted and toasted type flavour to the low wines, and of course we will be able to peat our malt as lightly or as heavily as we please. It is really exciting, knowing that it is not everyone who is given the opportunity to be involved in such a project to create something which hopefully will last for many many years. This distillery will restore to eight the number of distilleries on Islay and when asked recently what type/style of spirit we were going to produce, the honest answer I gave was that it would be Kilchoman style.

The website to visit for information regarding progress of the distillery is www.kilchomandistillery.com

Things keep changing in this great industry of ours, and since last month Whyte & Mackay/Invergordon Distillers has been bought in a management buy out from the Jim Beam company and is now effectively Scottish owned again. However The Inverhouse company has been sold for a reported £56 million to a Thai entrepreneur so what I wrote about that company last month is now history!

I will be involved later this month in a series of talks and tastings in various towns and cities in Sweden and I am looking forward very much to the tour. It will be a tough schedule but it gives me another opportunity to spread the whisky gospel.

Up on my return I will be involved in a weekend residential whisky school being held at Bladnoch Distillery and this will be attended by around eight people from all different parts of the world. They will be able to mill, mash, operate in the tunroom and the stillhouse. We will have talks and tastings in the evenings and at the end of the course each member will receive a miniature of the new spirit that they had produced, plus a signed certificate by distillery owner Raymond Armstrong. It should be good fun! See website www.whiskyschool.com

It is a healthy sign that there are people like Raymond Armstrong and others in the smaller companies who are prepared to open up their distilleries and give of their time in the pursuit of keeping Scotch Whisky (particularly Malt Whisky) in the forefront as the world's most famous drink.

John McDougall 12 November 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 21

All my life in this business I have maintained that it should be fun to be a part of the Scotch Whisky Industry, that the product should be drunk, enjoyed, and bring some real pleasure into our sometimes difficult lives, and nothing that has happened during the past year -2001 - has done anything to dissuade me from that long held belief. We only get one chance to be on this planet, and the consumption of the world's biggest selling libation should be used wisely in pursuit of a fulfilling tenure. There is however a growing tendency to regard whiskies (I mean malts) from certain distilleries far more highly than those from some others. Also there is the increasing fad of regarding some makes as highly collectable, as investments to be locked away and never see the light of day until possibly the owner(s) is dead and buried and their offspring, who probably do not appreciate the malt whisky business or culture, sell the inheritance for as much as they can, for somebody else to repeat the process. Perhaps I am missing the point, but I was of the opinion that whisky should be enjoyed. - Funny way to enjoy it. Even ancient and extremely valuable motor cars are paraded and driven from time to time!! It can be readily appreciated why, for instance, a really old bottle, or set of bottles possesses an inflated value, because like any other commodity, the rarity factor will increase the value, it is the old question of supply and demand. Also, sometimes whiskies from a well known distillery can capitalise on that distillery's reputation by bringing out replica (reproduction?) bottlings as is presently the case with one of Speyside's best known distillery's. Having the genuine ancient article is one thing, but trying to recreate authenticity, and therefore presumably profit on the back of that reputation, is quite another matter, and some people might say, should probably be viewed with a degree of cynicism by the prospective purchaser. As I said earlier, certain malts are more highly regarded in the consumers' eyes than are others, when we all know that some of the others are absolutely delicious and excellent. So, is it all down to marketing and creating the right amount of hype? Who knows, but of course this argument could rage on for ever. As for me as we approach yet another all too frequent New Year, I'm going to enjoy a few drams with special friends, because I believe that whisky is for drinking, to help us reflect the past, and give us inspiration for what lies ahead in the future. I have had an interesting year, travelled quite a lot, talking and tasting, spreading the gospel of the merits of drinking malt whisky sensibly, and therefore enjoyably. Finally I have ended 2001 with the wonderful prospect of fulfilling a lifetime ambition, of designing and building a malt distillery in the coming year 2002-Kilchoman Distillery, Isle of Islay. Merry Christmas and a very prosperous and Happy New Year - Slainte -

John McDougall 17 December 2001

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 22

Sales of Scotch Whisky in the last three months of 2001 were at record levels in general and none more so than in the U.K. Not only did blended whiskies sell well but so also did malts, this is a trend which looks set to continue well into the future. The interest in Scotch Whisky, and malts in particular is phenomenal and I am learning literally each day of people from all around the world who are desperate for knowledge and information about nearly every aspect of our great business and of course our heritage, our skills and culture, all of which are extremely complex.

This has now been amply demonstrated at the two 3 day whisky schools held at Raymond Armstrong's (an absolutely fabulous character) Bladnoch Distillery under the banner of www.whiskyschool.com the most recent of which was held over the weekend January 18th to 20th. Fourteen people attended from eight different countries, (Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, USA, Scotland and England) and it is a wonderful thing that happens, quite apart from the teaching of how to make the cratur. What happens is quite simply, that people, usually who have never ever met before, and having learned of the opportunity that the school provides, sign up online to attend, and subsequently turn up at the distillery. So, because of the love of Scottish malt whisky, and of course Scotland itself, people are brought together in a setting that not in their wildest dreams could most of them have ever imagined that they would. For these three days we are effectively divorced from the outside world so it is also therapeutic for everyone involved including me. - It is important that the "gospel" is dispensed by someone (not necessarily me) who as we say in Scotland "does not have an axe to grind". Unfortunately the employees/representatives of large companies do not have the same opportunities as we Independents have, to express truly individual opinions. It is fascinating to listen and to learn of the motivations of all these individuals (and of course that is exactly what they are, the same as malt whiskies) in recognising that especially in malt whisky we have one of the most important of God's gifts to man; it truly is something with which we Scots are absolutely privileged to have had bestowed up on us (with a little help from the Irish!) and it is up to us to uphold, preserve, and pamper this most marvellous beverage out of the larder of life itself. The problem that we humans actually have is, that we sometimes think that we have invented Scotland's National drink. The people (who one way or another were gifted enough) to whom we are indebted are our ancestors and they were much more clever than we will ever be, but we should take their vision and foresight and try to take from them the courage and the "guts" to stand up, be proud, and not only for the "Malt" but for this beautiful land of ours which we will only really grace in the "twinkle" of an eyelid in the bigger scheme of things. Anyway, we live in exciting times for our industry and things "are a changing", what with all the recent activity in terms of companies changing ownership and the end result due soon of the Seagram sell off - Watch this Space !! - Ultimately however the real power lies in the hands of the consumer, THE MOST important piece of the entire jigsaw puzzle. Let us never forget this reality, because without him/her our industry would count for nothing.

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 23

I find the world quite bizarre really. Roughly about 33% of the whisky industry in it's entirety is about to change hands once again. - And Frankly I am Bored with it. - In the final analysis Scotch Whisky (Particularly Malts) have been promoted by the "Punters" - the drinkers; The Real People. These are the individuals who keep us all alive. I am pretty fed up and hacked off with people who are mis-informed and purport to think they know better; usually second hand accountants. It is about time that they all "grew up," as my Late Mother would have said.

The Scotch whisky industry is guilty of capitulation. It keeps on selling itself short, by allowing overseas money to take it over, and not always in the best interests of the people it says it loves. I find this continuous process very tiresome and to be honest, and more so, exceptionally objectionable. On the other hand, our Beer Brewing industry is far more Scottish than our so called "Scotch Whisky Industry". Scottish & Newcastle Breweries have just invaded Russia and bought the family controlled Finnish drinks group, Hartwell - whose prize possession is BBH, it's Russian joint venture with Carlsberg. This is brilliant and the CEO of S&N has said that BBH's Baltika beer brand was the biggest in Russia, and was exploiting the move by younger Russians away from Vodka to beer. Of course this is all very well but to believe the switch from Vodka to beer especially in Russia will happen overnight is like living in "Cloud Cuckoo land" But then we Scots have always been a little bit Nuts!!!! Apparently BBH has 30% market share in Russia and is also market leader in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Hartwell is also claimed to be Finland's leading beer company.

I find this all quite exciting actually, because it is about time that we Scots started to become a wee bit aggressive again. We made our reputation as a country by being adventurous, and we were, - my own Grandfather faked his age on his passport to go to India when he was just 19 years old and became a Tea Planter!!, and why not? -

That's what it is all about, being daring and taking chances the young peoples from all their countries, that is where the future for all of us lies.

I am an enthusiast of the World really, and I love nothing better than seeing good sport. As a young man I loved motorbike racing, and I have watched all the old videos of the Isle of Man - 1939 Georg Mier , and Jock West BMW 1st & 2nd - I have also watched and seen the Great Geoff Duke and, the best of THE BEST, the Late Great Bob MacIntyre who was of course a Scotsman!! (The first man to lap the Isle of Man at 100 mph on an Italian Gilera after a glittering career on British Nortons.) He was tragically killed in April 1962 in a high speed crash at Oulton Park in Cheshire, England, on, at that time, a 500 c.c. Honda. He was the best rider never to have won a World Championship.

So back to the start, we must stop being stepped all over!!!

John McDougall 18 February 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 24

I visited Scandinavia from the 01 March thru' 08 March and carried out a series of talks and tastings in four major cities. I sailed from Newcastle to Oslo overnight and it was good fun if not a little rough in the middle of the North Sea. I was not sea sick however, and managed to sleep quite well!! The event in Oslo was well attended by a number of people who I had met on a previous occasion and also some people who I had never met in my life. The talk was around the theme of Traditional Malt whisky production methods and embraced all of the old fashioned tried and trusted procedures that we were taught when I first entered the Industry 40 years ago. It is quite amazing just how few of us there are left (still walking, far less alive!!) who can still recall the genuinely old methods and therefore it always gives me great pleasure to be able to inform the generation of today's whisky drinkers (particularly malt whisky) just how it was in my early years and of course pre that time. In today's world when nearly all aspects of our lives are dumbed down, politically correct, sanitised and inevitably bland I feel it is vitally important not to forget that this great whisky industry of our's in Scotland at least was created and developed by hard working men and women of great character - and really began from farming, as an offshoot of it in fact, and it seems to me the more I travel around that this has been often forgotten in recent times, or worse still not nowadays known or recognised at all by a great many people connected to, or closely associated to the trade. Too often there does not seem to be the true whisky, or a certain kind of hard working background and passion in certain sections of the trade, that there used to be, and until fairly recent times at that. Members of the general public all around the world keep on giving me this depressing message!! Therefore the sermon I "Preach" is well accepted by most people to whom I talk and Scandinavia is no exception to this; I have found that REAL whisky enthusiasts in many countries do appreciate REAL whisky people. We did two comparative tastings 12 Y/O Lagavulin (distilled around 1968 by traditional methods, floor maltings/coal fired stills etc.) against the current 16 Y/O. Both are excellent drams, but in all the Scandinavian cities visited, the 12 Y/O came out on top. That tells you something!! We also did a 35 Y/O Bowmore cask strength @ 45.4% abv, from memory, (Traditional methods - Hart Bros. bottling) versus Bowmore's standard 12 Y/O and the reaction was approximately 70/30 in favour of the older distillate; again there must be a message in there somewhere!! Other cities visited were Copenhagen, Malmo and Gothenburg. I addressed all audiences on the Kilchoman Project and the rationale behind it. Naturally I stressed the central theme of taking malt distilling back to it's roots so far as it would be practical to do. This message was extremely well received in all four cities. We intend to visit Stockholm separately in early May for a similar round of events. Then we sailed back to Newcastle across an even choppy North Sea but again I managed to sleep right through the storm. If only the storm's in life generally were so simply eliminated!! It was then on to two days of appearances at Whisky Live in London on the Stand of whiskyschool.com which was also shared with Raymond Armstrong of Bladnoch Distillery, where the schools are currently held - a fabulous character if ever you met one - A REAL person, never mind distiller!!) and his charming wife Florence.

This was a most enjoyable event, which had the usual hiccups - which event does'nt ? - was staged in the massively impressive Horticultural Halls in upmarket London Town. Then it was back home for a few days, before setting off for the Whiskies of the World Expo in San Francisco. More about that in next month's newsletter.

John McDougall 22 March 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 025

Following my tour of Scandinavia, I spent three days at home resting and also catching up on things that had accumulated on my desk during my absence. Then it was on the move again, catching the train at Berwick just over the Border into England (incidentally the Scots want Berwick returned to them as we were forced to hand over the town to the English as part of a ransom in 1174 to buy the freedom of King William the Lion, whom they were holding to ransom for the amount of 10,000 merks - 6,900.00 GBP - and we have offered to buy it back for exactly the same amount; we are waiting patiently for an answer!!) on to London stay overnight at Heathrow then on by United Airlines to San Francisco arriving at around noon local time on Friday 15 March. The reason for this trip was of course to attend and to take part in the Whiskies of the World Expo now in it's third year and run annually. The event is held in the Nikko Hotel on a Saturday which this year was of course the 16 March, so we had a little time to look at bits of the city, and as it was my first visit to the west coast I tried in the limited time available to breathe in the atmosphere, as I do wherever I go, and I must say that situated where it is right on the Pacific Ocean S.F. is most impressive. I was there as part of the effort to promote the whiskyschool.com business and also Bladnoch Distillery where the schools take place. Additionally, I was thrilled to have been asked to be a speaker and was allocated around one hour to talk about my life and times in this great industry of ours, the hour just disappeared for me and I could have gone on for much longer, but as my wife reminds me from time to time "You just like the sound of your own voice!!" The show itself ran for five hours from 1700 hours to 2200 hours and there were rumoured to have been 2,400 people passed through, certainly it was extremely busy on the [whiskyschool](http://whiskyschool.com) stand, as we had a constant stream of people (of all ages) eager to learn what it is all about.

Actually it was incredible just how many women were interested in learning about the schools and their questions tended to be very searching!! - We were assisted in this task by two San Franciscans, husband and wife team Peter and Jocelyn Freilinger who had attended our school in January and who better to tell their own countrymen and women than two people who had actually attended.....brilliant!! I met and talked to literally hundreds of people and of course at these events no two persons are there for the same reasons, some are there purely out of curiosity, to attend talks by particular speakers, to meet distillery managers, master distillers and to mingle with some of the experts from the Whisk(e)y World. Others indeed might be there to nose, taste, and enjoy whiskies which may not in all probability be available to sample in the normal course of events, and to add to the evening's enjoyment there is the opportunity to listen to a Scottish Ceilidh Band, a Fiddle Band, witness a Guest Master Chef in Culinary Demonstrations, partake of Buffet Supper which ran all evening, so absolutely no excuse for leaving the hotel feeling hungry!!

I believe that the effort involved in making the journey to the Expo was well worth while, it was well supported both by producers and public alike. All too soon it was over and after only a few hours sleep it was off again on Sunday morning to the Airport and back to the U.K. I personally would have preferred to stay a few more days just to see some more of California, who knows, maybe next year?

John McDougall

15 April 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 026

I was back in Stockholm 06 - 07 May for a talk and tasting. 35 people attended.

We tasted Bruichladdich 30 Year Old from two quite different bottlings:

Official bottling - Bruichladdich Single Cask 30 Year Old First Valinch to commemorate the re-opening of the distillery and ran it against an Independent bottling: Adelphi Bruichladdich Single Cask 30 Year Old. Adelphi are one of the "Grand Cru" Independent Bottlers.

They both nosed and tasted extremely well, and there was much debate as to their respective merits. In the end the Official bottling just edged it, but not surprisingly when we looked at our glasses again later, Adelphi's offering had improved so much it was unbelievably good.

We then proceeded to run 12 Y/O Lagavulin (distilled circa. 1968) against the current 16 Y/O and it was well favoured. An old Bowmore distillate (7 Y/O, distilled approx. 1955)

was much favoured over the current Legend offering which is not really so surprising.

Laphroaig, as most of you will know was one of the favourite distilleries that I managed during my time running distilleries, and it was of course great fun for me to be able to run 1960 distilled, 1970 bottled Laphroaig against the present day 10 Y/O. It was just in a different league, No comparison!! Everybody - with perhaps one exception - thought the 1960 distillate to be outstanding. I knew what to expect, and was not disappointed!!

With the exception of Bruichladdich, these malts were produced in the old distilleries, long before the stills were converted to indirect steam heating. Interesting!

I should have attended the Whisky 2002 event in Limburg, Germany on 18 - 19 May as a speaker where I was due to deliver two talks. Unfortunately, the only talking I did was to tell anyone in the air transportation business on Friday 17 May prepared to listen, just what a "joke" they all were, because for the third time in two months the brand new "all singing and all dancing" British air traffic control system failed and we were grounded. Depending in which part of the UK you happened to be at the time, and also which carrier you were booked on, very largely depended on whether you could travel in the following 24 or 48 hours. I was informed that with Ryanair from Prestwick it would be 48 hours, arriving just when the show would have been closing!

I was really disappointed, as I had prepared well for the paying public and anyone else who might have listened to me. Also and much more importantly Raymond Armstrong of Bladnoch Distillery had very kindly donated three bottles of his very fine 10 Y/O malt whisky - independent bottlings from Signatory Vintage, and James McArthur - in order to dispense it to my listeners, this was a brilliant gesture, and I feel sure that my audiences have missed out big time!! Hopefully there will be another opportunity in the future at least to drink the Bladnoch even if you have to listen to me also!!

I would also have taken the time to explain to interested people about the whisky schools which take place at Bladnoch Distillery. Why not contact them yourselves on their website www.bladnoch.co.uk and address your communication to Raymond.

I also would absolutely like to meet some of you who I know for sure I would have met and spoken with in Limburg. All the very best.

John McDougall 20 May 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 027

In issue 24 of Whisky Magazine there is an article entitled School Rules. This of course refers to the phenomenon which is the whiskyschool. Three of these remarkable events have taken place at Bladnoch Distillery the most southerly distillery in Scotland and situated in the village of Bladnoch in Wigtownshire.

The most interesting thing in my view regarding this piece, is that it is a direct and absolutely authentic reflection of the experiences of some of the participants from the three schools.

What makes the schools so enjoyable is that here we have real whisky maniacs - as one of the guys described himself - in many instances travelling vast distances from many countries of the world turning up at Bladnoch and thinking quite often that they don't really understand why they have made the journey in the first place. That attitude is dispelled from the moment they are met at Barrhill train station by Raymond Armstrong (Distillery owner), or by James Thomson who operates the site whiskyschool.com or indeed if they have been brave enough to make their own travel arrangements to the distillery. The gatherings usually commence with a relaxed coming together on Thursday evening with an informal bar meal in the Bladnoch Inn under the ever watchful eye of Audrey and her staff!! Audrey is the Landlady of the pub and contributes in a very complementary fashion to the success of these weekends. The food and drink she serves is not bad either!! Raymond is the "Headmaster", his mashman/stillman John Herries, myself - referred to, with the grand sounding title of Course Leader - and up to now John Glaser - Compass Box Whisky - and Jamie Walker, Adelphi Distillery have been his willing teachers. I tell you one thing, school was never like this when I attended as a boy!! This leads me to the intriguing point that in recent times there have been more and more references to Master this, and Master that, in relation to distillers, blenders et al. It used to be that one was described as a distiller, or distillery manager, blender or at most head or chief blender. I suppose like many other aspects of our lives it is inevitable that our vocabulary will change. I think it is a direct development from the wine industry with their Masters of Wine. Certainly in my opinion there has been a distinct shift towards the vocabulary of the wine people during my 40 years connected to the whisky business, and of course the moves by various bottlers into using ex wine casks of different origin in attempts to give the consumer a wider selection of finishes from which to select. Therefore when all things are considered it is probable that all the changes in attitude, vocabulary/description etc., was inevitable. The question is, what will be next ?

Just as an aside, I have read in one of our newspapers that Kyndal Spirits, the producer of Isle of Jura malt whisky have presented Argyll and Bute Council with a bill for more than £225,000 for losses it claims are due to a "laughable" ferry service alleging that the inefficiency of the service has lost the company money. Michael Heads, the distillery manager (not referred to in this context as Master Distiller - just a passing thought -!!) says the Isle of Jura ferry had been a disaster since it's introduction four years ago. He said his firm which relies on the service to transport it's goods to the mainland was at the "end of it's tether". Of course it should not be forgotten that after the short crossing from Jura to Islay, the goods then have to be loaded on to the ferry from Islay to go to Scotland proper!! It's a difficult, weird and wonderful life is it not?

John McDougall 21 June 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 028

"Quality Products Must Be Based on Home Produce" is a phrase that we in Scotland are beginning to hear more and more, and Malt Whisky is not excluded from this cry. As many of you will be well aware, especially those people I have had the privilege of meeting in person, I have long held the view that there is a misconception in the general description....."Scotch Whisky". After all, there is Single malt whisky, Grain whisky, Blended whisky, Vatted malt whisky etc. etc. So, how should this confusing (for very many people) state of affairs be sorted out ? For a start, and to make matters even more perplexing, let us look more deeply at the fastest growing sector - the malt whisky market -. In this sector we have the proprietary bottlings, like the Classic Six which have been produced from mixing large numbers of casks together, all from the same distillery of course, reducing the strength to their designated level then bottling. Then there is the more recent tendency by some companies to "finish" their malts in casks which are more innovative than has traditionally been the case. These casks could have contained Madeira, White wine, Red wine, even Calvados!! The whisky when finally bottled could be at cask strength, or the more usual 40%, or somewhere in between, and could have been chill filtered, non chill filtered so you begin to get the picture ? Then there are the independent bottlers which in my opinion is an industry within an industry, and which if viewed positively, ought to be regarded as an asset within the overall umbrella, and embraced as being the watchdogs of the industry at large, and by their learning very rapidly what is missing in the education of the consumer. Taking this information "on board", they then attempt to bottle what the perception from the consumer tells them ought to be bottled. More often than not what will emerge is single cask bottlings, and usually at cask strength, but not always, there are some outstanding exceptions, including my own about to be launched **John McDougall's "Whisky Life Series"** which will be filled into 50cl bottles -Dark Brown- and at 50% abv. Up to this point we have only briefly considered the malt sector, but what about the others ? and do we really recognise, with particular reference to blended whisky, as being true "Scotch" whisky in the accepted sense of the word ? I have tasted and drunk many extremely good whiskies blend and malt in other countries of the world, and very good some of them were too, not "Scotch", but good. There is an increasingly strong case being argued from the Scottish barley growers, that malt whisky, is what puts the "Scotch" into Scotch whisky, and it must be produced from Scottish barley - and no other. It has also been recently suggested, that what is required is a ruling that a single malt cannot be called "Scotch" unless it is brewed, distilled and matured in Scotland from Scottish water and Scottish barley. Personally, I would go even further and add "must be bottled in" Scotland. So far as Grain whisky is concerned, the producers could continue to use whatever mix of cereals is cheapest and convenient. It is after all an entirely different product to malt whisky, containing around 90% of other cereal in the mash bill, and very often from places as far apart as America, South Africa and Yugoslavia and therefore it could be argued that although produced in Scotland, maybe it is not Scottish in the truest sense. This whole debate seems to me to be in it's infancy, and the Scottish farmers - the barley growers - have stated that they expect all sorts of protest from the whisky industry re: the possible proposed requirement regulation of having to use all Scottish grown barley for single malt whisky production. Food for thought, this could really run and run. Watch this space!!

John McDougall 19 July 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 029

To continue on the theme of last month that "Quality Products Must be Based on Home Produce" Several things have not escaped my attention during the last four weeks. For instance, take the subject of barley once again, Scotland's farmers are now making their collective voice heard more vociferously than in the past. With good reason too, in my opinion, because the prices that they have been receiving for the first class malting barley which they grow has, in the last few years, been quite frankly insulting. It is no wonder therefore that more and more of them are opting to put nearly 25% of their good arable land into set-aside and receive payment from the E.U. set-aside fund, instead of growing crops for the production of all manner of final products, not least, much needed food for the 90% of poor people on the planet. On average 55.00 GBP (approx. 82.5 euros) is all that our farmers have been receiving per tonne for top quality malting barley. I can well recall that when I was a young teenager following my grain merchant Father around the fields of Fife, the Lothians, and Couper Angus to examine the crops while still growing, and the debates which would take place between the farmer and grain merchant (possible buyer) in a spirit of friendly rivalry in order to see where there would be a coming together on the issue of price, samples being got by Father taken to various corn markets around the country to try to achieve the fairest deal for both grower, and merchant. The best deal inevitably could be struck with the beer brewers and the various (at that point in time) distillers. That was circa 1954/55 and at that time it was possible for a farmer to achieve 12.00 GBP (18.00 euros), that was top price, for one tonne of malting barley. This means that per tonne the farmers receive only now, just over 4.5 times more than they did in 1954. A pretty poor return in any body's language. For goodness sake, I was earning 750.00 GBP per year in 1960 before coming into the distilling business (when of course my pay was immediately reduced by 50%!!) and if my income had only now reached 4.5 times more today, I would now be earning the princely sum of 3,375 GBP!!! I don't think so, do you?? In the meantime the big companies have got bigger, and purchasing power (or the mis-use of that power) has become the name of the game in order to squeeze even 1p off the price. I know this from personal experience of someone who has worked for a huge drinks company and who has cringed when seeing the operating methods of professional purchasing managers. – I call them "Hired Assassins" – Of course the sellers would have a "fall back" position to take account of these situations. I leave that to the reader's imagination!! It is good to read therefore, that there is a movement (small), emerging within the industry small players of being able to positively identify from where the malt for their distilleries originated from. In this context I was fascinated to read somewhere that Raymond Armstrong, of Bladnoch distillery recently visited an organic farm situated close to Bladnoch which grows the barley from which comes the Bladnoch whisky you will be drinking sometime after 2012, Locally grown (and in this case, organic) barley for the local distillery. Great!! A community looking after it's own, but also going global, of course it can be done if there is the WILL to do it. – Personally I can't wait to see and taste it!! Power to Raymond's elbow, and all other distillers who will establish an identifiable trail from field to bottle. This is an important first step in putting back some of the integrity which the industry has forfeited over the past 30 years or so. I wonder if the big battalions will try to hijack this initiative just as they did with the movement to popularisation of single malts ?

John McDougall
27 August 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No.03

I have spent most of October travelling in the US visiting several different towns and cities and also a few states, and talking to individuals, groups of people and also large audiences.

I started off my tour in California, flying into San Francisco from London Gatwick via Cincinnati. This was a Looooong day, as I travelled non stop from my Scottish Borders home for 27 hours before I reached my first place of rest on American soil!! This was in a Best Western in the town of Merced and I don't have to tell you that I was completely exhausted. Having slept well, I got up next morning and had a decent breakfast with my associate and just could not take in that the sky was so blue and the sun was shining so bright and hot, what a contrast from the weather I had left behind in Scotland. I was in California for eight days talking a lot about whisky to a lot of very interested people from all walks of life and from extremely diverse cultures and backgrounds. I had been to California before of course but never in such depth, and it certainly is a different experience, you could grow almost anything in this state, it is just so fertile. No wonder they produce good grapes and then good wine and why not ? the climate is just right! It was not all work of course, my hosts took me to visit Yosemite National Park right on the edge of the Sierra Nevada and this was totally breathtaking and awesome with mountains stretching up into the clouds as high as 4,000 metres, it was simply fantastic, and this is a park probably about the size of Scotland!! It is in fact situated in the middle of the old gold rush country, and the wild life is everywhere, including bears!! Also the sycamore trees which stand almost 100 metres high are a wonderful sight, for trees of such a height to only have roots which go down to approx. 1 metre is almost unbelievable.

They take their name from a Cherokee Indian Chief.

I also did some tastings on this tour mostly of the following malt whiskies:

Glenmorangie standard 10 Y/O and Glenmorangie Port wood finish

Balvenie Double wood and Glenfiddich 15Y/O Solera Reserve

Laphroaig 10 Y/O, Lagavulin 16 Y/O Dalmore 12 Y/O Macallan 18 Y/O and a

James McArthur bottling of Bladnoch 10 Y/O –silver medal winner- at cask strength of 58.5% abv., and talking about strong malts, I did two live radio shows of one hour, and the other of three quarters of an hour respectively, both in the Cincinnati area, and the host on one of the shows (both of them were 'phone in shows) a guy by the name of Mike McConnell – quite a livewire character – tried a few drams on air - he was due to finish work just after our show! – but out of the four we presented he loved the Bladnoch at 117 degrees US Proof!! And he also really liked the Balvenie Double wood. This was an extremely interesting show and went out to as far away as Texas, so we got good coverage. The other live show, on another station was with a celebrity chef, Jimmy Gerrardy who indeed does own and run a wonderful restaurant near Cincinnati, and his specialty is sea food. This was an amazing experience being on his show and also Mike McConnell's, taking 'phone in calls from members of the general

public and giving answers in quick time. We finished off in downtown Cincinnati proper by doing a live talk/tasting event in a very large pub, called the Barrel House Pub and Brewery. There were around 200 people present and I talked them and tasted them through all eight whiskies mentioned earlier. This was a well supported event, both by the paying public and whisky distribution companies, and by being supported also by the Pub owner, Mike Cromer, who supplied a fantastic buffet supper included in the price, I believe that this was probably one of the best events in which I have appeared. We may think many things, but the Americans can arrange and stage a damned good show!!

What else have I been doing, good question ? Small Distilleries:

- 1) Ladybank project: I think I should make it known that I am not involved in any way, at this time, with this project. The Ladybank website states that I am one of their experts. Expert....perhaps? One of their experts ? NO, not at this point in time.
- 2) Kilchoman: It should be understood that in most project assignments that I undertake, and this one is the same as most others, and that I am only a consultant and not the owner of the project. That said I am informed by Anthony Wills – the project owner - that he is confident that the Kilchoman project will re-start, probably early in 2003.
- 3) Blackwood Distillery, Shetland: This is a very exciting project indeed and one with which I am delighted to be associated with. The project initiator is Caroline Whitfield (CEO) who along with Dr.Arthur Davies, (who was largely responsible for the establishment of the new distillery in Wales two years ago) and Joanna Dennis, Financial Director, of great acumen in such ventures, form the executive team. Dr Jim Swan, probably the world's most noted expert in taste/taste profiles and other directly associated matters is one of the retained experts, and also a non executive director, as is myself, and who is also described as Master Distiller. Finally the distillery design is in the capable hands of Bill Rankin, undoubtedly the leading distillery design expert in the world, and who incidentally was one of my bosses (as a director of the Long John International Company) when I was with Long John International.

It's funny how things have a habit of coming round and meeting you again way down the line!!

I really like the "feel" of this particular project, it just does have so much in it's favour, not least the mystical remoteness (and I really mean remote!!) and it's extreme closeness to the Norse culture. I believe this is truly going to be "The Northern Star".

I will be in Denmark for a series of events end of November/beginning of December in my role as Independent Whisky Consultant, NOT employed by any other company; that's the way I like these things!!

John McDougall
16 November 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 032

Blackwood Distillers' £3m project to build the first distillery in Shetland is progressing satisfactorily. It is amazing to consider that distillers have ignored the Shetlands over the years, because the climate is absolutely amazing for the mashing, fermentation and distillation of top class malt spirit. Also as a result of the extremely high levels of relative humidity the conditions are perfect for the maturation of the spirit, on the island. This is most important! The site which has been selected for the construction of this most exciting of recent proposed Scotch malt whisky distillery projects is outstanding and simply breathtakingly stunning. It is situated literally on the sea shore on a voe where the wind howls in for most of the year at near gale force, whipping up the sea into a frenzy of white foam which lifts into the atmosphere and will pass through the production and maturation buildings, unseen but contributing in no small measure to the final character of the whisky to be produced. How do I know this ? Because of my experience as manager at Laphroaig distillery in Islay, where although conditions are very similar they most certainly are not identical to those in Shetland where, it is my contention, that the influence of the natural elements will probably have a greater impact on the product than in Islay. That of course will only be true of a comparison in the future of all Islay matured casks and Shetland matured casks. Frankly I cannot wait for that day to dawn, and I would be willing to bet – if I was a betting man, which I am not – that it will be the same as the difference in the native tongues themselves, namely that the Gaelic of Islay is so diametrically opposed to the Norn which is spoken in Shetland.

All of this takes me to something I read recently in a trader's house publication, where it was suggested by a well known person in the whisky business – an independent bottler - that maturing Island whiskies on the Island of production did not in any way make the slightest difference to the final product as opposed to it having been matured in a warehouse off the island and on the mainland. Such a notion was described as being "poppycock" or some other such description, and this is of course a sentiment with which I take serious issue. When I was manager of Laphroaig we conducted maturation trials in conjunction with our company scientists where 99 ASB's were cut three ways for maturation. 1 x 33 casks were kept at the distillery, 1 x 33 casks were warehoused in normal variable temperature racked warehouses at our Glasgow installation, and the remaining 33 casks were warehoused in a temperature controlled unit which we had had constructed also in Glasgow. These were monitored over a 10 year span and from an early stage it was obvious that each lot of 33 casks was maturing differently and displaying different characters. Finally after 10 years All three segments WERE very different, with only the Distillery (Islay) matured casks displaying the true characteristics of Laphroaig as we knew it, even taking into account the changes in character which occurred following the introduction of the large spirit still in 1972.

John McDougall
14 December 2002

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 033

Another month has passed by, and information regarding the various new whisky distillery projects continues to drip onto websites around the globe.

If you have not seen this posting then I hope you can make sense of it, and if you have seen it, then I apologise for that, but in my considered opinion it is very biased towards one of the project's and Not an Island one!! It is also unfair and ill informed in it's comments regarding the **Kilchoman** Islay project. – See Footnote -

Site referred to: Website: www.scotchwhisky.com/latest/newdistilleries.html

Blackwood Distillery Website: www.shetlandwhisky.com Location: **Shetland Isles**

Unique selling points – Most northerly in Scotland, only distillery on Shetland. –

Advantages: * **Romantic island location** * **No other distillery for 100's of miles –**

Shetland is 100 miles north of the Orkneys (ref. Highland Park) and only 180 miles west of Norway * **Has distilling Industry veteran – John McDougall – as a consultant.**

Advance cased sales offer: 2 cases £560.00 Age of 1st whisky to be released: 3 Years old and 5 years old.

The site goes on to give details of their own project **Ladybank Distillery** in Fife and makes a big play on the central Scottish location and several other features including Project owners – Club members who buy 10 casks as futures, or advanced sales -. Specific mention is made of the youthfulness of “The Team” who according to the report will see the project to maturity over the next 25 years. That is a very bold statement indeed!! **Glengyle Distillery** in Campbeltown is also discussed, and this project is now due to come on stream early 2004.

Footnote: **Kilchoman Distillery** This is the current news from the Kilchoman project founder. “There have been a few false starts, but obtaining funding is moving forward and if all goes to plan, they hope to have everything in place on the site by the end of the year (2003)”. The editor of www.scotchwhisky.com NOTES: “Kilchoman has not maintained it's website after the 2nd false start (it fell out with a team with whisky marketing and new distillery experience) and it is not known if they plan any features for enthusiasts in terms of futures or special facilities at the distillery. It must be noted that remote or island distilleries maybe more romantic but they are much less practical locations for visitor centre business, pretty hopeless for local barley growing (All Islay barley for malting is currently shipped in from England) and have countless additional costs because of their longer supply routes. All of this requires additional up-front funding to cover the years prior to mature whisky becoming available. It was a very hard slog for Isle of Arran and the further out the location, the greater the costs will be”.

It is interesting to know that the team which had the “fall out/disagreement” with the Kilchoman project is the same team now pushing Ladybank, and who presumably if the deal on offer at Kilchoman, had been to their advantage would have stayed with that project and owning and operating an island distillery might not have come in for the same kinds of comments/criticism as they now do!! Anyway I wish all the projects good luck and it will be fascinating to see which one(s) eventually come to fruition.

John McDougall
27 January 2003

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 034

It is always interesting to know what malt whisky enthusiasts perceive as being the heart of Scottish malt whisky country, and whilst not seeking to minimize in any way the enormous contribution made to the industry in general, and the malt sector in particular by the Islay region, it seriously should be remembered that there are several other regions which contribute in just as great a measure to the prosperity of our National drink. This point was reinforced to me this month, because whilst meeting with my colleagues on the Shetland Team in Speyside We had the opportunity (some of them for their first or second time only) to travel the length and breadth of that great region, breath in the fantastic clear air of the Glenlivet area, witness the opening day of the famous river Spey Salmon fishing season, (a world famous event in itself) see some superb distilleries from the outside, and also the inside, and the feeling of all of this fantastic industry around me brought back memories of my training for this business (in this very part of the country 41 years ago) flooding back in bucketfuls. These experiences are absolutely precious and totally irreplaceable!! In other words, "If you haven't done it, don't imagine you can talk about it!!"

Two distilleries which we visited, and which are at opposite ends of the production size scale were Glen Grant, which I last visited in 1968 – how it has changed!! – now a quite large distillery, and the fantastic little hand built (yes, that is exactly what it is) Speyside Distillery situated near Kingussie situated in the foothills of the Cairngorms. This distillery has been operating for 10 years, after having taken 12 years to build. The distillery's founder is George Christie now in his 80's, but still very much alive ! and it was he who had the vision, foresight, fortitude and damned Scottish stubbornness to see this project through. This is a remarkable little distillery, built by a remarkable man, and with a remarkable story to tell. I personally learned just so much about the Scots, and of course by definition myself, through meeting with George Christie, and listening to what he had to say.

I feel sure that my other colleagues on the Shetland Team felt the same way and that they all came away from Speyside Distillery feeling enriched and better able to face the inevitable challenges which lie ahead in the creation of what will be the most Northerly distillery in the Scotch whisky business. This of course takes me back to Islands, and Islay in particular.

Islands have a charm but also they present challenges all of their own, exactly because they are Islands. They have a mysteriousness about them which simply cannot be replicated on the mainland, and the week following our visit to the Speyside area we all gathered for a series of meetings on Shetland, visited the most sensational site imaginable, the future home of Blackwood Distillery, and where I reckon is going to be produced One of The Great Malt Whiskies, to be created in the Scottish (Norwegian ?) islands. Don't just take my word for this, but also no less an authority than Dr. Jim Swan, renowned throughout the world as an expert in aroma's and tastes in the world of Scotch whisky, malt's in particular!!

Therefore, whilst recognising that historically all the distilleries currently operating up and down, and across the Highlands, Lowlands and Islands have mostly been established for 100 years or more, time stands still for no man, and life progresses.

If it did not, none of the present day distilleries would exist, and we would still be lumbered with the Square Wheel!!

John McDougall
27 February 2003

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 035

In recent times I have listened to, and read several comments and general observations regarding the topic of "Soapy Whisky". This appears to be a description given to bottles of malt which for one reason or another do not exactly match the expectations of the consumer. I will share some of these expressed views with you in this letter:

Mark from California comments: I hav'nt tasted what I would call "soapy whisky" yet. The one "off"-tasting whisky I have is a Bowmore OB 10 Y/O, purchased at a questionable neighbourhood shop, whose storage conditions could not be confirmed. The bottle was corked, but strangely so. There was a noticeable fungal growth on the inside of the cork, and the cork had rotted away on it's outside surfaces, and remained seized to the inside of the neck of the bottle when I removed it. The cork just pulled it's center out of itself. Very weird smell and taste, but no real soap as such.

Stig from Denmark comments: I have tasted soap in several bottlings. Mostly from independent bottlers. This is a shame, as I prefer independent bottlings and these soapy whiskies may give the independent bottlers a bad name. I have also heard people talk about soap in some of the Bowmore distillery bottlings.

Ake from Sweden comments: I have at present two malts without cork/mouth finish. Glen Scotia 14 Y/O with a plastic screwcap and a half bottle of Deanston with a metal screwcap – both distillery bottlings -. I prefer the plastic one which has a better quality gasket. Metal screwcaps often seem to have a gasket made from paper with a thin plastic foil which is OK for short term storage but hardly lasts. Corks are traditional but are inferior if you want a tight seal – just put your nose into the tubes and smell the whisky vapours for proof!!

Keiron from England comments: I reckon the cause of soapy whisky could have something to do with letting the yeast work for too long in the washbacks. At first I thought it could be the odd time that a lump of soap is chucked into the stills to calm everything down, but that didn't sound right either.

Fran. From Scotland comments: I have a bottle of Edradour which quite frankly is undrinkable. It just reeks of soap and suds – most disappointing.

Auti from Pennsylvania comments: "Soapy Whisky" ? maybe it's all down to poor cask selection.

These are all factual points of view expressed by people who love their malts, and whilst recognising that we are all entitled to air our opinions, I must emphasise that these are not necessarily views held by me.

It is my sincerely held belief however, that if you produce top quality new spirit and then fill that spirit into "clapped out" casks this exercise would be a complete waste of time and effort, and MONEY! If, on the other hand top quality new spirit is filled into top quality casks and then stored employing good warehouse husbandry then chances are that a first class malt whisky will eventually emerge. Casks (first class) are absolutely crucial to the quality and character of the matured malt whisky, **Nothing** less than that will do. What is the point of knowingly doing differently ? , unless of course the casks in question were originally intended for blending purposes!

John McDougall 28 March 2003

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 036

Much has been written and commented on recently regarding the sale of well known Scottish malt whisky distilleries and the absolute knowledge that there are a good few more which could be purchased to the right people and of course for an appropriate price to the seller. To many people, they cannot understand therefore, the need or indeed the benefits of building new distilleries/companies four of which are currently planned and indeed are all at different stages in their development cycle.

On the one hand, the question could, and probably has been asked by many, "why, if there are all these distilleries available, is it sensible to build new ones?"

With the utmost respect to those people, I would suggest that they have missed the point completely!! The point being, that the distilleries which are up for sale, and which have recently been sold into new ownership do not/did not "fit" with the business plans/strategies of the selling companies, so therefore in there infinite wisdom the strategists have won the day in these companies. Time alone will prove whether the decisions which have been taken, will be successful. By the time that happens however, today's decision makers will have moved on, as is usually the case – I know about such matters from personal experience ! – It should not be forgotten however that the industry went through this kind of "musical chairs scenario" around 100 years ago so there is nothing new in most of what is currently happening. Back to the new projects, these will all be bespoke facilities, only producing "Hands On" quality malt whiskies in such small quantities but with the additional loving care that only small/tiny can provide. Therefore the industry is really polarising into what appears to me to be three distinct camps: (1) The Giants who are catering for the mass market world wide (2) The old and the new Independents who have bought some of the recently available distilleries and also in some cases very good Blend brands. (3) The New projects with their hopes and dreams still intact, and when some, or all (hopefully) come on stream will add a definite enrichment right across the spectrum. All this activity is good for consumers as it makes for a broader based competition and this has most certainly not been the case for some quite considerable time. More importantly it ought contribute in no small measure (no pun intended!) to building a more individual and responsible "Brand Loyalty" . This can only be in the best interests of the farmers, the maltsters, the distillers, the warehousekeepers, the bottlers, the packagers, the hauliers, the distributors, the shopkeepers, and last but not least the people who fund it all, THE CONSUMERS!!! Too often ignored to the extent of arrogance shown to them, but without whom there would be no whisky business!! I am therefore more optimistic than for some time about the well being and future prospects for our Great industry, and would sincerely congratulate those companies who in only the past few days have either extended their distilling activities or those who have joined the ranks of becoming distillers.

Well done to all those companies, but also let's now absolutely encourage those aspiring new distillers and their projects. They will be "The new kids on the Block!!

John McDougall 24 April 2003

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 037

I am writing this newsletter whilst on holiday in the area known as Middle England. It is in fact where my wife currently resides, having recently retired from the Ministry of Defence based in Malvern, approx. 60 miles south west of Birmingham. I have now been here for quite a few days, and I must say the heat is pretty different to that which I left behind me in Scotland. 25oC compared to around 10oC!!!. This makes for much "food for thought" in that it is perfectly understandable why England, generally speaking is a country well renowned for it's many, and fine beers, and that again in general terms, it is well known and understood that for much of any calendar year the temperature is considerably higher in the more densely populated areas which are south of a line of Manchester. This also goes some way to understanding the average English person's lack of appreciation and knowledge in relation to Scotland's National beverage and in particular Scotch Malt Whisky!!

However there must be, indeed there is, a growing band of malt pilgrims in the area of Britain, south of Scotland, known as England!! and they are slowly discovering the joys of the "cratur" and becoming increasingly influential in our "John Barleycorn" world. "GOOD" I say, and about damned well time!! For far far too too long there has been this happy state of the "whisky is whisky" ain't it ? approach, or even worse and in tune with most Americans "It's all Scotch" as if every individual blend and every single malt was all the same..in other words just one big pond of the same product!! Absolutely preposterous a notion of course, and as I have stated above, the English (or at least some of them!!) and more and more now the Americans (a small percentage, and of course it only needs a small percentage of 300 million people!!) have "grasped the nettle" regarding the difference initially between a blend and a malt, and are currently progressing into the more fragmented areas of the dozens of single malts on the market, proprietary and otherwise, then there is the BIG, and very SMALL question of the various expressions now being bottled mostly by the Independents, the SMALLEST of whom I am proud to say is the John McDougall/House of MacDuff stable. It is one thing to be amongst the biggest, when down is usually the only other way to go, and quite another, when you are definitely the smallest, and contrary to popular belief "Hands On", and certainly NOT an "Armchair Bottler", as many were described by the second largest independent in one of Whisky Magazine's many articles in praise of (Independent Bottlers) the second largest!! This brings me back to the better educated approach now being adopted by many of the U.K. selling companies, particularly Tesco, the leading food and drinks market retailer, who have come out in favour of replacing traditional cork bottled wine products – due to the wine becoming musty as a result of questionable quality corks growing mould – a view I have been expressing as being entirely relevant to Single Malt Scotch Whisky for some quite considerable time. Incidentally, Tesco are promoting this approach across their range of expensive wines and not just the "cheap and cheerful" lines which of course they also carry. In the meantime, I will continue to drink the excellent beers on offer in this part of England for one more week, my favourite of which is "John Bull", and now I have written this newsletter, I can now get on and enjoy the luxury of doing very little in the "brains" department as well!! In the meantime I sincerely hope that all the people involved with the Islay Whisky Festival, now in full "cry", have a thoroughly enjoyable experience!!!

John McDougall

29 May 2003

Istillery JOHN McDOUGALL
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Newsletter from Scotland No. 038

The flow of information and general interest currently being expressed about mothballed distilleries re-opening, working distilleries being sold to new owners and possible building of new distilleries goes on unabated, and is quite difficult to keep track of!! In the past few months at least three working distilleries have passed into new ownership, there is the talk of Tullibardine (mothballed), which belongs (or belonged) to Kyndal being taken over by a consortium who if rumour has it correctly have paid £1.1 m for the defunct distillery plus any stock. The distillery was mothballed in 1994 and has stood silent, looking more sad by the year since that time. Although this has probably been the worst kept secret in the industry for upwards of a year or so, it is nevertheless quite nice to see in writing what the promoters of the project have in mind, even if it some of what they say appears to be fanciful...time of course will tell! The proposal is for an eventual £10 m development on the ground adjacent to, and surrounding the distillery. The distillery itself is proposed to re-commence production within months with the first malt being bottled and sold in year 2013. The distillery is also planned to have built, a reasonably proportioned visitor centre (approx. 25 x 25 mtrs.) to be able to cater for large numbers due to the fact that it is situated on the A9 road, just clear of the M9 motorway, which is the principal road to Perth from Edinburgh and Glasgow. 20,000 cars are reported to pass this way each day. The land surrounding the distillery is proposed to be developed as a retail park, selling the best of Scottish goods and produce and is quoted as going to be at least 8 times larger than the distillery visitor facility. With regards to news of new distilleries, I understand that at Ladybank the plan appears to be to build a new prototype maltings plant, with fully integrated one vessel steeping, germinating and kilning capability. I have attempted, for various reasons to find out a bit more, but there is a general veil of secrecy surrounding this entire project, or so it would appear. In the last week some news just broke that almost next door to the Ladybank site a planning application has been submitted to the local government asking for permission to build a small farm distillery at Daftmill farm and presumably the distillery if and when constructed will be known as Daftmill Distillery. The intended site is a collection of beautiful old, and listed (protected for historical purposes from demolition) kiln and mill buildings on the farm, which is owned by a family, and is principally run by two of the brothers of the family. I have been there, and it is just so well run and efficient, and with approx. 500 hectares there is plenty of land from which to grow excellent malting barley!! We should watch this development very closely!! In the meantime Blackwood on Shetland have issued their prospectus in order to raise £1.5 m so that one appears to be still "on the rails". Me, I might just go and help some people to build a malt distillery in California in the traditional Scottish style, employing traditional Scottish production methods, and traditional Scottish plant and equipment. Only time will tell if I do, but watch this space!!

John McDougall

20 June 2003

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 039

The talk of building new malt whisky distilleries rolls on and on. I mentioned briefly in newsletter No. 038 that some people might just do this in California, well if they do, the distillery will be called Glen Kelley Californian Malt Whisky Distillery. It is proposed that it be built in the old "Gold Rush" country in the area close to the "Yosemite National" Park. The idea is to build a Malt Whisky distillery using traditional Scottish/Scottish style brewing and distilling plant and equipment inside a traditional building of the area, to suit the theme of the history of that area, and to be sympathetic to it, and it's people. – The native people before the white settlers moved west were and still are the Cherokee Indians. The site itself is a clearing on part of the cattle ranch belonging to the promoting family (one can almost imagine the cowboys appearing round the next rock driving them on during a "round up"!!) and is quite a large site, that is no bad thing because, as a result of it's close proximity to Yosemite it is envisaged that some of the many tens of thousands of visitors who visit the Park each year will probably wish to visit their local distillery as well, so it is planned that a visitors reception/experiential centre will be established in the event of the project going ahead. Even as I write this newsletter, the plans are being scrutinised by the authorities in California, and I also believe that the alcohol license from the Californian Alcohol/Liquor authorities has been applied for, and by this time may even have been approved. So, the family appear to be serious regarding their intentions. Certainly I have visited the site and thoroughly inspected it, and the surrounding environs, which at 2,000 metres above sea level it is just a little bit more elevated than Tormore distillery on Speyside which has been my highest distillery to date – approx. 246 metres above sea level -!! It is naturally obvious that the distillery will produce Californian Single Malt Whisky, similarly as Scotch Malt can only be produced in Scotland, Irish in Ireland, Japanese in Japan and so on. This is good, however, as it will enlarge and enrich the total world community of malt whisky/aficionados, and yet it will be so small as to make no dent at all on the armour of the huge Global Brands. It will, if the project comes to fruition, be an additional generic product, and that can only bring benefit to the malt sector "across the board" The Californian Wine producers took up a similar challenge and though they encountered many difficulties the best of them have survived and prospered, and there is, therefore no good reason why Glen Kelley Distillers could not do the same with their malt whisky. I would envisage that the plant and equipment required for the proposed distillery would be Grain Silos, Mill, Boiler, Mashtun and other usual brewing ancillaries, Washbacks (2/3), Wash and Spirit Stills plus all necessary stillhouse tankage. It is planned to build the Maturation facility part subterranean into the adjacent hillside on the complex – although this has still to be finally decided – We are also currently looking at the real possibility of constructing our own "in house" Maltings facility, and also bottling facility, and are at present working on the \$ mathematics of these activities as opposed to buying in the malt from commercial malt suppliers, and contracting out the bottling business. However, it may be in the event of the distillery project proceeding, that the maltings element of the entire project would have to be held back for later, and in the meantime bought in malt to the company's specification would be used in the short term. This exciting proposed project is apparently "the talk" of the territory.

John McDougall

23 July 2003

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 040

The variety of jobs which are presented to me are never ending and take me often to the most pleasurable parts of Scotland and, of course, farther afield. This month has been no exception and for the purposes of this communication I will restrict my comments to two quite separate visits to Raymond Armstrong's Bladnoch Distillery. Raymond has been extremely generous in affording me the extraordinary privilege of unprecedented access to his distillery warehouses in order to assess his stocks of maturing Bladnoch. Not only the Bladnoch produced by him since December 2000 but also casks which he has managed to buy back in from September 1988, and July 1991. There is a good and serious purpose behind all of this activity, quite naturally, and that is of course guided in the direction of bottling in the future....quite near future I would suspect in the case of the oldest stock. I visited for the first time on Wednesday August 06, and in company of Raymond, his wife Florence (tell me a woman without a good nose?!!) and John Herries..who actually was the stillman for each and every one of the casks we looked at (1988, 1991, 2000, 2001 & 2002, so how's that for continuity??) samples from several casks of years 1988 & 1991 were drawn, nosed, tasted, and commented upon. All of the casks were good, some very good, some excellent and one or two of them were just brilliant and WOW!! We will assess a cross section of these when I visit Sweden at the beginning of September. The Scandinavian Whisky Society which was established late last year, and of which I am proud to be the Scottish end, is involved in a series of events across Sweden, and one of the highlights of each event will be a nosing and tasting workshop using the samples which we drew from the 1988 Hhds. See www.whiskyspot.com for details. I then visited Bladnoch a further time on 22 August, because it was thought that it would be also great fun and of course educational and informational to carry out an in depth assessment of the spirit which has been produced since the millennium year i.e. from December 2000.

Again this will be a world premiere, for the Scandinavian Whisky Society and in conjunction with whiskyspot. I believe that the spirit produced since 2000 and currently maturing quietly and sedately in the Bladnoch warehouses is shaping up really well and that the audiences are really going to be privileged to have secured such a World First, in being Allowed the opportunity which Raymond has entrusted me to give to them, in conjunction with my associate and President of the Scandinavian Whisky Society Henrik Aflodal. This is very exciting for all of those involved, and as a result of the endeavours of last Friday in the warehouses, we have selected eleven samples from different types of casks, Bourbons, sherry (American oak and Spanish oak) refills Butts and Hhds and one extremely interesting sample from from a Spanish oak Hhd. This cask is a fantastic one, and the level of maturation and take up of sherry is simply almost unbelievable. Yes, I am really now looking forward with great anticipation to my Swedish visit. I would sincerely like to thank Raymond Armstrong for all of his help co-operation and enthusiasm in helping me and The Scandinavian Whisky Society to make everything possible which I have described in this Newsletter.

John McDougall

25 August 2003

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 041

This has been a busy month. I have been to Sweden when in the company of Henrik Afloidal we toured across that country giving lectures, talks and tastings. The talks were of a question and answer nature where Henrik was asking me about some of the ongoing new distillery projects, such as Blackwood in Shetland, Daftmill in Fife, Kilchoman, Islay, and Glenkelley in California. Each of these projects is at a different stage of development, but all of the project owners are still hopeful and, in the main, reasonably optimistic of a successful conclusion. Each project – the Scottish ones, that is, has encountered some problems, not the least of which is satisfying the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency of complying with the new regulations regarding the disposal of distillery waste materials. Also, regulations have to be adhered to in California. These are not insurmountable difficulties, but nevertheless they are quite stringent, and each distillery has to propose a scheme for the control and disposal of its effluent to the satisfaction of the Agency. Obviously the less effluent there is to dispose of ought to make life easier, for the individual distillery, but there are no guarantees that this will be the case. Each distillery project will be assessed on its merits, and on an individual basis, within the legislation of course. We covered 1500 kms. in the space of six days taking in six venues, namely: Goteborg, Ulricehamn, Karlstad, Vasteras, Gavle – the event was held in the reception area of Macmyra Distillery, Sweden's new malt project, and where we also benefitted from the talk given by Magnus Dandanell, the Managing Director – and finally Stockholm. At each event we also conducted Workshop-tastings of 6 malts from Speyside, Bladnoch and from Islay. In the case of the Mackmyra event we also tasted a 2 – 3 years old sample of their own peated product, which was quite interesting in its complexity and full body. This month has also been notable for two sad events. Malcolm Greenwood late of Glenfarclas and noted whisky writer and author regrettably passed away. I knew Malcolm only slightly, but when we did meet up occasionally through the years I enjoyed his company, and his untimely death is made all the worse because he was only 45 years old. The second sad event is the death of Mr Mitchell Sorbie the distiller at Loch Lomond distillery. Mitchell was an "Institution" he was still going to business each day at the age of 76 until he took ill a few weeks ago. I knew Mitchell for nearly 25 years, and he was always to me, a kind person and a thorough gentleman. He helped steer Loch Lomond distillery through the re-development phase some years ago, and also oversaw the building of their Grain distillery at Alexandria. Both of these men will be very much missed, and their passing will make the distilling Industry a much poorer place, but life goes on, and neither one of them would wish us to dwell on these matters for too long, they both made a significant contribution to many peoples' lives and that is the way I think we should remember them.

John McDougall

24 September 2003

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Newsletter from Scotland No. 042

I was unable to produce a newsletter during October due to the fact that I was in Denmark, Norway and Sweden on a business tour promoting my two ranges of Single Cask, and genuinely Single Malts. Also I moved house just two days before setting off, and I have been busy with my wife sorting out the new house in my spare moments which have been very few and far between !! Much has been going on in the Scotch Whisky industry over the past months, not least the debate and arguments which are currently raging regarding Diageo's decision to capitalise on the good name of Cardhu Distillery (Cardhu Speyside Single Malt) by presenting to the world a vatting, of several Speysiders – including, we are reliably (?) informed by Diageo a reasonable percentage of Cardhu. They will label, then market this **blended malt** as Cardhu Pure Malt in almost identical presentational form as their previous presentation of Cardhu Single Malt. How absurd, confusing and downright misleading this is, and in many people's opinion it is almost fraudulent. It is no more than could be reasonably expected of a massive (the largest) global drinks conglomerate which is no doubt peopled by well meaning, but totally mis-guided individuals who unfortunately have absolutely no "feel" for the Scotch Malt Whisky business in it's truest sense. To digress for a moment, I well remember in a previous time, being a senior manager in a large whisky company and in it's quest for increased sales etc. etc.. employed a young and very brash (I call it damned rude) Marketing Manager. His immediate previous employment had been in marketing frozen peas.....need I say any more?? The Industry is split right down the centre on this most contentious of issues, and it seems like Diageo wishes to re-write, or should I dare to suggest produce a dik-tat/definition of malt whisky, by which they would do as they pleased in branding/re-branding their malts. They contribute approx. 48% of the revenue to the Scotch Whisky Association, - who appear omnipotent or unwilling to intervene positively, (what a surprise!!) - so it would be a very short step to "persuade" one or maybe more of the "independents" to side with them ??? Those dissenters of which I gather number 16 companies held a meeting this week to discuss matters and with legal representation present at the meeting, will no doubt make a statement soon regarding their position and what to do next in their dis-agreement with the "playground bully". Is it any wonder therefore that the Micro distilling movement world wide is becoming ever more popular, also not just micro, but regular sized malt distilleries are proliferating around the globe. The following is a list of countries which have imported whisky stills from Scotland in recent times: Canada, California (US), Venezuela, Uruguay, Sweden, Finland, Turkey, Germany, South Africa, China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, New Zealand and Tasmania (Aus). Of course it should not be forgotten that India has a well established malt whisky industry of it's own with many malt distilleries, not forgetting closer to home, in the shape of Ireland.

I agree absolutely with Mark Reynier, the managing director of the independent Bruichladdich Islay distillery who is quoted as saying "Good luck to them. Anyone that makes the effort to produce an individually crafted product that raises the quality of whisky should be applauded". The dissenting faction are already being dubbed the producers of REAL WHISKY in much the same way as the Brewers of Real Ale. I like to think that I am progressive in my outlook to our industry here in Scotland, but I cannot agree with the current thoughts of Diageo. These thoughts if they are eventually adopted as policy are not only extremely selfish, but in the long term could prove disastrous.....for Diageo and others.

John McDougall

19 November 2003