



GLENGLASSAUGH[®]
A Distillery Reborn

IAN BUXTON





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Foreword

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE ALEX SALMOND MSP MP

FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND



Whisky is one of Scotland's finest and most valuable exports and our many varied malts and blends are savoured and appreciated around the world. Scotch Whisky is an iconic symbol at times of celebration both at home and abroad—from toasting the Bard at a Burns Supper to a dram at Hogmanay. For over 130 years Glenglassaugh distillery has played its part in spreading the pleasure of whisky across the globe.

As the local Member of Parliament it was an honour to officially re-open the *Glenglassaugh* distillery in November 2008 and it was a particularly uplifting experience to see such an iconic distillery brought back to life. Over its long history *Glenglassaugh* has seen several periods of operation interspersed with silent mothballed interludes and it is wonderful the distillery is committed to using traditional equipment and methods to once again make its unique whisky.

A Distillery Reborn offers a fascinating insight into the history of *Glenglassaugh* and its substantial contribution to the local community over the years. We should raise a glass to its continued success.





Introduction

IAN BUXTON



This is a rather unusual whisky book. Neither a completely independent history, nor an insider's account, it may be best thought of as 'semi-detached'. To understand that curious description requires a brief history of my involvement with Glenglassaugh. As will become clear elsewhere, the distillery was silent and mothballed when purchased by its new owners. Consequently, it had been all but forgotten by the world of whisky and certainly when I was first approached about Glenglassaugh I had never visited it nor, to the best of my recollection, had I even tasted the spirit.

I can place that approach exactly: it was December 20th 2007 at *The Mash Tun*, a well-known whisky bar with rooms in Aberlour, and the hour of that meeting was 9.30 a.m. I was due to meet Stuart Nickerson, an independent consultant working in the whisky industry, who I knew slightly from his previous employment as Distilleries Director

of William Grant and Sons (the owners of Glenfiddich and The Balvenie, amongst many other things).

Nickerson had left Grants some years previously and was working as a 'consultant'. That can mean many things, as I know myself.

I once saw a cartoon in which a middle-aged executive stared at an empty desk, evidently a home

values—reserved, discreet and conservative but highly admirable.

And then there was the fact that this was Stuart Nickerson that I was speaking to. As a distiller, his reputation went before him. With experience at Highland Park, Glenrothes, Glenfiddich, The Balvenie and Grants’ giant grain whisky operation in Girvan (and, as it turned out, some knowledge of *Glenglassaugh* also) he had forgotten more about making whisky than I would ever know. And I considered the man himself: Stuart is by nature almost a caricature of the canny Scot but passionate about what he does and, as I have come to learn, a man of his word. The fact of his long-term

involvement and his decision to give up his consultancy practice to return to a full-time management role both intrigued and reassured me.

As he explained more, so my interest grew. We met several times before the deal was concluded and our own arrangements finalised. I learnt that his investors were a Dutch-registered investment group with interests in the energy market, most notably in Russia and the former Soviet states. I learnt that they were fully committed to bringing the distillery back to work and to producing the highest quality of spirit. I met some of their senior executives and liked and respected them. I learnt that Stuart had managed



Graham Eunson & Ian Buxton

to lure Graham Eunson, a quietly-spoken Orcadian, from Glenmorangie to be his new distillery manager and my interest grew. I learnt that along with the distillery buildings and the brand name Highland Distillers were selling all their remaining stocks of mature *Glenglassaugh*; as I tasted it interest turned to excitement.

What was not to like? It was clear that for most of the first year Stuart, Graham and their team were to be fully engaged in refurbishing the distillery and getting it running; my task was to help develop a marketing and brand strategy and begin to execute it while the distillers worked out what kind of an animal they were trying to tame at *Glenglassaugh*.

So I started work in March 2008, as soon as the distillery’s purchase was completed.

My role was that of an interim, part-time Director of Marketing. At that stage *Glenglassaugh* did not

require, nor could it justify, a full time marketing resource. The priority was on fixing the distillery; while getting some of the mature stock to market was clearly important it took second place and, in any event, there was not enough mature *Glenglassaugh* to support the kind of marketing infrastructure and expenditure that characterises many of its competitors.

So I was *of* the team, but not wholly *in* it. Sometimes this resulted in frustration, but more often it provided a helpful detachment (or so I firmly believe). It was always planned that my involvement would run down. Once the key elements of the strategy were in place the requirement was for execution and delivery of the plans. This is both a more labour intensive and time consuming role than I was able to undertake given my other commitments, and in any event not the proper responsibility of a consultant.

But it will always be a source of pride and

pleasure that I was able to get on site within hours of the purchase being finalised; that I played a major role in the re-opening celebrations led by Scotland's First Minister; that I was in the still room when the very first new spirit in more than twenty years ran at *Glenglassaugh* and that I can point to the new brand identity, packaging and products and say 'I did that' (well, bits of it, anyway).

Subsequently we agreed that I would write this account of the distillery and its re-opening. As you will appreciate from this recital of the circumstances it is a partisan account: this is partly the distillery's story (they have supported the publication of this book) but

it is my version of the story also, not a promotional brochure or a piece of marketing literature.

It's too important for that. Stuart Nickerson has supplied much background and historical material but, apart from correcting some facts and advising on technical issues to do with distilling, has given me a free hand to write as balanced an account as I am able, and for this alone he deserves both thanks and respect.

Publication of the book marks a further diminution of my role and this is therefore a bittersweet moment. But I am confident that *Glenglassaugh* will go on from strength to renewed strength.

This is a distillery reborn. This is its story.

Ian Buxton

PITLOCHRY, JANUARY 2010



The Foundation Years



‘It is but the truth when we say that in order to write anything like a memoir of Col. Moir would be to write a history of every movement that has taken place in town and district for half a century back, for during all those years there has scarcely a movement of any note taken place of which he was not the originator, guiding spirit, or at least a staunch advocate.’

If the *Banffshire Reporter* of 5th October 1887 may be believed, the pleasant seaside town of Portsoy has much cause to be grateful to Colonel James Moir for his good works.

During his fifty years of prominence, Col. Moir established several successful businesses in fields as diverse as banking; the importation of Peruvian guano; fishing, agriculture and shipping. Though not a regular soldier he served energetically in the local

Volunteer and was gazetted Lieutenant Colonel of the Banffshire Battalion of Volunteer Artillery, retiring in 1873 but retaining the rank of Honorary Colonel.

On his arrival in Portsoy in 1834, Moir opened a general store in the High Street, and traded as a wine and spirit merchant, seedsman and manure merchant (hence the interest in guano), and ironmonger. His interests grew rapidly and, as agent for the North of Scotland Bank he was

at the heart of commercial activity in the town.

He took an active and prominent part in extending the Strathisla Railway to Portsoy in 1859, but not content with giving Portsoy railway communications southwards, he undertook the additional task of

securing a Parliamentary Bill for the construction of a line westwards along the coast, in which effort he was successful.

As Chairman and principal shareholder of the Portsoy Gas Company he brought the first mains gas supply to the town and in 1868, to promote the

local fisheries he was instrumental in linking Portsoy, Buckie and Portgordon by a ‘sixpenny telegraph’—the wire being later sold to the Government, no doubt at a handsome profit.

With his interests in shipping and fishing Moir

was an enthusiastic participant in the Portsoy Harbour Committee and actively interested in the harbour’s reconstruction, bringing great benefits to the town.

In acknowledging his prodigious physical energy the author of the *Banffshire Reporter* obituary noted,

perhaps a trifle enviously, that *‘He was a great pedestrian in his day, and for years is said to have walked between Portsoy and Turriff regularly every Saturday’*. That is a distance of some 17 miles, though the mode of the Colonel’s return transport is not recorded.

Finally, in July 1887, shortly before his death, this worthy citizen and model of Victorian commercial acumen and drive gifted land and property in Seafeld Street as a site for the new Town Hall. Lacking issue from either of his marriages this archetypal



philanthropy was perhaps intended as his memorial.

None of this concerns us, however, other than to note his considerable, one might even say ubiquitous, presence in local affairs. Clearly, if James Moir determined that a distillery should be built, a distillery would be built—and a fine one at that. And so, in 1875, the *Glenglassaugh Distillery Company* came to pass, duly if imaginatively eulogised some twelve years later by the *Banffshire Reporter* as ‘a concern which has now assumed gigantic dimensions’.

However it was not, it must be confessed, an entirely original idea. There had previously been a distillery right in the heart of Portsoy. The Portsoy Distillery Co. is first heard of in the *Edinburgh Advertiser* of 1800. It traded from premises in Low Street, just off the harbour, where by 1830 it was known as Burnside Distillery. It appears to have ceased operations at some time after 1837, so Moir would have been aware of the distillery during his early years of trading as a general

merchant and no doubt he sold its products to local customers. Perhaps as a banker he was aware of the reasons for its demise and deplored its impact on the local economy; as a merchant he surely regretted the loss of business.

Whatever its history however, today no trace remains of Burnside. However, in Pigot & Co’s Banffshire trade directory for 1825 a William Morrison is described as ‘Conductor’ of the Portsoy Distillery.

We cannot be certain, but it seems probable that this is the same Morrison who will later feature in the *Glenglassaugh* story as founding partner. In the absence of Burnside, presumably Moir obtained supplies from the nearby Banff Distillery at Inverboyndie, which was demolished as late as 1983.

Around 1834 he married into the family of the Morrisons of Turriff, described simply as ‘merchants’ and on the death of Peter Morrison came eventually to acquire their business. It was with the Morrison family

that he was to promote construction of the distillery. The partners in the *Glenglassaugh Distillery Company* are shown in contemporary documents to be Moir, his two nephews Alexander and William Morrison and Thomas Wilson, described as a coppersmith of Portsoy, though their respective shares are not recorded.

This was a propitious moment in the history of Scotch whisky, a fact of which a shrewd businessman such as Moir would have been keenly aware, even without his interest in the wine and spirit trade.

With the advent of blending and the decline of brandy production, Scotch whisky was in the ascendancy even as Irish whiskey, its great competitor, began to falter. A number of notable distilleries were founded around this time, including Cragganmore (1869),

Balblair (1872), Glenrothes (1878), Bunnahabhain and Bruichladdich (both 1881).

In fact *Glenglassaugh* slightly anticipated the boom in distillery construction, which accelerated from 1890. In the following decade, a remarkable

forty-one new distilleries were opened in Scotland, a pace of development which has never been equalled, even if some of them were short-lived.

To that extent, the decision to open *Glenglassaugh* was a far-sighted one.

Together with the adjacent

Craigmills Farm, which provided barley for the distillery, some 17 acres of ground were acquired on the Glassaugh estate at the foot of the Fordyce Burn, round the headland at the east of the town. The site is dominated by the imposing remains of the Sandend



The Cup & Saucer

windmill, today known locally as the ‘cup and saucer’. Though not linked to the distillery its proximity often attracts attention, and its story is an interesting one.

According to the *1791–99 Statistical Account of Scotland*, the site originally housed a substantial prehistoric burial mound some fourteen feet high and sixty feet across, covered with turf. When opened it was found to contain a stone coffin and well-preserved bones, presumed those of a chieftain together with a deer’s horn, symbolic of a hunter. It has been speculated that stone from the burial mound was employed in the construction of the windmill, in which case history will record another stain on the reputation of James Abercromby who was responsible for erecting this dramatic structure.

Abercromby had recently returned from North America to his Scottish estates somewhat in disgrace following his catastrophic command at the Battle of Ticonderoga (1758).

There he led an army of some 16,000 troops against a much smaller, but well entrenched combined French-Indian enemy force estimated to be some 4,000 strong. British casualties were at least 2,000, substantially heavier than the losses inflicted on the French and Indians, with the Black Watch taking particularly heavy losses. Abercromby retreated in disarray and confusion.

Describing his leadership at Ticonderoga the historian Lawrence Gipson has suggested that ‘*no military campaign was ever launched on American soil that involved a greater number of errors of judgement on the part of those in positions of responsibility*’.

Contemporary accounts have his officers and troops describing Abercromby in rather more trenchant terms but despite this disaster Abercromby was protected by his political connections. Though he was withdrawn from the North American campaign and never again commanded troops in action, he reached

the rank of full General in 1772. Perhaps it was in an attempt to forget his disastrous foray at Ticonderoga that Abercromby turned to building works and the improvement of his Glassaugh estate.

In August 1761 he wrote to his eldest daughter, then resident at their house in London’s fashionable Golden Square, complaining of high winds which had threatened ‘*the pompon of the windmill, which was only set up yesterday*’. This presumably refers to the movable wooden structure atop the tower, now lost, which housed the gears connecting the sails to the driveshaft for the millstones.

Later that year he entertained Lady Lessendrum and her two daughters to a trip to the mill, where they enjoyed two plates of apricots and plums, suggesting that the windmill was still something of a local novelty. Its working life appears to have ended at some time in the early 19th Century when steam power rendered it redundant.

By 1887, when Alfred Barnard first visited the distillery, the mill’s upper floors were apparently in use as storage for the distillery. With his distinctive love of idiosyncratic detail and local colour Barnard relates that a walk of some ten minutes ‘*brought us to the ruins of an ancient mill, built over a lofty brick archway, through which we passed to the Distillery, close by*’.

A track may well have run through the mill, the arched entrances of which could admit a pony and trap, but it was not the distillery’s main entrance. However, with that account of the highly distinctive landmark that is the ‘cup and saucer’ to one side, we can return to *Glenglassaugh’s* history.

The *Glenglassaugh Distillery Company’s* lease permitted them to extract water from the Fordyce Burn—considered excellent for distilling and used, according to local tradition, by several illicit distillers in the years before 1823. Water, which as we shall come to see plays such a pivotal role in *Glenglassaugh’s*

history, was thought to hold enormous significance for spirit quality before modern science rather relegated its importance below that of fermentation chemistry, still design and, above all, wood management. For all that, however, Moir and his partners had given considerable thought to the location of their new project and a sound and reliable source of water was regarded as of paramount significance.

They were allowed to cut peats from the moss of Auchinderrom for use in the distillery at a cost of £1 ‘per spade’s casting’. This was a consideration almost as important as the water supply. As the *Portsoy Advertiser* reported in its issue of 12th March 1875 as the distillery neared completion, ‘*Glenglassaugh Whisky will be the real “peat reek”, as peats are largely used in drying the malt.*’ All in all, this was thought to be an excellent location in the midst of a ‘*fine corn providing district*’ with ‘*splendid barley crops*’.

Barnard too, in 1887, drew attention to the *five*

large peat stacks, containing upwards of 400 tons.

Peat, of course, was hugely important in Scotch whisky production in the nineteenth century and, as late as 1930, no less an authority than Aeneas MacDonald could write, ‘*The convenient proximity of a peat bog is an economic necessity for Highland malt distillery.*’ Whilst this is no longer the case and the distillery’s present new make is unpeated, in Nickerson and Eunson’s quest for authenticity in production there are plans to begin trials with both medium and heavily peated malt in the next year. It helps that heavily peated styles are currently greatly demanded, especially by northern European single malt aficionados.

That report in the local newspaper is the main source for information on the original *Glenglassaugh* distillery. From it, we learn that ‘*the plans for it were drawn by Mr Melvin, Elgin; the contractor for the mason work was Mr A. Barclay; slater and plumber work, Mr Geo. McDonald, Portsoy; plaster work,*

Messrs McIvor and Younie, Cullen and Elgin; Stills, Mr T. Wilson, Portsoy. The cast-iron work is from Mr Johnstone’s Foundry, Elgin, with exception of the mashing machine which is from Banff Foundry; and the millwright is Mr Petrie, Ballindalloch.

The Manager was then a Mr Sellar, though he appears to have been replaced shortly after this by Dugald Mathieson who came with his family from Campbeltown, then an important distilling centre.

The distillery’s original capacity is also meticulously detailed for, as the report explains, ‘*in the course of its erection, the work, like all works of this kind, has excited a good deal of interest.*’

As was normal at the time, the distillery would have resembled a small community of its own, with housing for the Manager, workforce and two Excise officers; extensive stores and substantial buildings associated

with malting, all of which was undertaken on site. Glassaugh Station was some ten minutes walk away and, were the workforce in need of any refreshment (in addition to the liberal dramming of ‘clearic’ which

would have taken place) there was an inn at Glassaugh smiddy known then as the Black Jug and later as the Red Lion.

Great care was taken to exploit the topography and take advantage of the supplies of limestone which could be quarried on site. The distillery ran largely on water power—there was a powerful overshot water wheel 17 feet in diameter and 4 feet broad which drove all the equipment

and was arranged so that, in the words of the *Portsoy Advertiser*, ‘*with exception of the manufactured spirits, everything may be said to go down, down and further down by gravitation, so to speak.*’

In fact, given today’s concerns with energy



Dugald Mathieson



efficiency and the carbon footprint of any business, the operation of the original *Glenglassaugh* distillery may be considered enviably ‘green’. Though yields would inevitably have been lower than today, due in part to the different varieties of barley used, the principles of construction and operation seem remarkably contemporary in terms of their environmental impact, though low operating costs would have been the principal objective of this design.

Though, as we shall see, little remains of the 1875 distillery or warehouses, two large grain lofts survive from this period, testifying to the scale of the operation. The ‘Withering Floor’ may still be seen, together with a large stone steep in the easternmost malting building, presently unused, though earmarked for long-term restoration. Stuart Nickerson’s fond hope is that this may eventually be brought back into use and floor malting once again take place at *Glenglassaugh*.

It is certainly an imposing structure—the original

kiln (now removed) was capable of drying 35 quarters (around 7,100kg) of barley in 48 hours. From this, the distillery would have expected to receive approximately 5,330 kilos of malt for milling. At this rate of production we can understand why, on opening, the distillery was said to hold between 2,000 and 3,000 quarters of barley.

Beyond the malting was the malt deposit, the floor of which was 2 feet below the level of the floor of the kiln. It was 30 feet long and 14 feet wide, and capable of containing 300 bushels of prepared malt.

For a detailed description of the lost distillery we must turn again to the trusty *Portsoy Advertiser*, as nothing today survives beyond the Excise cottages, two maltings and the original dunnage warehouse. The works were described in the following terms:

‘(The) malt mill is capable of mashing 160 bushels in 18 minutes. In the mashing machine the malt is met and blended with the hot water from two coppers, each of

which has a capacity of 1,500 gallons. From the mashing machine the malt and water rush into the mash tun, which is of cast-iron and is of a large size.

Another pipe from the coppers enters the mash tun on a level with the floor of it, and may be used in washing it out. From the mash tun the wort or wash is pumped up to the cooler and in the bottom of the mash tun a hatch opens to let the draff descend into carts, which will take it to the cattle sheds. The cooler, which like the mash tun is of cast-iron, is 42 feet by 30.

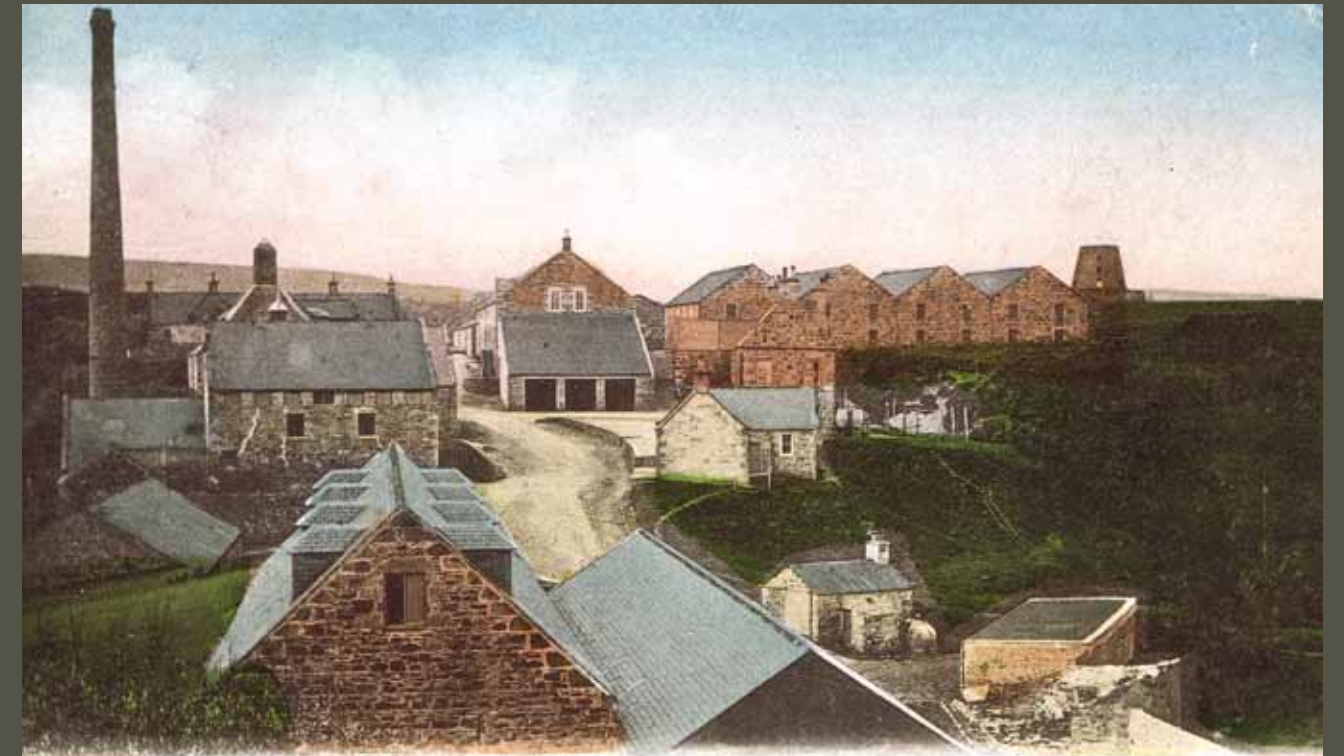
Underneath the cooler, and of the same dimensions, is the tun room, in which stand what are called the washbacks, or tuns—four in number, each of which is capable of containing 5,700 gallons. From these wash backs the wash, or wort, runs into the wash charger, which has a capacity of 3,700 gallons.

From this it goes into the wash still, which will hold 2,500 gallons. From the high head of the wash still the low wines and feints descend into the cooling worm,

passing through which, they then run into the low wines and feints receiver, from which they again, at the proper time, descend into the spirit still, which will hold 1,500 gallons, and, passing through the cooling worm of that still, the whisky—for it is whisky then—passes into the spirit receiver, and from it the spirits enter a large solitary covered and closely secured tun which is called the spirit vat.

This vat has a capacity of 2,000 gallons, and is sufficiently elevated above the floor of the room in which it stands to admit of the spirits flowing from it into the casks. In the same room is a powerful weighing beam for weighing the casks, the quantity of spirits being now calculated by weight. Facing the door of the room in which stands the spirit vat, but with a passage wide enough for a cart to pass between them is the door of the bonded warehouse which is 80 feet long by 30 feet in breadth, and is at present on the lowest level of any of the buildings.

We may explain that the still room does not range with the other buildings, but forms a wing on the east



Glenglassaugh Distillery wishes you a merry Xmas —

35 Published by Alex. Robertson, Fordyce

side. The door of it opens to the east, and is close to the side of the burn, and is but little above the level of it. The tank for the cooling worms stands on the south side of it, and is placed at such a level that a cooling stream of water from the mill lade may be kept constantly flowing through it.'

The cost of the new distillery was some £10,000 (or approximately £700,000 in today's money, based on the R.P.I.) and, according to the *Banffshire Reporter* of 16th April 1875 the first brew or 'browst' took place successfully that month.

All the buildings may be seen in the handsome hand-coloured postcard illustrated here, which was produced by Robertsons of Fordyce in the very late 1890s. The 'cup and saucer' of General Abercromby's mill can be clearly discerned in the background to the right of the card.

Though in all probability photographed some years previously, the card is postmarked 1906 and was sent to James Gordon who was at that time the Brewer

at Cardow distillery, today more familiarly known as Cardhu, the home of Johnnie Walker.

According to unpublished research undertaken by Professor Michael Moss of Glasgow University the partners planned that their distillery would cater largely for the bottle trade in 'self' or single malt whisky, perhaps harking back to Moir's roots as a general merchant, but needed to find a market for the large proportion of surplus capacity.

They were fortunate to find a customer in the prestigious Glasgow firm of wine and spirit wholesalers, Robertson & Baxter (R&B), who will later feature dramatically in this story. R&B already acted as agents for the Greenock Distillery Co.; McMurchy, Ralston & Co., owners of the Burnside distillery in Campbeltown (not to be confused with the earlier Portsoy distillery of the same name) and the proprietors of Fettercairn in the Howe of Mearns in Angus.

They quickly became *Glenglassaugh's* biggest

customer by a wide margin and in turn supplied the whisky in large parcels to another distinguished Glasgow firm of wine and spirit merchants, William Teacher & Sons. It is pleasing to speculate that *Glenglassaugh* may have ended up in Teacher's celebrated dram shops, drunk with due solemnity!

Though the independent whisky broker has now largely disappeared from the trade, these were bumper times for whisky merchants like R&B who dealt in good quality malt whisky. This was much in demand for the newly fashionable blends that were filling the gap left by the sudden disappearance of brandy after the outbreak of phylloxera and the refusal of the Irish industry to countenance blending, which they considered tantamount to adulteration and fraud.

Little is known about *Glenglassaugh's* output or other clients in its first years of operation. But, like their competitors in the north-east, it is believed that the partners built up a trade in England where there was

a growing markets for 'self' whiskies and, unlike much of the whisky consumed within a year of distillation in Scotland, well matured in sherry wood. Customers south of the border included Wyld & Co. of Bristol, the Birkenhead Brewery Co., Mackie & Gladstone of Liverpool, John Groves & Son of Weymouth, Ernest Hobbs of Gosport, and Richardson Bros of Salisbury.

Glenglassaugh whisky evidently found acceptance in the public houses of Liverpool and surrounds and was equally favoured in the West Country. Most of the firms mentioned were brewers and would have supplied *Glenglassaugh* to their managed and tied estate as the 'house' whisky.

Within three and half years of opening, on 28th December 1878 the distillery was the site of a tragic accident. The stillman, George Aitken and his colleague John Grant, one of the distillery labourers, chose for some reason to clean one of the washbacks immediately it had been emptied. To do this, they

would have climbed into the vessel carrying heather besoms, with which to scrub the wooden sides clean of yeast residues.

Having worked at the distillery since it opened, Aitken would have known that the washback contained dangerous levels of carbon dioxide gas, a by-product of fermentation, which is of course fatal. Contemporary reports of the incident express mystification at the men's failure to test the air in the deep washback using a lamp or other open flame, as was standard practice. My own speculation is that they were anxious to start work before the sides of the vessel dried and were harder to clean, though there is no evidence to this or any other effect.

Both were swiftly overcome by the fumes but their cries were heard by the brewer Fraser. He bravely went to their assistance but could not lift either man clear so managed to scramble out and seek further help. Having done so, valour overcame discretion

and he returned to the washback where he himself promptly collapsed.

There were now three insensible men at the bottom of the washback and quite a crowd gathered next to it, including Mr Allan, Manager; Mr Tolmie, officer of the Inland Revenue; Mr Grant, clerk at the distillery and others.

According to the *Banffshire Journal*, 'the gas was felt exceedingly strong at the mouth of the tun, so much so that a lamp would not burn'. Notwithstanding this alarming signal, Adam and Alexander Ingram, described as maltsmen, volunteered to go down with a rope attached to their persons to assist their colleagues. First the one and then the other tried, but they no sooner reached the bottom than they had to be pulled up. Twice each tried with the same result.

These rescue attempts having failed it was decided to cut a hole in the base of the washback. The staves were some three inches thick however and, despite

energetic efforts with a saw, axe and hammer, this took some 20 minutes, after which the unfortunate men were rapidly pulled through a two foot square gap—Fraser first, Grant next and Aitken last. They emerged '*...much exhausted, but alive. George Aitken, we regret to say, was dead. Drs Anderson and Robb were at the Distillery a few minutes after the men were taken out. They could do nothing for Aitken, but through their care the other two men have recovered.*'

Aitken, 47 years of age, left a widow and seven children. The incident was said to have cast considerable gloom over the district. Just as their contemporaries, we can regard this tragic accident with some bewilderment: the men had no business entering the vessel without first checking the CO₂ levels and Aitken in particular should have been alert to the dangers. His alacrity to start work on cleaning the washback came at a high cost.

The incident also tells us something of nineteenth

century distilling: like much manual labour, it was arduous and dirty, much of the work was repetitive and occasionally dangerous. It is easy to imagine some 'golden age' of artisanal distilling and romanticise a nostalgic view of a lost age of innocence. Aeneas Macdonald, for example, writes of the '*relics of a vanished age of gold when the vintages of the north had their students and lovers*'. Few of us, however, would be happy to swap places with the like of George Aitken for more than a few hours of experience tourism before returning to twenty-first century comforts (and drams) with some relief.

We may today look askance at distilleries run by computers, though *Glenglassaugh* is doggedly traditional in generally eschewing such aids, but understandably rigid health and safety procedures require a risk assessment of such an inherently hazardous procedure, rendered unnecessary in any event by in-plant cleaning. Today's George Aitken

would have obtained a ‘permit to work’ from his distillery manager or supervisor. A gas analyser would be used to check the CO₂ levels and a washback, or any such vessel, would only be entered after stringent checks and with great circumspection. Alert to the dangers, today’s employees take considerable care not to drop any personal belongings into washbacks—distillery visitors should be similarly cautious!

The Census records of 1881 reveal the population at the distillery. Dugald Mathieson, the Manager, lived with his wife, four children and one servant in a stone-built modern villa provided by the company. Ten years later Mathieson was still in residence with—by today’s standards—the remarkable total of nine further persons under his roof. But shortly after that Dugald Mathieson died and his place as Manager was taken by Alexander Christie who had started with the company as a clerk.

The 1823 Excise Act, which did so much to shape

the modern industry, required the distiller to provide a house for the resident Excise Officer, or ‘Gauger’ as he was known. Though the Government paid a rent not exceeding £10 per annum, nothing was said about repairs and the Gauger’s house was not always in tip-top condition. However, the Excise Officers’ accommodation at *Glenglassaugh* appears to have been of a higher standard, Barnard describing them as ‘*handsome dwelling houses, with large gardens*’. Today they are used as the company’s offices.

In 1881, they housed James Wilson, his wife and four children and next door his colleague Murdo Tolmie, his wife and young son. Also on site was Robert Sommers, the Brewer (Assistant Manager) with a further five persons in his household and up the road at the Black Jug we would have found William Henderson, a maltman, with a family of four. Finally, a property known as Claylands was home to Alexander Ingram (the would-be rescuer of the unfortunate

Aitken), another maltman. A total of nine persons occupied the accommodation here.

Further members of the workforce presumably lived further afield and were not included in the census for *Glenglassaugh* but the figures for 1881 show a total of forty adults and children in the immediate vicinity of the distillery. No doubt the small glen and the Fordyce Burn rang to the cries of the children and *Glenglassaugh* must have been a very lively place indeed.

Thomas Wilson the Portsoy still manufacturer and junior partner in the venture, died in 1883, followed four years later in 1887 by Colonel James Moir. With no children, he left his substantial fortune of £23,000 (close to £2m today) to his niece Margaret, wife of Alexander Morrison. A statement of his affairs showed that he had an investment of £5,128 (c£424,000) in the distillery and whisky stocks of £862. Clearly, *Glenglassaugh* had been a spectacular success, the distillery shares and whisky stocks

representing more than a quarter of his ample estate.

During the last six years of his life he had been unstinting in his public services, chairing the committee to restore the parish church in 1881, leading the campaign to rebuild the harbour in 1885 and supporting the building of a new Town Hall in 1887.

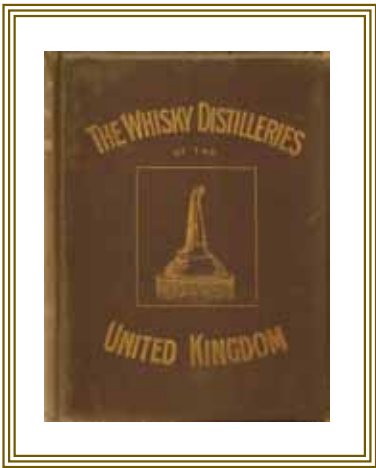
The whisky industry had encountered some temporary difficulties in the mid-1880’s but, emerging from these setbacks and the disruption following Moir’s death, Alexander Morrison decided to re-equip the distillery. The original plant had run successfully for some twelve years and presumably was ready to be overhauled in expectation of an even more prosperous future. Accordingly, he began the process of expanding and renewing the distillery.

During 1887 the two stills were replaced and, in the same year, Alfred Barnard (see Chapter 6) made his first visit to *Glenglassaugh* on behalf of *Harper’s Weekly Gazette* for his monumental work

The Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom. Judging by his account, the replacement of the stills had taken place by the time of his visit. He describes the still house as a ‘*modern edifice*’; the wash still having a capacity of 4,000 gallons (18,160 litres) and the spirit still 2,000 gallons (9,080 litres). This compares to the earlier report of a 2,500 gallon wash still and a 1,500 gallon spirit still.

They were, of course, direct fired. The manufacturer of the new stills has not been recorded, nor is it clear if the old pattern was copied. What is evident, however, is that the distillery was trading sufficiently well to justify a significant expansion.

Barnard records *Glenglassaugh* as ‘*steadily gaining favour in the market*’ with an annual output of 80,000 gallons (363,200 litres). By contrast, the same author



relates that Edradour in Perthshire was then producing 6,600 gallons annually; Glenmorangie 20,000 gallons; Laphroaig 23,000 gallons and The Macallan (which receives a scant eight lines, as opposed to the two pages describing *Glenglassaugh*) about 40,000 gallons. By contrast, however, the grain distilleries at Bo’ness and Port Dundas in Glasgow were producing 870,000 and 2,562,000 gallons respectively, dramatically illustrating the impact of blending on the industry.

Barnard does not appear unduly impressed by *Glenglassaugh*, though he does not dismiss it particularly briefly either. A full two pages of description is relatively generous but, sadly, there is no illustration in his *magnum opus*. However, he was to return some eleven years later and wrote a more detailed account, which

is fully discussed in chapters 2 and 6, following.

In 1889, Morrison continued his improvements and two new washbacks were installed. Three years later, in the summer of 1892, the existing three washbacks were rebuilt and elevators installed to raise malt to the kiln, and two barley separators acquired for screening and grading the barley. With the whisky boom gathering volume and demand for whisky strengthening, the outlook appeared

excellent. *Glenglassaugh*’s future prosperity, and that of its fortunate owners, must have seemed assured.

Quite unexpectedly, however, in the late summer of 1892 William Morrison died and in September 1892 Alexander Morrison, needing to find the cash to settle his estate, decided ‘for family reasons’ to sell the business. He wrote at once to Robertson & Baxter to enquire if they were interested.

Glenglassaugh’s history would take a dramatic turn.





CHAPTER 4

Renaissance



On Tuesday 16th May 2006 Stuart Nickerson received a 'phone call which, unbeknown to him, would change his life. The caller, at that stage a stranger, was a senior executive in charge of acquisitions and diversification for The Scaent Group, a Dutch-registered investment company. He had an unusual mission: he wanted to buy a distillery.

Scaent's interests lie mainly in energy trading in Scandinavia and the independent states of the former Soviet Union. Founded as recently as 2003, Scaent has expanded to include interests in fields as diverse as property development, IT, public services and utilities, construction, retail, publishing and telecommunications with more than a dozen companies and sub-groups conducting business in 20 countries and across two continents.

The growth in global whisky sales and especially the dynamism of the luxury sector in Scandinavia, Russia and related markets had first caught their attention and then captured their imagination. The opportunity appeared a tantalising one, offering the company exposure to consumer markets, further developing its global reach but requiring long-term thinking. Could a distillery be acquired, they wondered, and a brand be built? The call to Nickerson was the result.

At this point, Stuart Nickerson was working as a consultant to the global distilling industry. Based on his many years experience, with spells working for Arthur Bell & Sons, Diageo, Highland Distillers and latterly William Grant & Sons, he had built up an expertise in production trouble-shooting. His consultancy work took him around Scotland and to the Caribbean, advising on distillery openings, refurbishments, energy usage and environmental best practice. It was a comfortable, interesting and, at times, reasonably lucrative niche (he might disagree with the ‘lucrative’). Though far from the lifestyle of a corporate high-flyer it suited Nickerson’s independent caste of mind and love of travel.

Scaent were clear about what they required in a distillery: high-quality spirit above all, an interesting and authentic heritage and, if possible, aged stock with which to re-enter the market. With these criteria the idea of building a brand new distillery was quickly

considered, then abandoned: though the spirit quality could be assured through careful design and by utilising Nickerson’s considerable distilling expertise, a start-up could never have the required tradition and patina of history and, by definition, aged stock is an impossible dream for a new-build site.

So began a lengthy search. Shortlists were drawn up; anonymous visits undertaken and discrete enquiries made. Scaent were meticulous and demanding in their requirements—more than one well-regarded name appeared for consideration and was then scratched as unsuitable. Nickerson’s consulting work began to take a back seat as his new client increasingly dominated his time.

By May 2007 two separate deals had progressed significantly; in both cases to the point where a handshake had been exchanged and for one purchase, contracts drafted. But both fell through, due in both cases I am assured, to the potential vendor



The old malting floor



The old stone Steep

withdrawing from the negotiation. Knowing the locations involved, but sworn to maintain strict confidentiality I may still observe that this is truly a case of third time lucky: *Glenglassaugh* proved a happy, indeed an inspired choice.

So far as anyone knew, *Glenglassaugh* was not for sale. It was certainly not actively marketed and, for the most part, had largely been written out of whisky's story. Its owners had sold other small distilleries as surplus to their requirements, but these were operating plants and came with a workforce, brand reputation and filling contracts. *Glenglassaugh*, then mothballed for some 22 years, was a very different proposition.

However, following the breakdown of the second set of negotiations to purchase another site, Nickerson remembered his days in Portsoy and got in touch with Graham Hutcheon of Highland Distillers, an old industry contact. Might *Glenglassaugh* be for sale, he enquired.

Initial discussions were positive. Highland Distillers proved amenable to the idea of selling; realistic about the price and prepared to make available all the aged stock which they held. Matters proceeded rapidly, though curiously another potential buyer appeared on the scene during the transaction. The negotiation began in May 2007 and proceeded, under conditions of great secrecy, until 29th February 2008 when payment was made and the transaction closed. Stuart Nickerson, slightly stunned at the magnitude of what he had just done, received the keys to *Glenglassaugh*, distillery, warehouse, dilapidated office and all, and drove onto the site, alone, to consider his next move. Much work lay ahead.

Simultaneously, the new company vehicle The Glenglassaugh Distillery Company Ltd came into being, consciously echoing the original trading identity. Nickerson was appointed Managing Director (initially he was the sole employee) and

a new chapter in *Glenglassaugh's* history opened.

At this point in the story, a diversion. Having worked closely with Stuart for somewhat over a year I have been mightily impressed by the Scaent approach to their new baby. It might have been expected that a procession of executives and shareholders would arrive in Scotland, all with ideas and pet projects that demanded immediate execution. It would not have been unreasonable to have anticipated a high degree of day-to-day involvement or, less desirably, remote management by memo and e-mail. The appointment of new management or, worse fate, consultants would have been understandable though, all too often, they arrive with little or no knowledge of the industry.

In practice, none of this has happened. Scaent and their investors are largely anonymous, deliberately so. They have adopted a distant 'hands-off' posture, keeping out of the picture and preferring to trust the management to manage; taking the view that

the current team know what they are doing. Of course, reports are prepared and reviewed; budgets are submitted and plans discussed but, in general, the regime is a benign one. This is not, it would appear, an acquisition driven by corporate egotism nor is it some kind of 'trophy' asset (as was thoughtlessly suggested in some trade press reports at the time). Scaent appear to understand that the distillation of Scotch whisky is a long-term business, requiring patience and a steady nerve through global booms and recessions. Where a case for investment has been made the investment, as we shall see, has followed. Money has not been foolishly or lightly spent; neither has any reasoned request been refused.

This modest, low-profile approach seems to me a wholly admirable even, dare one suggest, a traditionally Scottish philosophy and follows from the lengthy period of consideration given to this strategic diversification. Distilling whisky is a long way removed





from the no doubt exhilarating and volatile world of energy trading: the Scaent team have had the great good sense to understand there are some aspects of their new acquisition that they do not fully understand and, instead, have put their trust in those who do. It seems well placed, though only time will tell. As a long-term business perhaps distilling provides a counter-weight to the vagaries of the energy market.

One further example of their stewardship is telling, however. Shortly after the new company began to restore the distillery the question of membership of the Scotch Whisky Association (swa) arose. Though the members of the swa account for the production of more than 90% of all Scotch whisky not all distillers, in particular not all the small independent firms, are in membership. Some are happy to exist in parallel with the swa, following its guidelines and policies and benefiting from at least some of its work, whilst avoiding the tiresome necessity of paying a

subscription whilst others, it is only fair to record, do not agree with the swa and, on occasion, vociferously object to its activities.

The subject was not long debated at *Glenglassaugh*. Anxious to demonstrate their commitment to the industry and to conform to its standards and norms, The Glenglassaugh Distillery Company became the swa's 54th member company in July 2008.

Becoming members of the swa was a conscious and considered step to furthering their ambitious plans. As Stuart Nickerson said at the time, *'At Glenglassaugh we believe that we have a unique opportunity to breathe life back into a hidden gem. The SWA is of vital importance to the whisky industry and we recognise the part they play in ensuring that brands like ours become part of Scotland's future whisky heritage.'*

For the swa, spokesman David Williamson responded, *'That Scotch whisky is to be distilled again at Glenglassaugh is good news for the industry. We are*

delighted Stuart and his team are going to play their part at industry level and welcome them as the SWA's fifty-fourth member company.'

This may all sound like a carefully orchestrated round of mutual admiration but there was no pressure on *Glenglassaugh* to join the SWA and no requirement for them to do so. The option to remain outside the fold was a real one and the obligations of membership do to some extent constrain the company's freedom of movement, so the decision to seek membership should not be under-estimated, especially considering the implications for proprietors new to the industry and its expected codes of behaviour. Scaent clearly wanted to 'join the club'.

But this is to jump ahead. Though a comprehensive technical survey of the plant had been made this had not, and could not, reveal all the challenges that faced the new owners.

One set of problems was particularly poignant.

Though *Glenglassaugh* had remained silent since 1986 the buildings had remained secure and all the equipment remained intact for more than twenty years. Then, on 12th September 2007 and at a delicately-poised stage of the negotiation to acquire the site, *Glenglassaugh* suffered a break-in. This was more than casual opportunism—around this time a number of silent distilleries across Scotland were the target of an apparently co-ordinated series of attacks by thieves in search of scrap metal. As Stuart Nickerson told me: *'I was alerted on my way travelling North and arrived to find a scene of devastation! Police were alerted and installed a temporary motion sensor detector within the distillery buildings but the intruders never returned.'*

Though eventually a gang was caught and prosecuted, this was for a single, similar offence at Imperial distillery. The perpetrators of the *Glenglassaugh* break-in have never been formally identified and the two incidents may well be entirely





unrelated. Whoever was responsible, the damage was considerable and set back the process of re-opening by several months, not to mention the cost incurred. To purloin a few thousand pounds of scrap metal, it's estimated that more than £100,000 of damage was done. While it was clear why some vessels and pipes were removed, some of the destruction seemed little more than casually vindictive vandalism.

Gentlemen to a fault, Highland Distillers adjusted their asking price to reflect the cost of repairs but the incident was a disturbing one that caused no little upset to all involved.

But this was only one of the problems facing Stuart Nickerson. At the start he was working on his own: clearly a team had to be built up. Here he was fortunate.

Discussions were quickly opened, and equally quickly concluded to the satisfaction of both parties, with Graham Eunson, a quietly-spoken Orcadian. In a varied career, he had experience at both Glendronach

and Scapa distilleries before taking charge as manager at the renowned Glenmorangie distillery in Tain. Fortunately, Graham was looking for a new challenge. Having had the depressing experience of closing distilleries the appeal of re-opening one was too great to resist. He was appointed on 1st April 2008, apparently undaunted by the date. The announcement attracted some curiosity and interest in the trade and amongst whisky aficionados. As he told them:

'During my career I have had to oversee the closures of both Scapa and Glendronach distilleries. So the opportunity to breathe life back into a mothballed distillery of such iconic status was one I couldn't resist. Until now, I feel that I have very much been the custodian of existing brands. With Glenglassaugh, I have the unique opportunity to make my mark on the whisky industry with a exciting new product.'

At much the same time, I was fortunate enough to be asked to work with Stuart and Graham on some

aspects of *Glenglassaugh's* marketing and publicity. Just as with the distillery, there was much to do: there was no corporate or brand identity; no packaging; no distribution network; no established products; no website or literature and virtually no awareness of *Glenglassaugh* even among whisky enthusiasts, though the announcement of the sale and planned re-opening attracted some attention and comment.

Work was therefore put in hand on many fronts at once. Contractors were appointed to deal with the main refurbishment of the distillery; the well-known consultant Dr Jim Swan was engaged to assist in the assessment of the casks purchased from Highland and we began work on a corporate identity and brand positioning strategy. Stuart Nickerson's days passed in a blur of activity, phone calls, e-mails and decisions. From time to time, well-known whisky writers and key independent retailers were invited to the site; it was fascinating to see their reaction to

a time capsule, closed for more than twenty years.

The timing was tight: a commitment had been given to the new owners that whisky would be on sale and the distillery in operation by Christmas 2008. Some observers were frankly sceptical of this target and I recall discussing the date with one of the principal contractors (who had now better remain anonymous, though his firm did deliver on time).

'Can't happen. Won't happen', was the blunt verdict. Walking onto the site in early March 2008 it was hard to disagree. On a blustery and slightly damp day *Glenglassaugh* presented a forlorn and sadly abandoned appearance. So it was decided to photograph it.

The logical person to turn to was Ian MacIlwain, a retired NHS consultant psychiatrist turned photographer whose great love of Scotland's distilleries joins a keen eye with a profound sense of the romantic. In his photography, he combines lyricism with nostalgia. Ian had already photographed the *Glenglassaugh* site as part

of his continuing and slightly obsessive quest to capture the almost Gothic dereliction of Scotland's silent distilleries before they either crumbled to dust or were sanitised by the health and safety lobby. He accepted the demanding task with quite alarming alacrity.

As you will see from his photographs appearing here and throughout the book, *Glenglassaugh* had been maintained, but hardly cared for. However, it seemed both important and appropriate to capture the site from the day of the take-over through its transition to a fully working distillery once again. Hence, Ian visited and revisited *Glenglassaugh* over the following twelve months documenting the process of renaissance with methodical care and almost proprietorial zeal. The result is an archive at once unique and exhaustive that will, it is hoped, be of interest to future generations. It also helps the team measure, with quiet satisfaction, what has been achieved if ever they are daunted by what remains to be done.

The changes have been considerable. Whilst the main vessels and component parts of the distillery were in good condition the building itself was damp and required roof repairs. It also had to be re-wired completely and a new boiler installed—a process not without drama, when it was discovered that the proposed location for the chimney could not support the necessary foundations!

A new gas main was laid into the site; the old cottages converted to offices; the accumulated clutter and rubbish of many years was removed from many of the buildings, revealing their potential; the former Manager's house was adapted to provide a small hand bottling facility (it is the company's aim to contain as much activity on site as possible); the filling store was restored; everything was painted, sometimes twice.

While this was going on the key parts of the plant were undergoing thorough checks and restoration. Thanks to the intervention of the burglars, a new false



bottom was required for the delightfully antiquated and thoroughly traditional Porteus cast iron mash tun, itself something of a rarity. The thieves had attempted to make off with the mash tun's copper dome but its size and weight fortunately defeated them.

Elsewhere, the Porteus malt handling equipment and malt mill proved to be in sound condition and, after reconditioning, was soon running again. The mill itself is thought to be pre-World War II, the presence of bronze bushes rather than bearings suggesting this vintage. Behind the mill room the more modern malt bins were in good condition though the screw conveyor required a comprehensive overhaul and clean. An ugly structure on the roof designed to facilitate the removal of malt was itself removed, along with a tumble-down corrugated iron malt delivery bay.

Also swept away were the remains of the water softening equipment installed in the previous owners' attempt to emulate the Speyside character. The water

at *Glenglassaugh* is notably hard and the new make is uncompromisingly Highland in style: happily, there is no intention on the part of the current team to attempt to force *Glenglassaugh* into uncomfortable conformity with an alien style; it is to remain true to itself. Graham Eunson is familiar with the distilling properties of hard water from his days at Glenmorangie and an enthusiast for its qualities, even if authenticity was not already a watchword for his Managing Director.

With that in mind, work was undertaken to secure part of the original Number 1 warehouse at the heart of the site. Though a section of roof had collapsed, it has proved possible to cordon this off (it will be restored in time) and safely use some of the dunnage space. A proportion of the newly racked spirit is therefore stored here, maturing exactly as it would have done in 1875 though with considerably greater experimentation with cask types.

Fortunately, the stills proved to be in good

condition. Though they too had suffered damage in the break-in this was largely superficial and, after a thorough inspection and testing by Forsyths of Rothes, they were once again commissioned—after intense and physically demanding deep cleaning. Forsyths also cleaned and re-commissioned the distillery’s spirit safe, which had initially appeared beyond repair.

Finally, the four Douglas Fir washbacks proved to have been scrupulously maintained since the closure and following testing and cleaning they too were brought back into use (the two stainless steel washbacks are currently mothballed). In total, more than £1m was spent in nine months to bring a silent distillery back to life—a contrast, perhaps, to the various noisily trumpeted schemes to build new distilleries in various locations in Scotland. Most seem doomed to remain pipe dreams and the fantasy of over-enthusiastic promoters.

But a distillery is more than a series of large rooms filled with equipment. It needs a team to bring it alive

and much time was spent during the summer of 2008 in recruiting suitably experienced and motivated staff to bring *Glenglassaugh* back to life, both operationally and administratively.

Once appointed, the new team had to be trained in the *Glenglassaugh* methods of working (Nickerson and Eunson had first to determine these) and then familiarise themselves with the equipment and its inevitable idiosyncrasies—there was no instruction manual and no-one familiar with the processes to guide the exploration. It felt like an adventure. A palpable sense of excitement and optimism was clearly evident.

During the autumn work progressed at an increasingly rapid pace. Decisions were taken on the initial products to be offered and the look and feel of packaging. New signage appeared at the distillery. Contractors’ lorries made frequent appearances, delivering men and machinery. Media interest grew, as it became apparent that the renaissance of *Glenglassaugh*





was not a pipe-dream, or a vision, or a speculation but was, in fact, actively underway.

The date of 24th November 2008 was set for the official opening and the local MP agreed to perform the ceremony and make the appropriate remarks to an invited audience of VIPs, suppliers, local dignitaries, industry leaders and former employees. As will be clear from the Foreword, the 'local MP' is, in fact, Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond. Failure was not, therefore, an option: the distillery had to be ready.

Memorably it was, even if the paint was scarcely dry in some areas and the 'distilling' consisted of merely starting the mill and beginning the first mashing, albeit for the first time in twenty-two years. Despite a throat infection the First Minister spent several hours on site, toured the distillery, mingled with guests in a filling store unrecognisable (for a few hours at least) and reflected on the disappointment he had felt as a young Parliamentarian when a vital part of the

community life of his constituency disappeared with *Glenglassaugh's* closure. His speech was witty, non-partisan and effective. Guests were charmed.

By restarting the mill, Salmond brought *Glenglassaugh* alive once again, but the real test came a few days later.

I was anxious to be present on Thursday 4th December for the first run of new make spirit. This is a rare occasion, not to be missed, and I watched the carefully feigned nonchalance of my colleagues turn first from relief through delight as they first tentatively nosed, then tasted the 'clearic'. That they were confident cannot be doubted, and for that they had good reason but for all their experience, for all the investment and for all the testing this was a tense moment. But it lasted only a moment: the spirit nosed cleanly and was fresh, with a delightful grassy quality, holding the promise of fine and delicate single malt once the necessary maturation had taken place.

The first casks were filled a fortnight later, the global financial climate having altered radically in the preceding months. The relentless optimism of the summer seemed a world apart from the gloom of the winter of 2008 and the following spring.

But the promise made to the owners and investors had been met. Whisky was being distilled and the first products were on sale by December. So *Glenglassaugh* pressed ahead. Tougher conditions had been weathered in the past and no one doubted that whisky's fortunes would change over the years ahead. Scaent's investment in purchasing and re-opening *Glenglassaugh*, said to be at least £5m and probably more, was not lightly made.

A sense of optimism, tempered with a realistic assessment of the challenges ahead, characterises the atmosphere at the distillery today. Whilst much has been achieved, much remains to be achieved not least with the various attractive but redundant buildings that

remain on the site. The potential is clear though and, for the first time in many years, there seems a vision for *Glenglassaugh* that will see it eventually take its rightful place as one of Scotland's leading single malts (and if that seems like special pleading consider the outstanding achievement in the 2009 rWSC awards—by this measure at least, *Glenglassaugh's* 40 Years Old expression could be said to be Scotland's finest whisky).

However, this is at least a ten year project. While some new products have been released (see the following chapter) these are mere striplings and it is on its mature spirit that the renaissance of *Glenglassaugh* will eventually be determined. A start has been made, an impressive start but only a start, as the current management and owners know full well.

It is clear that that single telephone call did not just alter Stuart Nickerson's life, but *Glenglassaugh's*. Today, knowing them both, that seems both fitting and fated.



A changed life. Glenglassaugh at the Ronneby Whisky Society, Sweden, with Anders Bizzozero



❧ A Note on Distilling at Glenglassaugh: The Facts & Figures ❧

Malt intake and malt mill	.. ..	Porteus—the mill is probably pre-World War II.
Malt variety.	.. .. .	Optic and Optic/Oxbridge mix. Currently un-peated though limited amounts of a peated style will be distilled.
Mash Tun	.. .. .	Porteus. Cast iron, with rakes and copper dome. Diameter 15’.
Size of mash	.. .. .	5 tonnes.
Mash regime	.. .. .	Strike temperature 68.5°C, Mashing temperature 64.5°C, 2nd water approximately 80°C, 3rd water approximately 92°C. The worts are pumped to the washback at 18°C.
Washbacks	.. .. .	4 Douglas Fir washbacks, each with a capacity of 43,187 litres. The working capacity is 26,800 litres. The stainless steel washbacks are currently mothballed.
Fermentation time.	.. .. .	Between 60–90 hours, depending when the washback was filled. Yeast—approx 70 kgs.
Distillation	.. .. .	A balanced system is operated, with a single pair of stills. One washback will fill the wash still twice; each charge of the wash still results in one charge to the spirit still. Therefore from one mash 2 runs of the wash still and 2 runs from the spirit still are obtained.
Still size.	.. .. .	Wash still—17,200 litres; working capacity 13,400 litres. Spirit still—12,700 litres; working capacity 7,400 litres.
Still operation	.. .. .	The spirit comes into the safe at around 73% alcohol by volume (abv). Foreshots are run for 20 minutes before starting the middle cut; feints come on at 62.0% abv and the distillation is stopped at 1% abv.
Intermediate Spirit Receiver	.. ..	11,260 litres. Located in the still room.
Spirit Receiver	.. .. .	37,304 litres. Located in the filling store. Filling strength 63.5% abv.
Distilling capacity..	.. .. .	Approximately 22,000 litres of alcohol per week or some 1,000,000 litres annually.
Warehouse capacity	.. .. .	Dunnage: 1,000 casks mixed (currently, with room available). Racked: 29,500 casks mixed
Wood regime.	.. .. .	A wide variety of casks are currently employed as the distillery experiments with maturation rates and the impact on spirit character.
Bottling.	.. .. .	All bottling is now done on site. There is no chill filtration, no added caramel or colour and most products are bottled at cask strength (new spirit at 50% abv).
Staff..	.. .. .	Office: 4. Distillery & Warehouses: 5.