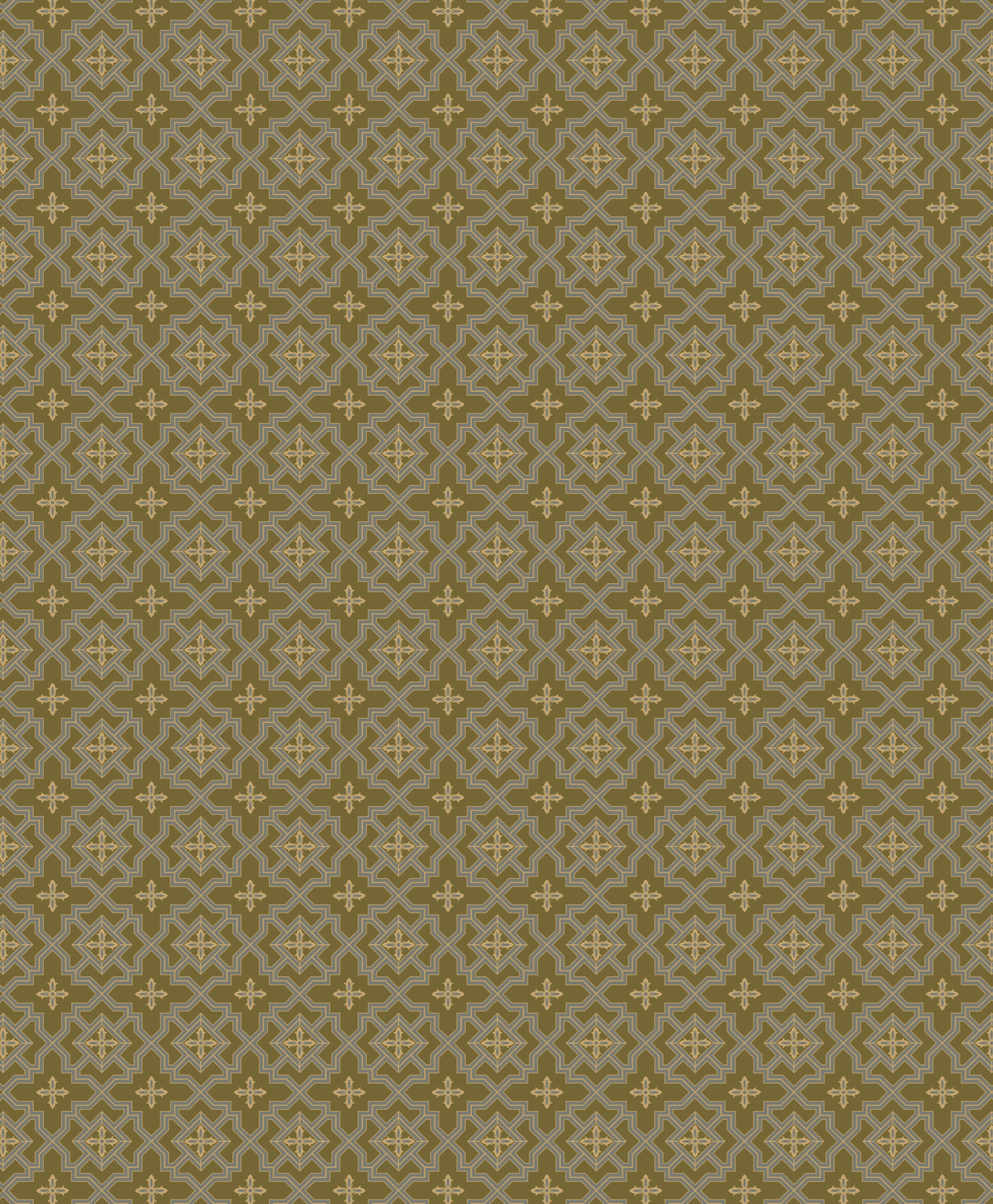




THE  
THOMSON FAMILY  
*WHISKY*  
COLLECTION

PERTH  
SCOTLAND





## PETER THOMSON, PERTH

*Foreword*

FROM THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY until the 1980, the 'Fair City' of Perth could claim to lead the world in the blending of Scotch whisky. The ancient town's situation at the heart of Scotland, with access to the North Sea via the mighty River Tay and railway connections north and south by the 1850s, facilitated the flow of goods between the Highlands and Lowland markets.

This provident location was not lost on Perth's wine and spirits merchants, who received malt whiskies from the north and grain whiskies from the south and who thus became among the first whisky blenders in Scotland.

By the early twentieth century four firms were pre-eminent in Perth: John Dewar & Sons, Arthur Bell & Sons, Matthew Gloag & Son and Peter Thomson & Company.

John Dewar arrived in Perth in 1828 to assist a relative who was a wine merchant. In 1846 he had set up on his own account and during the 1860s was selling blended Scotch whisky in branded bottles rather than kegs or jars, according to family tradition. He was succeeded by his sons, John Junior and Thomas, and it was they who transformed the family firm into an international concern.

Arthur Bell's story was similar. He came to Perth in the 1830s to work as a salesman for a distant relative who was a wines and spirits merchant, becoming senior partner in 1862, by which time he was offering blended Scotch and appointed a whisky rep in London—the first firm to do so. By the mid-1890s he had appointed seven provincial agents in England and was beginning to launch into overseas markets.

Matthew Gloag was a local man whose wife established a successful grocer's shop in Perth in the 1820s. He joined her in 1835 and by the time he was succeeded by his son William Gloag (in 1860) was listing blended whisky. *The Famous Grouse*, which would make the firm's name, was created by William's nephew and successor, Matthew Gloag in 1897.

The fourth family firm, Peter Thomson & Company, is the subject of this booklet. Less well known than the other three, the Thomson family can trace their involvement with whisky, as farmer-distillers, back to the eighteenth century, and in 1838 Alexander Thomson opened a licensed grocery in Perth.

It was not until 1908, however, that the eponymous Peter Thomson opened his own licensed grocery on Perth's High Street, specialising in whisky and wines, and supplying the licensed trade as well as private customers. Peter had a deep knowledge of malt distilling, especially on Speyside and immediately began to buy and lay down casks for his house blend, Peter Thomson's. The name was changed to *Beneagles* in 1922, inspired by the famous golfing resort and luxury hotel, Gleneagles.

Peter Thomson died in 1939 and the business was taken over by his son, David, who continued his father's practice of filling and buying casks for Beneagles. These were held by a sister company, Dougal Cratur Whisky Ltd., and when Peter Thomson (Perth) Ltd and the successful *Beneagles* brand were

sold in 1983, the stock held by Dougal Cratur remained in the ownership of the Thomson family.

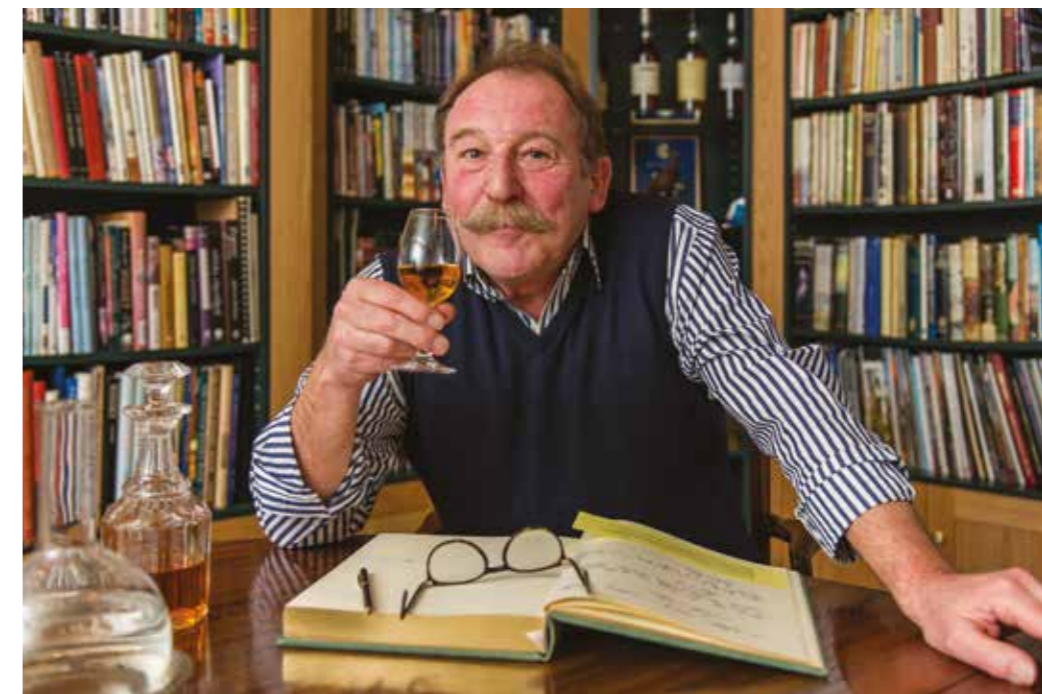
Most of these casks are very old and rare; all are first rate whiskies, and their provenance, as described in this brochure, is undoubted. I am delighted to have been asked to assess their quality and can wholeheartedly recommend them.

*Charles MacLean*

Charles MacLean

MASTER OF THE QUAICH

*Edinburgh, August 2017*





*Michael Thomson, seated, and his two sons Stuart (left) and Andrew*



## THE FAMILY

*One of Scotland's oldest whisky families*

**T**HE ORIGINS OF THIS REMARKABLE and rare whisky collection can be traced as far back as the beginning of the whisky industry in Scotland itself. The Thomsons originally came down from the Highlands in the late seventeenth century and claim to have founded the pretty Perthshire village of Grandtully by the banks of the River Tay, renowned for its freshwater pearls and wild salmon.

Throughout the eighteenth century the family farmed the area whilst working the Highland burns that cascade off the Perthshire hills to engage in illicit whisky distilling, keen to avoid ever increasing rates of taxation imposed following The Act of Union with England in 1707. According to family legend the Thomsons do not appear to have taken part in the Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745, being too busy distilling whisky on their farms and enjoying the products thereof, to enter into such doubtful ventures!

In 1823 the Excise Act was passed, which sanctioned the distilling of whisky in return for a licence fee of £10, and a set payment per gallon of proof spirit. Illicit distilling died out almost completely over the next decade and the Thomsons were quick to adapt.

The location of Grandtully Distillery



In 1837 John Thomson acquired the Grandtully distillery which remained in family hands until it closed in 1914. Alfred Barnard, in his 1887 seminal work *The Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom*, commented: “Grandtully is the smallest distillery in

the United Kingdom, and was built by the father of the present proprietor, who is an experienced farmer. It is the most primitive work we have ever seen. The spirit made at Grandtully is from a fine quality of Malt, and much appreciated by the shooting proprietors in the neighbourhood, including Sir Donald Currie, M.P. We tasted a sample of this Whisky, six years old, and found it delicate in flavour, and smooth to the palate”.

Keen to consolidate the family’s new found legitimacy, a tale is told of how John Thomson visited a local builder, put down two whisky bottles a few inches apart on the desk and said: “Fill in the gap between them and build a house of that shape”. The result was the beautiful Bendarroch House, one of the finest country houses in the area.



Bendarroch House today. ‘Fill in the gap between the bottles and build me a house of that shape’

In 1838 the great great grandfather of the current custodians of the Collection, Alexander Thomson, opened a grocery and whisky blending business in Perth, passing it on to his three sons, Alexander, Charles and Peter in 1893.

On 28th October 1908 Peter Thomson branched out on his own, acquiring a shop at 202 High Street, Perth, from Alexander and Charles.

Peter proved to be a canny businessman. Success blessed the venture with the shops rapidly becoming four in number and the firm weathering the great economic storms following the First World War and the Depression of the 1930s.

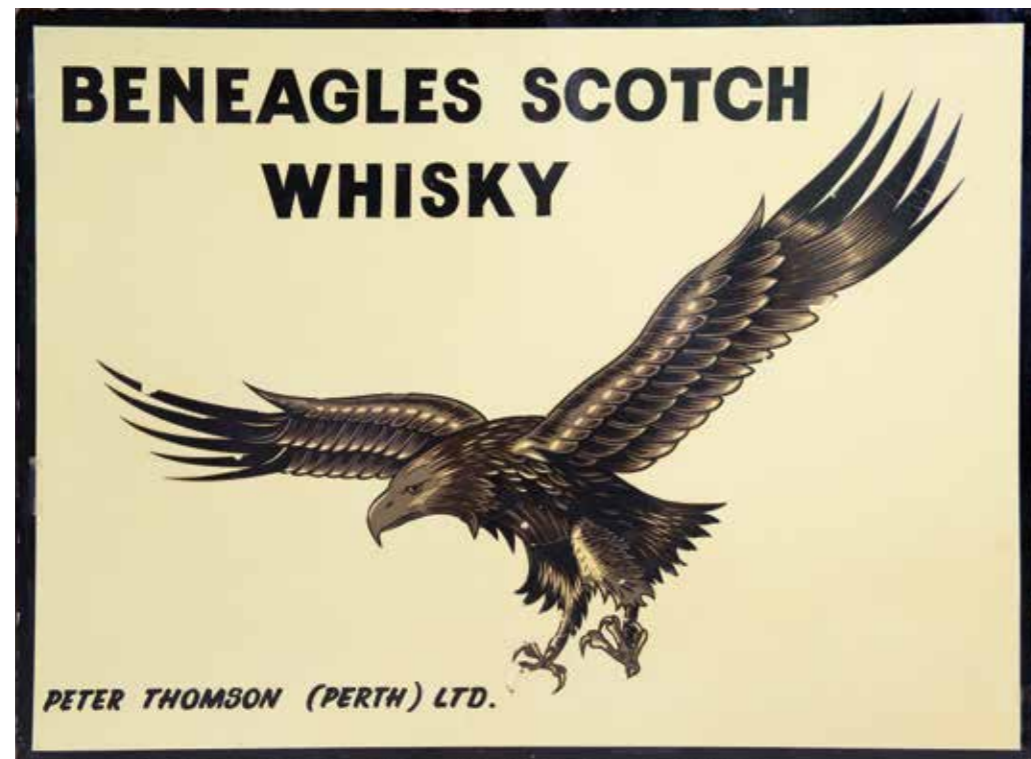
*Peter Thomson*  
28 Oct '08

Partners of Alex Thomson & Sons	1418 12 7
Special Advance of	2222 19
Profits for say 6 months to Oct say	3101 11 7
Sundry Creditors 202 High St	65 11 1
do Debtors 202 High St 185 6 7	195 10 6
Allowance for Bad Debts 5 5	129 18 7
	65 11 11
Shop 202 High St purchase price	2200
do alterations	268
	2468
less Bonds	1174
	1188
Fittings in 202 High St	115
Stock	372 15 9
Drawings by P.T. (all-gain)	1711 10 7
Cash on hand 22 Oct 08	7716 6 2050 8
	£ 1965 6 7
	1000

Peter Thomson's Opening Accounts 28th October 1908



Peter first started selling his own blend of Scotch as Peter Thomson's Whisky in 1908 as a result of his interest in blending and his detailed knowledge of the great Speyside malts. In the 1920s the brand became known as *Golden Beneagles Scotch Whisky*, inspired by the construction of the famous Gleneagles golfing hotel.



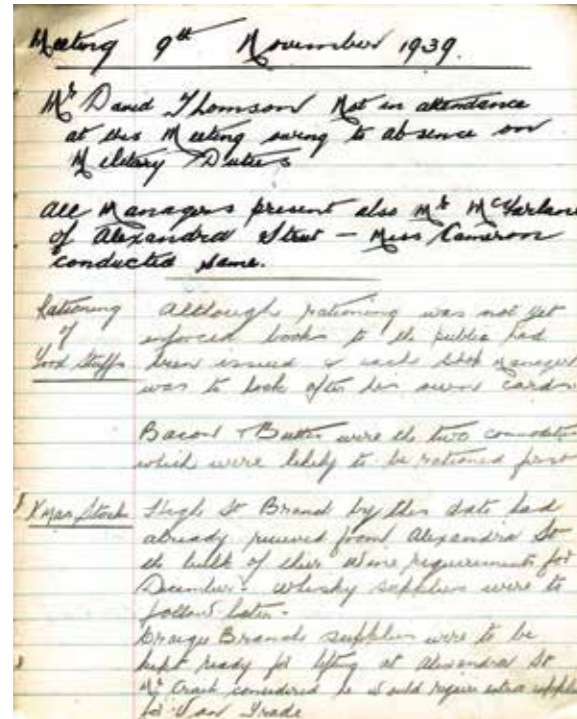
The blend contained a sizeable proportion of Macallan single malt as well as other Speyside and Highland malts with high quality grain whisky from the North British distillery in Edinburgh in which the Thomson family had shares. The firm also launched a premium whisky called *Old Perth* which is sought after today — a bottle of *Very Old Perth* sold at auction for £2,250 at Bonhams in 2014.

Known as the Gateway to the Highlands, the city of Perth is ideally placed for merchants to buy characterful malt whiskies from the north and blend them with the lighter spirits of the Lowlands to create a consistent product to sell in Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and export around the world. Illustrious names as Matthew Gloag, founder of *The Famous Grouse*, Arthur Bell and John Dewar all started blending whisky in Perth at the same time as the Thomsons. Indeed the Thomson family home, *Craigievar*, designed by noted Scottish architect Andrew Heiton, was formerly inhabited by John Dewar then Matthew Gloag in the 1890s. The view from the house over the River Tay to the church spires and grand merchant houses of Perth must rank as one of the finest urban views in Britain.



Craigievar—  
the family home  
of the Thomsons

Minutes of the meeting dated 9th November 1939



Peter Thomson died in 1939 and his son David Kinnear Thomson, aged just 29 at the time, took over but the following year he was captured by the Germans at St Valery, near Dunkirk and saw out the war in a POW camp, creating the famous Highland dance *The Reel of the 51st Highland Division* with his fellow prisoners of the captured Division to while away the time. Fortunately the firm was left in the more than capable hands of his secretary, the redoubtable Miss Cameron, who managed the firm until the war ended. In fact, according to the family, she carried on the day to day running of the business even after the war, becoming a director upon the incorporation of the firm in 1956 while David networked and promoted his whiskies around the world. The prominence of the firm in Perth and David's endeavours in the business world and in public service led to him becoming Lord Provost and receiving the Freedom of the City.

David's brother, Alexander, married Eileen Macgregor, a descendant of the famous Scottish outlaw Rob Roy. One of their sons, Michael Thomson, after qualifying as a chartered accountant, joined Peter Thomson (Perth) Limited in 1962. Under Michael's leadership and drive, the firm expanded rapidly becoming Scottish agents for such prestigious wine and spirit

companies as Hugel in Alsace, Torres of Spain, Joseph Drouhin, Burgundy, Lanson Champagne and Beefeater Gin. Fortified wines were big business too—around Perth you can still see painted adverts on the side of buildings for *PT Port*.

But whisky remained at the heart of Peter Thomsons, *Golden Beneagles Scotch Whisky* growing to be one of the largest selling blends in Scotland. The firm became renowned for its innovative marketing including ceramic whisky miniatures in the shape of curling stones, the Loch Ness Monster, a Golden Eagle decanter and, most magnificent of all, a “Thistle and the Rose” Wade porcelain chess set portraying Scotland's great rivalry with England. The pieces are figures from British history including Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I and Robert the Bruce—all filled with *Beneagles Scotch* whisky!



A decanter of Golden Beneagles Scotch Whisky

The original blending mix from December 1974 for Beneagles signed off by the directors



In 1945 a sister company was set up named The Dougal Cratur Whisky Company Limited. This Company's role was to hold substantial quantities of maturing malt whisky as “fillings” for the *Beneagles* blend and Peter Thomsons' other blends and whisky liqueurs. The name is a character from Walter Scott novel's *Rob Roy*. How very Scottish to give a practical company such a romantic name.

*Following in the footsteps of Bonnie Prince Charlie*



Throughout the 1960s and the 1970s the strong and close bond with the distilleries of Speyside continued to grow. Indeed in 1982 Michael Thomson led a group of industry leaders, including John Grant of Glenfarclas and Sandy Grant Gordon of William Grant & Sons, creators of Glenfiddich, in following the footsteps of Bonnie Prince Charlie from Culloden to Skye dressed in the Highland plaid and surviving off oatmeal and whisky.

The Macallan had long been a vital component of Peter Thomsons' blends and in the 1960s appointed Peter Thomson & Co as the sole agents for selling Macallan as a single malt throughout Scotland. It's hard to imagine now when a bottle of fifty year old Macallan can sell for £25,000 at auction in New York but most single malts prior to the 1990s had no reputation amongst consumers and largely went straight to blended whiskies. Certainly most distilleries did not deem it appropriate to have their own sales force! The efforts of Peter Thomsons proved fruitful however and by 1985 they were selling ten thousand cases a year. So successful were they that Macallan eventually decided to handle sales themselves. One can assuredly say that the origins of The Macallan's reputation as the most prestigious whisky in the world is in no small part down to the efforts of the firm of Peter Thomsons of Perth.



*The Macallan 50th Anniversary Malt—1983 bottling*

In 1983 Michael Thomson took the decision to sell Peter Thomson Perth Limited to The Stakis Corporation, Michael staying on as Chairman for a few years. The Dougal Cratur Whisky Company however remained in family ownership with its substantial stock of young maturing malts and grains, Stakis deeming it unsuitable to hold stock that could not provide an immediate return! Michael however, as canny as his grandfather, with the passion, knowledge and foresight of a lifetime in the trade, recognised the growing trend towards single cask malt whiskies.

Through the 1980s and early 1990s Michael applied his expertise and passion for collecting by adding to and enhancing his stock of casks, always paying homage to the original malt whiskies that had formed the blend of



*Michael Thomson (left) and David Thomson in the foyer of Peter Thomsons of Perth, with a display of Beneagles Whisky bottles and ceramics in 1983*

*Beneagles Scotch Whisky.* Since that period the Collection has quietly matured in the dunnage warehouses of Macallan and Glenfarclas and Michael has now passed on ownership to his two sons, Stuart and Andrew.

So steeped is the family in whisky that Andrew Thomson,



*A ceramic flagon Golden Beneagles Scotch Whisky*

From left to right,  
Peter, David  
and Michael  
Thomson—  
three generations  
of Lords Dean of  
Guild, The Guildry  
Incorporation  
of Perth



whilst running a boutique law firm specialising in the hospitality industry, lives in a converted farm distillery, Tomdachoille, near the village of his forebears, Grandtully. Stuart was, until recently, the Finance Director of McPhersons of Aberlour, the whisky haulage firm and lives in Huntly, close to the great Speyside Distilleries. Michael, Stuart and Andrew are all Liverymen of The Worshipful Company of Distillers, a Livery Company of the City of London dating back to the reign of King Charles I.

The family whisky tradition continues with Stuart's son Simon now a grain merchant and Andrew's son Finn a brand development manager for *Copper Dog*, a new premium blended whisky. Before that, he was at Morrison & MacKay, a whisky blender based in Perth, where he worked on the relaunch of a famous Peter Thomson brand, *Old Perth* whisky. Whisky really does run in the Thomson family's blood.

Now the family are pleased to bring this rare and treasured single malt and grain whisky Collection to the attention of the world and those collectors who share the passion for Scotland's *uisge beatha* or 'the water of life'. *Sláinte!*



Andrew Thomson enjoying a dram from *The Collection* at Glenfarclas Distillery

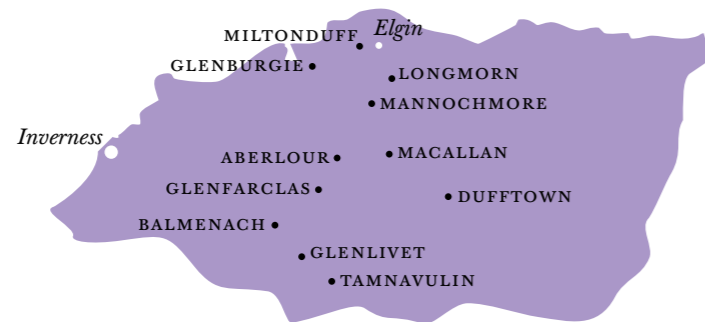


# THE WHISKY

*The Thomson Family Collection*

*The Collection consists of some 160 hogsheads (250 litre capacity)  
and 4 butts (500 litre capacity) of sought after malts  
and very rare old grain whiskies.*

## SPEYSIDE



### *Aberlour—1989*

Also known as Aberlour-Glenlivet in tribute to the great nearby Glenlivet distillery. It sits on the banks of the River Spey near some of the best salmon fishing in the Highlands. There has been a distillery on the site illegal and legal since the early nineteenth century but Aberlour as it is today was built in 1879 by James Fleming. The distillery was then rebuilt and reequipped in 1979. It sits somewhere in style



between heavy Speyside whiskies such as Macallan and more delicate ones like Miltonduff. David Daiches, historian and whisky writer, described it as a “fragrant malt of real individuality”. Casks are held in dunnage at Glenfarclas distillery.

#### ***Balmenach—1978***

Like many Scottish distilleries, Balmenach was founded in 1824 or rather this was the year it went legal. The founder James MacGregor’s family had been illicit distillers in the area for generations. According to Alfred Barnard, writing in 1887, it was drunk by Queen Victoria. He describes it as “rich and highly flavoured” which it is to this day. They are one of the few distilleries to still use worm tubs for condensing, which makes a heavier spirit suitable for long ageing. Dave Broom describes it as “meaty when new, rich and heavy when mature”. It is unusual to see this whisky offered as a single malt. Casks are aged at Broxburn Bottlers.

#### ***Dufftown—1987***

Dufftown is the unofficial capital of the Speyside region yet its eponymous malt whisky is rather under the radar. The distillery is a converted mill and was opened in 1896. It was then bought in 1933 by Arthur Bell and Sons of Perth for use in its blends. They extended it in 1974 so it now has six stills in total. It makes a heavy, powerful spirit that rewards long ageing in sherry casks. Ninety-eight percent of it goes into brands such as Bell’s, Dewars and Johnnie Walker, so a single malt is a rare treat. Casks are held in dunnage at Glenfarclas distillery.

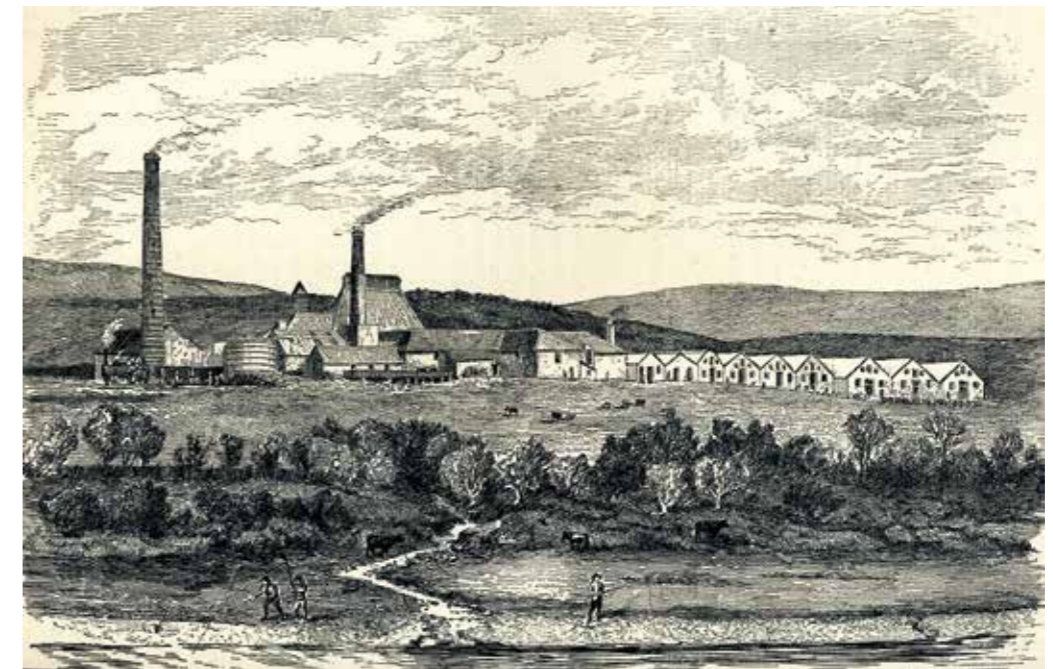
#### ***Glenburgie—1988***

Glenburgie sits on the road from Inverness to Perth. According to Alfred Barnard’s 1885 book *The Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom*, it is “very ancient”. The original distillery was founded in 1829 but it didn’t last and was revived in 1878. Like Miltonduff, it was part of the Hiram Walker Canadian whisky empire and for most of the twentieth century made malts to go into lighter blends for the North American

market, notably *Ballantines* and *Chivas Regal*. The whiskies are mainly aged in sherry casks. They are very rarely seen as single malts, so independent bottlings tend to be valuable. Casks are held in dunnage at Glenfarclas distillery.

#### ***Glenlivet—1970***

Walter Scott wrote about Glenlivet: “It is worth all the wines of France for flavour, and more cordial to the system besides”. The distillery began life as an illegal operation but much to the anger of his fellow moonshiners, George Smith took out a licence in 1824 and the rest is history. Such was Glenlivet’s fame that distilleries on Speyside used to append the word Glenlivet to their names to get some of the glory. Aeneas Macdonald wrote in his 1930 book *Whisky*, that Glenlivet was “almost a synonym for the finest Highland whisky”. To separate itself from all the pretenders, Glenlivet became known as The Glenlivet or Smith’s Glenlivet. Casks are aged at Broxburn Bottlers near Edinburgh.



*Glenlivet Distillery*

*Glenfarclas—1989, 1991*

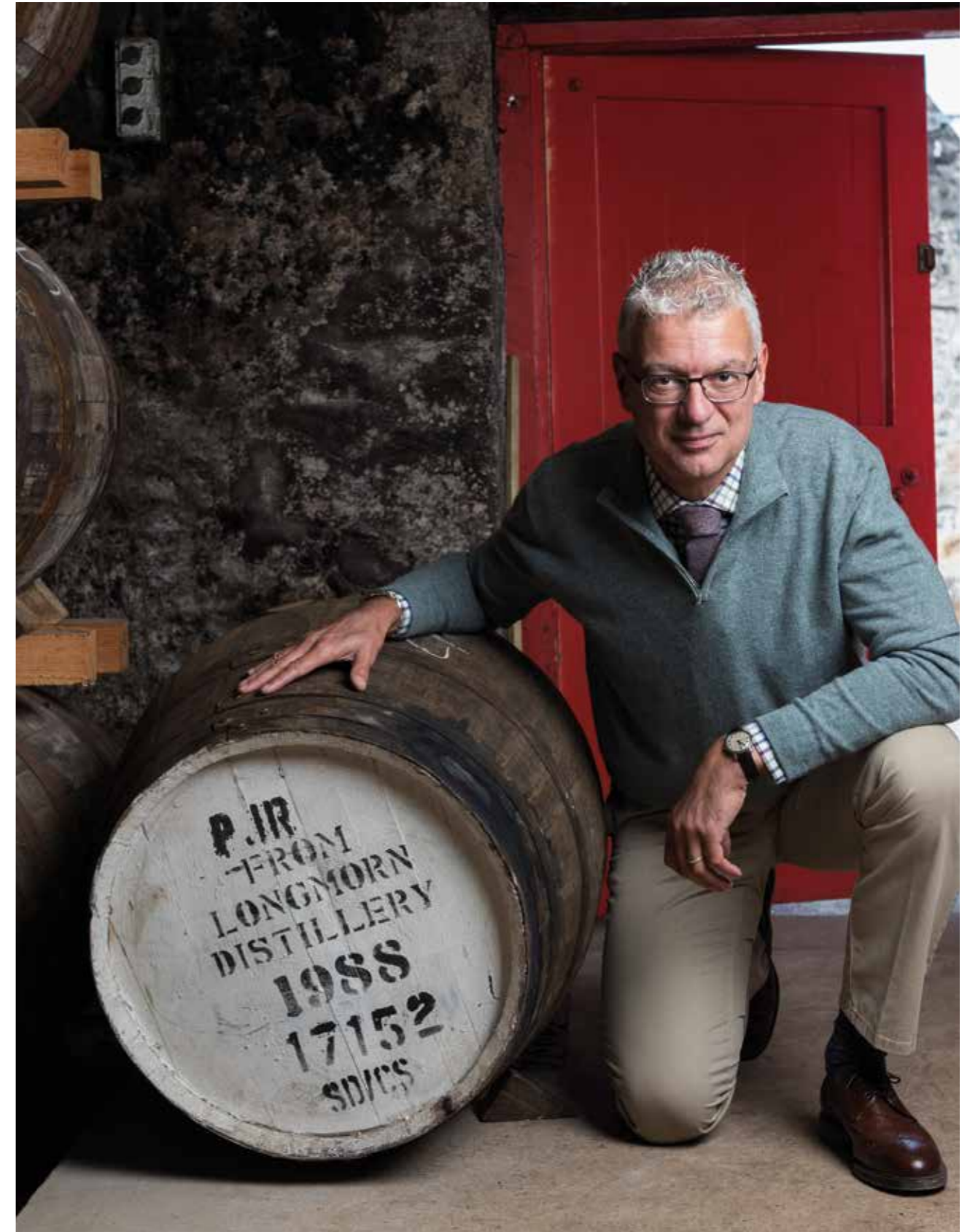
One of the few independent distilleries left in Scotland. Glenfarclas was founded in 1836 and bought by John Grant in 1865. It has remained in family hands ever since. Nowadays it is only ever matured in old sherry casks, usually oloroso from Bodegas Jose y Miguel Martin in Jerez. Glenfarclas were one of the pioneers of single malt whisky. In fact in 1969 they stopped selling their whisky to blenders entirely. With its rich heavily sherried style and vintage releases, Glenfarclas is one of the most in demand whiskies amongst collectors. Casks are held in dunnage at Glenfarclas distillery.

*Glenfarclas  
Distillery*



*Longmorn—1988, 1989, 1991*

Longmorn was built in 1893 by John Duff who also designed the nearby Glenlossie distillery. It is located near Elgin, a small city like Perth with more than its fair share of grand nineteenth century buildings—a tribute to the prosperity of the whisky business. This was the distillery where the godfather of Japanese distilling, Masataka Taketsuru learnt his trade. The stills at Yoichi distillery in Japan are exact copies of the ones at Longmorn. Rare single malt releases from Longmorn are much



in demand from, in the words of Dave Broom, “an obsessive fan base”. Casks are held in dunnage at Glenfarclas distillery.

*Macallan—1985 (sherry butts) and 1987, 1989, 1990 (hogsheads)*

Macallan was first established in 1824 near the town of Craigellachie on the banks of the river Spey. It was rebuilt in 1892 by Roderick Kemp. Alfred Barnard writing in 1885, is strangely dismissive saying that it “mostly finds its way to the English market.” By the twentieth century, however, it had earned a great reputation amongst blenders, but it wasn’t until the 70s and 80s that it became so sought after as a single malt. It’s now the most prestigious whisky in the world with auction prices to match. Casks are aged at the Macallan distillery.

*Mannochmore—1977*

This part of the Highlands near the elegant town of Elgin must have the highest concentration of distilleries in the world. Mannochmore is a recent addition to their number. It was built in 1971 by John Haig and Co. with six stills. Now owned by Diageo, it was home of the notorious, discontinued and now very valuable Loch Dhu black whisky which was produced in the 1990s. It allegedly got its colour from heavily charred casks. The regular product, which is seldom seen as a single malt, is quite different. According to Dave Broom the whisky is “all about sweet floral freshness”. Casks are aged at Broxburn Bottlers.

*Miltonduff—1988*

The Glen of Pluscarden just outside Elgin was once home to a rumoured fifty illegal distilleries in the early nineteenth century. One of these, Miltonduff, went legal in 1824. Miltonduff was bought in the 1930s by Hiram Walker, the Canadian whisky giant, and since then has made what’s known as Scotland’s most Canadian whisky. It’s a delicate floral spirit that with age becomes extremely complex. Most goes into export blends, notably *Chivas Regal*, so a single malt is extremely rare. Casks are held in dunnage at Glenfarclas distillery.



*Milnorduff  
Distillery*



*Tamnavulin—1991*

One of Speyside's newest distilleries. It was built near the river Livet (where Glenlivet gets its name from) in 1966 by Invergordon Distillers during the great whisky boom. It's now owned by Whyte and Mackay. The distillery has six stills and produces over four million litres of spirits a year, but the vast majority of this goes into blends. It is rarely seen as a single malt, but when bottlings appear, they tend to be very highly regarded and in demand. The spirit has a great affinity with sherry wood. Casks are held in dunnage at Glenfarclas distillery.

NORTHERN HIGHLANDS

*Clynelish—1989*

Clynelish has an illustrious history. It is located in the town of Brora, which lies by the North Sea. It was founded in 1819 by the Marquess of Stafford and for much

of its early history was only sold to private customers rather than blenders. David Daiches in his book *Scotch Whisky* described it as "that fine, full, mellow whisky". It then became part of the Johnnie Walker stable where it was a much-prized part of the blend. The distillery was completely rebuilt in 1967 and is an exact copy of the Caol Ila distillery on Islay. Clynelish is a lightly-peated whisky. Casks are held in dunnage at Glenfarclas distillery.

ISLAY

*Bowmore—1991*

Located on the rain-battered coast of Islay, Bowmore is a legend of Scotch whisky. The distillery founded in 1779 was the first on the island to obtain a licence. In 1880 it was taken over by James Mutter and the distillery was rebuilt. It is now one of the few distilleries left in Scotland that still has its own malting floors. It is not the most heavily peated whisky on Islay, but it does have a strong smoky character. Bowmore has long been prized as a single malt and as such is highly collectable. Rare bottlings go for a significant amount of money. Casks are aged at Broxburn Bottlers.



*Bowmore  
Distillery*

***Bunnahabhain—1988***

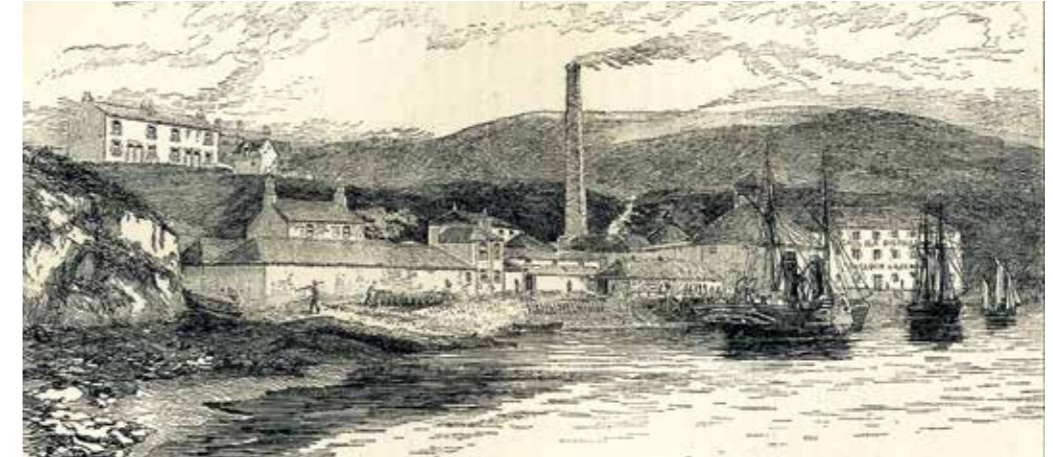
The distillery near Port Askaig on Islay was built in 1881. In fact a whole village was built around it for workers, along with a pier so that coal-fired steamers could collect the whisky and take it to the mainland. Small steamships known as puffers made the island whisky economy possible. The name Bunnahabhain means “mouth of the river” in Gaelic. The distillery was extended in 1963. Of the Islay malts it has the lowest profile as most of its product is used for blending, but it deserves to be much better known. The style is gently smoky, but without the heavy peat character of Ardbeg or Laphroaig. The casks are aged at Broxburn Bottlers.

*Bunnabhain  
Distillery*



***Caol Ila—1988, 2006***

According to Aeneas Macdonald’s *Whisky*, written in 1930, Caol Ila is one of “four whiskies with an almost legendary fame” along with other Islay distilleries Ardbeg, Laphroaig and Lagavulin. Alfred Barnard wrote that the water Caol Ila uses is “the finest in Islay”. The distillery was founded in 1846 and then completely rebuilt in 1974. The new stills were exact replicas of the old ones so that the taste remained the same. The whisky tends to be one of the peatiest on the island. Casks are aged at Broxburn and Blackgrange bonded warehouse near Stirling.



*Caol Ila  
Distillery*

**LOWLAND**

***Auchentoshan—1989, 1991***

The name Auchentoshan means “corner of the field” in Gaelic. It was founded in 1823 and lies on the road from Glasgow to Loch Lomond overlooking the Clyde—the river that linked Scotland to the world. The whisky is unusual because the spirit is triple distilled as with most Irish whiskies, rather than double distilled as is the norm in Scotland. There is a story that this technique was introduced by refugees from Ireland. Wherever it came from, it lends the whisky a pure, fresh and rather delicate character. The distillery was refurbished in 1984, but the unique distillation technique was preserved. Casks are aged at Springburn bonded warehouse near Glasgow.

**GRAIN WHISKIES**

***Girvan—1989***

Located in the wilds of North Ayrshire on the west coast. Girvan is a grain distillery and its aged spirits like those from North British are very rarely seen on the market as

they are in demand for luxury blends. The distillery was opened in 1963 by William Grant & Sons to provide grain whisky for their blends. It's an enormous distillery built in a moment of great confidence in the Scotch whisky business thanks to a boom in lighter whiskies for the American market. They use a Coffey continuous still to create a very pure high quality spirit. Casks are aged at Airdrie bonded warehouse near Glasgow.

*North British—1988, 1991*

A grain whisky rather than a malt and very rare to see on its own especially at these ages. Grain from North British was a major component of *Beneagles* whisky, and nowadays older casks are snapped up by blenders such as Johnnie Walker for premium whiskies like *Blue Label*. The distillery was built in 1886 by a conglomerate of blenders and spirit dealers and is the last surviving one in Edinburgh. It remained as a cooperative owned by, amongst other, the Thomson family until it was bought out in 1993. Casks are aged at Muirhall bonded warehouse near Edinburgh. ✦

*Dunnage  
warehousing  
at Glenfarclas  
distillery*



*Designed by Jules Akel, written by Henry Jeffreys, with photographs by John Paul*

