

SOMETIME IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AN UNKNOWN FARMER
BEGAN DISTILLING IN STRATHSPEY'S GLEN OF THE GREEN GRASS.
HIS BUSINESS PROSPERED IN THIS LAND — FERTILE IN SUMMER,
YET BLEAK AND AUSTERE UNDER WINTER'S SNOW. BY 1836
THE DISTILLERY WAS WELL-FOUNDED. FOR **175** YEARS IT HAS
SINGLE-MINDEDLY GONE ON, INDEPENDENT IN OWNERSHIP AND
OUTLOOK, CONTINUING TO MAKE THE FINE SINGLE MALT WHISKY
THAT TODAY THE WORLD KNOWS AS

Glenfarclas[®]



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GLENFARCLAS

An Independent Distillery

Ian Buxton

Published by The Angels' Share in association with Glenfarclas Distillery



The 840 metre summit of Ben Rinnes dominates the landscape around Glenfarclas

CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Introduction	
<i>A family firm... or a family business?</i>	13
history	
<i>Family Roots</i>	17
<i>Early Days: 1791–1865</i>	19
<i>Calm before the storm: 1865–1890</i>	31
<i>A Big Boom: The Pattison Years</i>	39
<i>Recovery in Recession: 1900–1930</i>	57
<i>Rebuilding, Revival and Expansion: 1930–1950</i>	63
<i>Foundation Stones: 1950–1969</i>	71
<i>The Modern Era: 1970 to Today</i>	85
people	
<i>John L.S. Grant</i>	109
<i>George S. Grant</i>	113
<i>Shane Fraser</i>	117
<i>Douglas Belford</i>	119

<i>Robert Ransom</i>	122
<i>Donna McIntosh</i>	125
<i>Jane Timmins</i>	128
<i>Alistair Miller</i>	130
<i>Tommy Webster</i>	133
insights: to see ourself as others see us	
<i>It's not Rock and Roll. Or perhaps it is—Anders Fridén</i>	141
<i>M. Marguerite's Holiday. The Mähler-Besse connection</i>	145
<i>The Collector—Luc Timmermans</i>	151
<i>Whisky 1.01—Pip Hills and the Scotch Malt Whisky Society</i>	156
production	
<i>Why Glenfarclas?</i>	161
<i>Distilling Arrangements</i>	165
175	
<i>The Ceilidh</i>	174
<i>A Taste of 175 Years</i>	178
<i>A Princely Whisky</i>	180



FOREWORD

John L.S. Grant
Chairman

This book was conceived during several conversations with Ian Buxton reminiscing about past characters, and the history of the whisky industry. In particular we talked about the 'Pattison era' which is of great interest to him. Of course my forebears were heavily involved having formed a partnership with the Pattisons in 1896 and we are fortunate that much of the correspondence from this time survives, most of it untouched for over 100 years. With 2011 marking the 175th Anniversary of our first licensed distilling I was easily persuaded that a history of the distillery and family was both timely and appropriate.

Unfortunately I never knew my Grandfather who at the age of 16, along with his brother took over the running of the farm and subsequently the distillery. My father in his journal gives us a note of his background during the 1920s, 30s and 40s prior to starting work with William Walker & Co. Ltd, whisky

brokers, and filling agents for Glenfarclas in Glasgow in January 1947. His training there however was cut short when my grandfather was admitted to hospital in Edinburgh in October 1948, and he was called back to run the distillery. He wrote:

'It was only after the surgeon operated that we realised how seriously ill he was. I had to come home to Glenfarclas to take over the direction of the firm, which had been formed into a private company in 1947, without knowing any details or having the chance to take over from anyone. I was of course familiar with the process of distilling malt whisky, but painfully ignorant about tax matters, company law, Customs & Excise procedures and the hundred and one things I should have known. Looking back (this was written in 1961) it amazes me how I managed to get away with it.'

Unlike the previous two generations I have been fortunate in that I had time, three years with the then family company Wm. Teacher & Sons Ltd, and a further five years with my father before he retired in 1979 to learn about the trade and the company. How successful that apprenticeship was is for others to judge, but I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as custodian of Glenfarclas. We are indeed fortunate to work in an industry where competitors not only trade with each other but help each other.

In 1986 when making my annual visit to see John MacPhail, then Chairman of Highland Distillers Ltd, looking for a filling order he very kindly increased their annual order, and then suggested 'you had better increase your price by a couple of pence as this is an expensive year for you'. It was of course the year of our 150th Anniversary, and he then agreed to be the guest speaker at our celebration lunch. To this day he is the only person to have asked me for a price increase!

As I look to the future our Glenfarclas whisky is now exported to over fifty countries, and as predicted by my father forty years ago the future is in building a bottled brand. Quality and tradition will remain

paramount, as will the (expensive) direct fired stills, the (inefficient) dunnage warehouses, and I hope our non politically correct employees, who muck in to whatever and use their common sense — a rarity in the twenty-first century.

This book is dedicated to all our employees past and present, importers, distributors, customers and consumers. Without you, we would not be here.





A FAMILY FIRM...OR A FAMILY BUSINESS?

Introduction

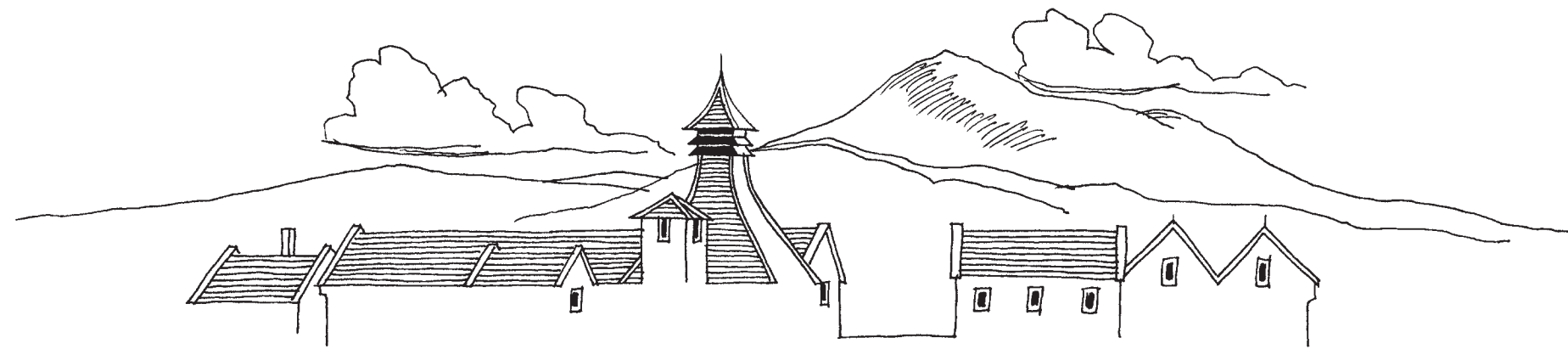
A family firm. Glenfarclas, we are told, is 'a family firm'. But what does this mean?

Despite huge consolidation in the global drinks industry there are still a number of 'family' firms, some of them unexpectedly large.

Bacardi, for example, owners of the eponymous rum but also Bombay gin, Martini, Grey Goose vodka and the William Lawson and Dewar's brands of Scotch whisky (amongst many other things) is still privately owned by a surprisingly small number of family members, descendants of founder Facundo Bacardi. And a number of Bacardi family members are still active in the management of their company.

Much the same observation could be made of William Grant & Sons, one of the giants of the Scotch whisky industry, but with wider interests in gin, rum and other drinks.

*Opposite:
John & Ishbel Grant
with their two Labradors*



FAMILY ROOTS

The History



William Grant of Blairfindy 'carried arms in Prince Charles' army' but in 1746 'submitted to the King's mercy'. His sons, John, a lieutenant, and David, an officer, were also out with Charlie as were two kinsmen Alexander and James Grant, both of Logan of Blairfindy.

Did they distill? We shall never know, for this is their sole appearance in history. As far as Glenfarclas' history goes, our story begins in 1791. It turns out that 2011 may just be the distillery's 220th anniversary ...

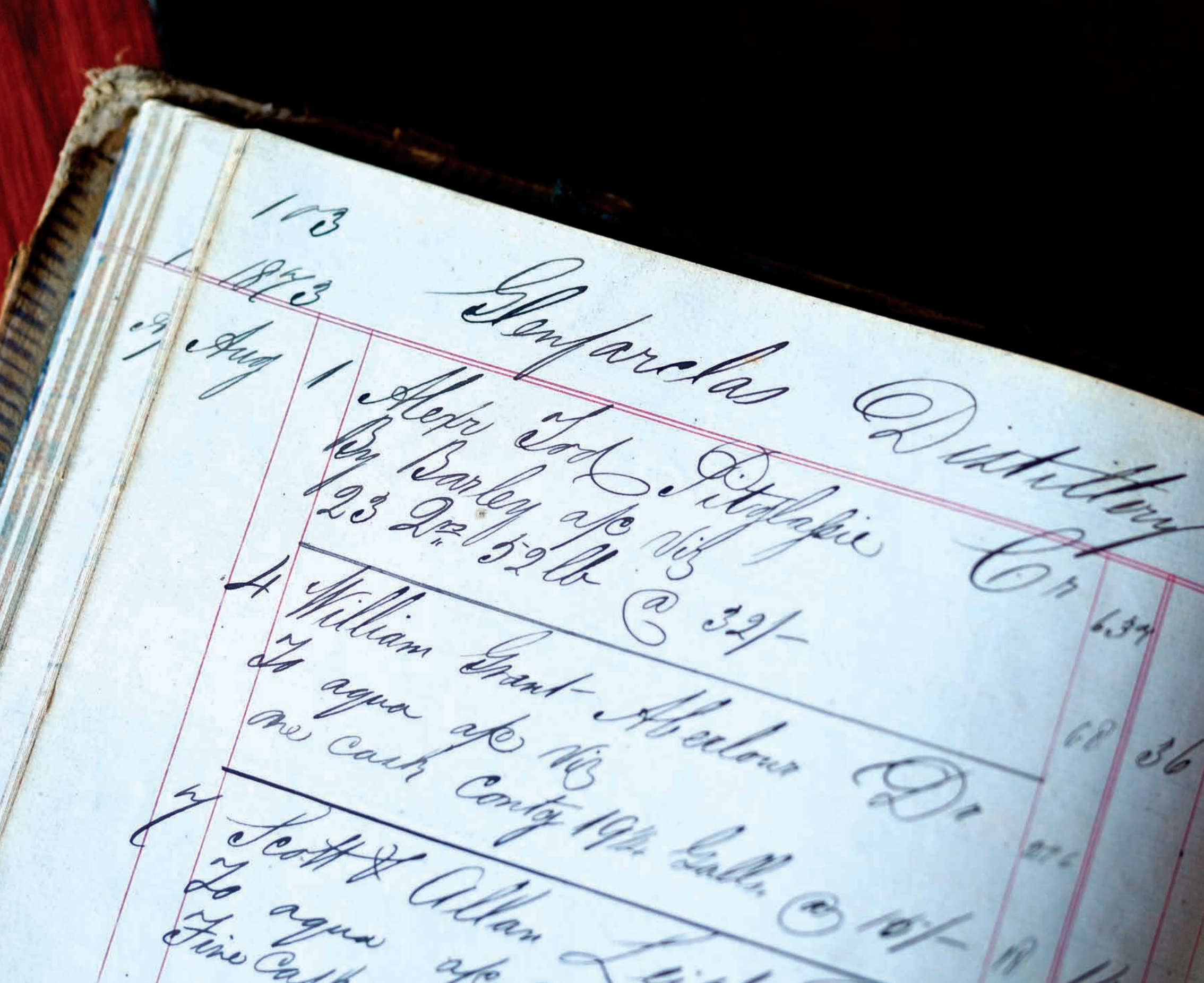
Our journey to *Glenfarclas* was a longer affair than we expected,
for what seems near in mountain scenery may be,
after all, a very long way off.
Beautiful the prospect certainly was not;
for without the soft magic of green hills,
woodlands, and the river meandering in the verdant meadow,
no scene can deserve the qualification;
nevertheless, if unlovely,

*all was strange,
gigantic, and sublime.*

ALFRED BARNARD, THE WHISKY DISTILLERIES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM







CALM BEFORE THE STORM: 1865-1890

George Grant lived at Glenfarclas from 1865 until his death in 1890, aged 60. During his lifetime distilling in Scotland underwent profound change, moving from a small-scale artisanal or peasant activity, often in defiance of the law, to an increasingly industrialised business under growing centralised control. This process had started earlier, arguably stimulated by the 1823 Act and the rapid adoption of the continuous still after 1830, but gathered momentum as the century went on.

Glenfarclas appears to have resisted these trends and it would seem that little changed under George Grant's management. It remained a relatively modest farm distillery producing on a seasonal basis for the local market and, also for the rapidly expanding and newly fashionable blending industry.

We know that, during the season, around 1,200 gallons (3,114 litres of pure alcohol or lpa) could be produced weekly and that the filling price was 3s. 1d per proof gallon (just over 15p ppg). Distilling started in June and, in the first year 242 casks were filled. The first cask was sold to Galbraith & Grant,

Opposite:
Cash book from 1873



George Grant
1830-1890

merchants in London and cask number 5 to Rodrick Kemp of Elgin (today famous for his association with The Macallan). Around half of the total fillings for 1870 were for Scott & Allan of Leith (a firm of blenders, wine merchants and cork cutters, they ran two clipper ships carrying wine and brandy into the port of Leith but were eventually acquired by J.G. Thomson & Co in 1890) suggesting the importance of the blending trade.

A distilling licence for six months cost five guineas (£5.25) and a malt licence £4. 14s. 6d (£4.72½). Special permission had to be obtained to grind malt on the farm under strict conditions, including the presence of an Officer of the Inland Revenue who would *'accompany the malt and not lose sight of it until it is again deposited'*.

In the following year 21 casks were sent to London and in 1875 a new lease for the farm and distillery buildings was agreed at an annual rent of £130. 19s. 0d (£130.95) with Sir George Macpherson-Grant. An increase in the filling price of 7d (a little over 2½p) per gallon no doubt compensated, though by 1880 this had fallen back to 3s. 5d (17p) and ten years later to 3s 3d (a little over 16p). A further 19 year lease, now at £142. 10s. 0d (£142.50) was entered into in 1879.

George Grant was aware of the value of a brand name however. For a number of years it had been the practice to append the name 'Glenlivet' to the company's whisky. Indeed, a considerable number of distilleries did this, some as far as 30 miles from the glen itself such was its fame, giving rise to the wry observation that Glenlivet was 'the longest glen in Scotland'.

In 1870 the Smiths of Glenlivet registered 'Glenlivet' as their trademark and this was acknowledged in the Trade Mark registration Act of 1875. The use of the name by other distillers continued unabated, though, and in 1880 Col. J.G. Smith commenced a legal action to secure the exclusive rights. It never



The staff in 1891. George Grant is the young lad sitting on the extreme right, aged 17



The staff in 1883 with George Grant seated on cask; sons John and George to his right.

came before the courts, however, as it was settled out of court in 1884 with an agreement that Smiths would be entitled to the sole use of the name ‘The Glenlivet’ and that other distillers in the Spey valley, including Glenfarclas, could use their name hyphenated with Glenlivet (or, as it was sometimes then spelled, Glenlivet). More remote distillers then had to abandon their use of the designation. George Grant and his fellow Spey distillers then ensured that Smith met all their costs.

The link to Glenlivet survived for many years while it was seen to lend credibility to the whisky but has now been all but abandoned, even by those entitled to style themselves ‘___ Glenlivet’. Like its neighbours Glenfarclas can now stand on its own.

A scanty record also survives in Barnard’s *Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom*. He included Glenfarclas in his run through the distilleries, visiting around 1886, but does not appear to have been unduly impressed. Glenfarclas receives only a cursory entry of one page, around half of which is taken up with a description of the immediate landscape (by contrast, nearby Glenlivet is accorded a respectful five full pages, including two full page plates). Barnard laconically records a few statistics and concludes ‘The water used comes from several springs on Benrinnes, and the make is pure Highland Malt, the annual output being 50,000 gallons’. (Around 130,000 lpa).

However he was shortly to remedy this with a lengthy and fulsome description. As we shall see, Barnard was nothing if not the professional journalist.

George’s father John died in October 1889, aged 84 and George survived him by only a year. By now the ‘whisky boom’ was in full flood and *The Illustrated London News* could write, ‘The extent to which Scotch whisky has increased during the past few years is truly marvellous... now it is the usual drink of a large part of the community, not only in England but all over that Greater Britain which lies across the seas’.



An early label.
No record of John Pile & Co. has been found



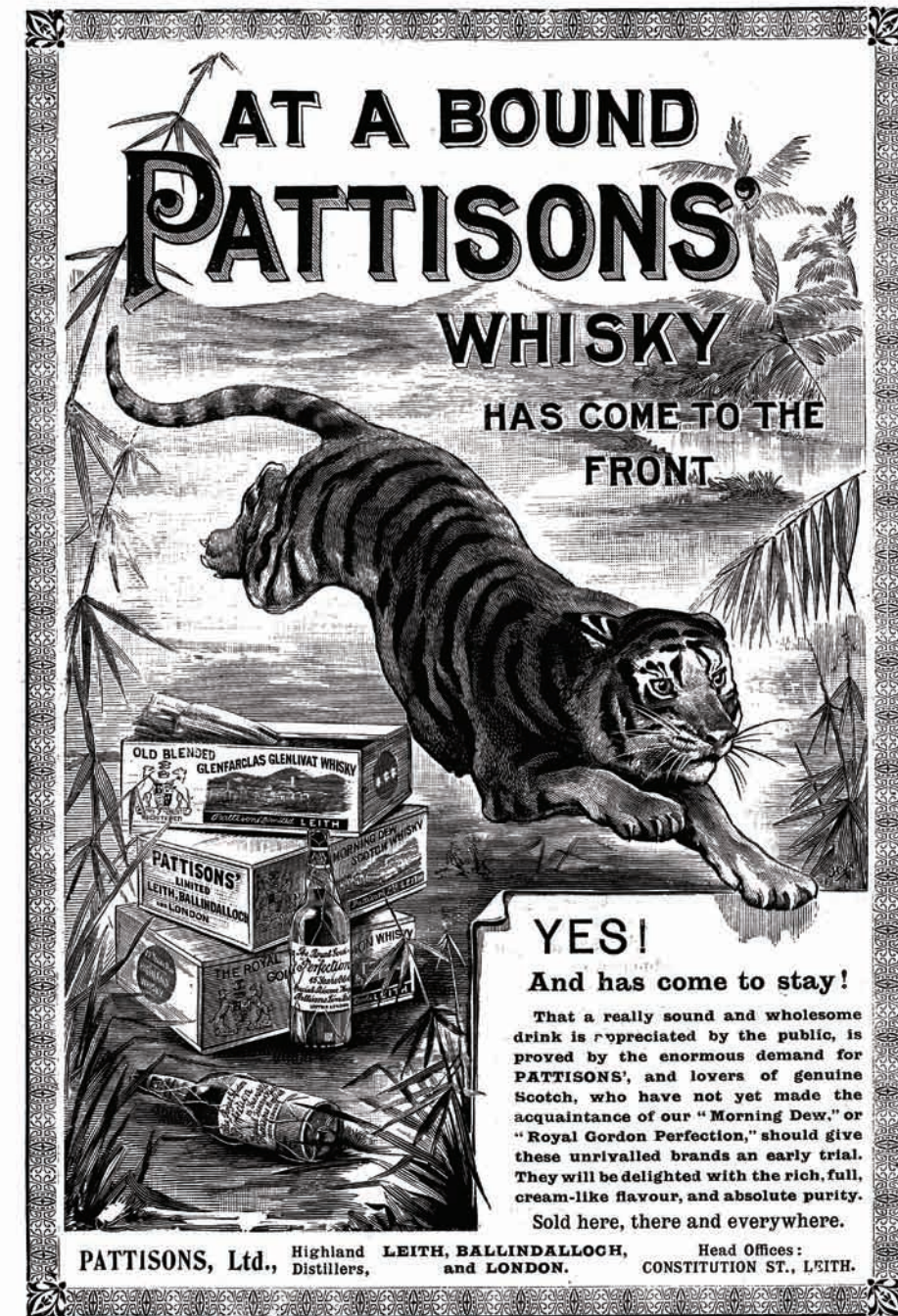
1872
The earliest authenticated label

*...an innocuous stimulant to the whole system;
rich, mellow and full of flavour...
a most pleasing aid to digestion.*



*There is just a touch of the aromatic flavour
of peat and heather which imparts a nice bouquet to it.
...it is a drink that affords great sustaining power.*

ALFRED BARNARD, A VISIT TO THE GLENFARCLAS—GLENLIVET DISTILLERY



A BIG BOOM: THE PATTISON YEARS

In 1890 George G. Grant died, aged 60, leaving his widow Elsie with the licence of the distillery. We may note that she thus joins the small but distinguished roll of female distillers and distillery proprietors and, as she lived until 1927, presumably she remained actively involved throughout the following years. They were certainly to prove exciting and required a steady nerve.

But, before then, there were the correct proprieties to be observed over the funeral. The archives still hold the tradesmen's accounts for funeral hearse and coffin and the widow's mourning clothes. It was an expensive business.

Two brothers continued the family line: John Grant (b 1873) and George Grant (b 1874), who were 17 and 16 years old respectively when their father died. They subsequently took over active management of the farm and distillery, though it is not clear when they were able to assume the distilling licence from their mother. They were certainly in charge by 1897, when Elsie was receiving the sum of £20 annually from the distillery account.

*Opposite:
 An 1897 Pattisons' advertisement
 from Black & White magazine
 featuring Glenfarclas Glenlivet*

Glenfarclas

—*the King of Whiskies and the Whisky of Kings.*

In its superiority it is something to

drive the skeleton from the feast

and paint landscapes in the brain of man.

In it is to be found the sunshine and shadow

that chased each other over the billowy cornfield,

the hum of the bee, the hope of Spring,

the breath of May, the carol of the lark,

the distant purple heather in the mountain mist,

and the wealth of autumn's rich content

all golden with imprisoned light.

SIR THOMAS R. DEWAR, CORRESPONDENCE, MAY 1912





*John Peter Grant,
George Grant
& George S. Grant
in 1933*

REBUILDING, REVIVAL AND EXPANSION: 1930-1950

In January 1930 the tide began to turn, though that would hardly have been evident at the time.

The lease on Rechlerlich Farm and the distillery, first entered into in 1865 expired. Instead of renewing it, as had been the practice for the past 65 years, George Grant bought the freehold title to the farm (and two others nearby) from Sir George Macpherson-Grant. The Grants of Glenfarclas were tenants no longer. The decision to buy the freehold is another mark of George Grant's resolution and single-mindedness.

And, in the following March, a further important step: in the Court of Session Lord Murray confirmed the distillery's rights to water and peat cutting. A distillery without water is unthinkable. Now, with these vital raw materials and the freehold of the distillery secured, the Grants were truly masters of their own destiny.

But the prevailing mood was hardly a positive one. The price of maturing whisky was dropping steadily,



*George Grant with his
Alvis Speed 25
on 1st January 1938*

the price of *independence*

Over the last fifty years or so the ownership and organisational structure of the Scotch whisky industry has changed almost out of recognition as smaller independent and family companies have been acquired by larger groups — which, in turn, have often been themselves acquired.

Substantial, multi-national groups with diverse portfolios including other spirits, wines and beers have come to dominate the industry.

Ownership of Scotch whisky has, for the most part, passed out of Scotland and with it has gone many of the higher paid management roles. Similarly, the independent whisky broker has all but disappeared from the trade.

Many commentators deplore this trend, yet few have been able to stand against it. Glenfarclas have. What has been the price of independence — and what are its benefits?

It is not as if the company has lacked for ardent suitors. Some approaches have been discreet, almost diffident; others more confident, some bold and a few downright aggressive, even hostile. Confidentiality, good manners and discretion prevent me from naming names here — but you may care to guess at the identity of those rebuffed, some more than once!

Here are just a few of the approaches. Not all are recorded: as John Grant said to me whilst researching this book, *'We don't write them all down. What does it matter? The answer's always "no thanks"'*.

May 1957 saw a polite enquiry on behalf of a North American group. It was equally politely declined. Less than a year later another North American distiller raised the question — to receive the same response.

In March 1965 George Grant noted that there were planning applications or building works in hand for no less than thirteen new single malt distilleries. *'I fear a slump due to over-production'*, he wrote prophetically. Shortly afterwards, blending customers were rationed due to high demand and record production of 500,000 original proof gallons was noted.

Time passed. A reasonably close neighbour spoiled a perfectly good lunch in October 1966 by broaching the topic and, a couple of years later, those persistent Americans were back, this time waving a blank cheque. *'Fill in the figures yourself'*, George Grant was told.

He handed the cheque back without taking the top off his pen. There was a further approach in 1968, also rebuffed but, in August 1970 he confided to his private journal, *'How long can we remain independent?'* It was a rare and atypical moment of doubt.

Back they came ... in 1970, in 1988 and so on — too tedious to record. No doubt others will follow and doubtless they will be shrugged off, as forcefully as seems appropriate.

'What would we do with the money?', asks John Grant. *'The only certainty, if we were to sell, is that there would be redundancies in all departments, and I suspect our overseas distributors (90% of whom are family companies) would have the brand removed from their portfolios in a short period of time.'*

Freedom is both the price and the prize of independence and long may Glenfarclas fly that flag.





*Sandy Emslie
fishing with
George Grant
in 1981*

October 1987 with the confident words, *'Earlier on today apparently'*, he began, *'a woman rang the BBC and said she had heard that there was a hurricane on the way. Well if you are watching, don't worry there isn't'*, he said sagely. Early next morning, the worst storm since 1703 devastated southern England. Naturally, then, shortly after Ian McCaskill had declared the filling store officially open a torrential downpour ended months of drought!

With the increased production the site was again at capacity and two further warehouses were completed. As fast as they were being built, John Grant was trying to empty them and the company's first ever duty free listing was achieved at Tokyo airport. It was presumably a success, as a listing for Osaka airport followed shortly. Today, Glenfarclas is a feature in airport shops across the world.

Despite the global downturn of the early 1990s, due to the first Gulf War and the consequent increase in fuel prices, production of the company's own fillings was once again stepped up. Sales to the blending industry had dipped in the recession but, once again, this was viewed as an opportunity to lay down stocks which would surely be required in the eventual recovery. And so it proved.

This required further new warehousing in 1992, and the distillery offices were also extended at that time. Bouncing back from the slowdown in sales, Glenfarclas' own bottled sales grew by a quarter in 1993, once again demonstrating the volatility of the market for Scotch whisky. Naturally, production was once again increased the following year.

The period following has been a hectic one. Worldwide appreciation of single malt whisky has been followed by a gratifying growth in sales.

Hard though it may now be to appreciate, as recently as 1973 it was possible to list all the brands available in a very small space. Albert Mackie, an Edinburgh writer and journalist in what was one of

*The **Glenfarclas 105** has long been one of the best strong whiskies widely available, and it's hard not to make comparisons between its robust, self-confident style*

and the independence of the firm that makes it.

IAIN BANKS, RAW SPIRIT





tasting panel. As if that wasn't enough he looks after the company's it systems or, as he admits, keeps an eye on the specialist sub-contractors that are so essential to such a specialised field.

He can thank his mother for all this. She saw the advertisement for this post in *The Scotsman* and, along with Douglas' wife Judith, persuaded him to apply. They saw the chance to move for space, fresh air and to have the room and quality of life to start a family. Trust an accountant to have a plan – and make it work.

Back in 2003 he admitted at the interview to being interested in whisky – apparently few other candidates did. But he'd prepared by getting and drinking a bottle of the 10 Years Old Glenfarclas. Planning again: perhaps this swung it! Certainly the empty bottle and tin remain in his office to this day as a kind of talisman.

Today he rates the 15 and 21 Years Old styles as *'top drawer whisky; the casks from 1989 onwards seems superb, with fabulous colour and great depth of flavour'*. An Octave cask is also shared with close family. *'I chose a whisky for the mood, the weather and the occasion'*, he says. It's good to know that he was part of the team that drew up the shortlist for the Family Casks, though he was quick to add that *'there's nothing wrong with the pre-1989 casks, it's just that those were the ones being dumped in the year I joined'*. A secret romantic at heart then.

Outside of work, Douglas enjoys life with his wife and two children in their home near Aultmore. Time permitting, he golfs (for Glenfarclas in the Malt Distillers Association tournament amongst others), watches rugby (though his playing days are over), catches up with the diy and spends time with the family.

Asked to sum all this up Douglas replies, *'It's an excellent company, with good friendly people, in a nice place with a lovely product'*. What's not to like?

As I said, a fortunate man.

ALISTAIR MILLER

When I met Alistair he'd been on shift for six or seven hours (having started at 6:00 a.m. that morning) but was still bouncing round the mash house like a man twenty years his junior. It wouldn't suit me and frankly, while trying to take coherent notes, I had difficulty keeping up.

I realise that I've written 'the mash house'. It would be more accurate to say 'his' mash house because if ever a man had staked claim to a territory it's Alistair and the giant Glenfarclas wash backs. It's clear that you're a guest here; a welcome guest, but a guest nonetheless.

This is a man not given to wasting words. Asked to describe his job he replied, *'I walk about and watch what happens'*. Watch with a sharp and experienced eye I would suggest. The washbacks have to be filled to a precise level, two at a time, and the filling must be carefully balanced otherwise one 'gets all the good stuff'. That wouldn't do. Knowing that his colleagues in the still room can only work with





GLENFARCLAS
No. 4
DUTY-FREE
WAREHOUSE



⊖ № 2 WASH ⊕



⊖ № 1 WASH ⊕



⊖ № 2 / LOW WINES ⊕

