

GLENFARCLAS

An Independent Distillery

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An Independent Distillery

Ian Buxton

Published by J&G Grant



The 841 metre summit of Ben Rinnes dominates the landscape around Glenfarclas

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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!

It is now 10 years since we first published this book to commemorate the 175th Anniversary of the distillery. During this period distribution of Glenfarclas has increased to more than 70 countries, we have built several more traditional warehouses, and upgraded all the control systems in the distillery. However 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.



JOHN GRANT



A FAMILY FIRM...OR A FAMILY BUSINESS?

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 Sapphire gin, Martini, Grey Goose vodka and the William Lawson and Dewar's brands of Scotch Whisky (amongst many other things) is still owned by a surprisingly small number of family members, descendants of founder Facundo Bacardi. And a number of Bacardi family members remain 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

Despite it being publicly quoted, the ranks of senior management of the giant Pernod Ricard group contain a remarkable number of Ricard family members. And so it goes on. All of these groups proclaim their 'family' credentials, with more or less a degree of credibility.

But, at the risk of offending these fine companies and their owners (which is not my intention), there is I think something qualitatively different about J & G Grant, proprietors of the Glenfarclas distillery.

It was brought home most forcefully to me in August 2010. Leaving the modest office building that is their headquarters I nearly collided with a stepladder at the front door and then had to move smartly to avoid a large Labrador. At the top of the ladder was Ishbel Grant, wife of the company's Chairman — so it was particularly fortunate that I hadn't knocked it over.

The previous night had been stormy, with high winds blowing across the Glen of the Green Grass, Glenfarclas' home. As a result, the hanging baskets at the office entrance had been blown around and, next morning, the attractive flowers planted there looked rather wan. Much of the foliage had been blown to the ground.

Ishbel was standing on the ladder cleaning up the debris and re-planting the baskets. As she explained, there was no-one else immediately available to do the job and the impression it gave to visitors was untidy. So she got a ladder and some tools, climbed up to tidy the plants and then took a broom and swept up the resulting mess. Apparently, it had been felt unnecessary to complete a risk evaluation or a health and safety appraisal. Common sense prevailed.

She did not appear to find this in any way noteworthy or remarkable neither did it justify any comment and that, I think, characterises my understanding of the difference between a firm in the ownership of one family (a family firm) and a 'family business'.

There is here to be found a direct relationship between owner and place that has remained unbroken in six generations. I believe it unlikely — and I mean no offence to the Bacardis, Ricards or even to the other Grants — that I will find their wives tidying up the flower baskets at the front door.

In the global distilling business, Glenfarclas may be the equivalent of a corner shop where the proprietor sleeps above the business, but it is a *family business* in the richest sense and all the better for it. 175 years on, this is just something of their story.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

It has been a very great pleasure to compile this new edition to mark Glenfarclas' 185th anniversary. With further changes and consolidation in the whisky industry over the past decade the company's robust independence becomes ever more remarkable and valuable and I am delighted to have been invited to help celebrate it.

May it continue to prosper as long as discerning consumers enjoy fine single malt whisky. *Slainte!*

IAN BUXTON

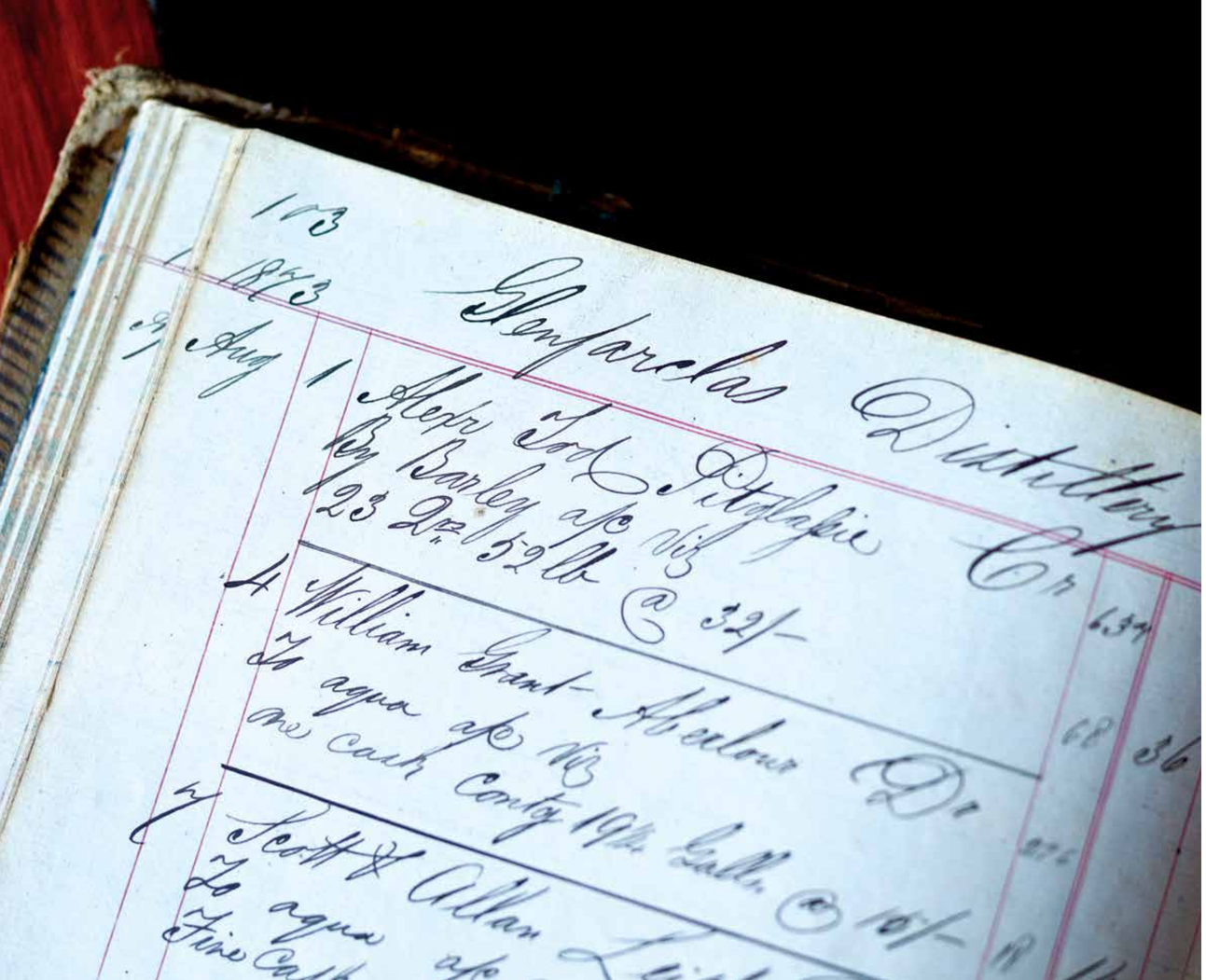
Our journey to Glenfarclas was a longer affair than we expected,
for what seems near in mountain scenery may be,
after all, a very long way off.
Beautiful the prospect certainly was not;
for without the soft magic of green hills,
woodlands, and the river meandering in the verdant meadow,
no scene can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



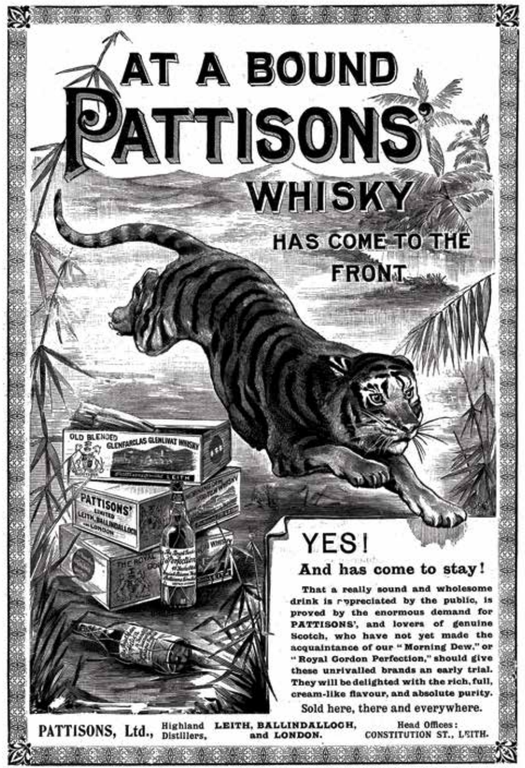
The staff in 1891. George Grant is the young lad sitting on the extreme right , aged 17

...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: 1890–1900

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 Glenlivat

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.



The whole character of the industry changed after the end of the Second World War: not only did ownership change hands, but it became more remote and physically removed from the distillery itself — first to Edinburgh and Glasgow, then to London and today, increasingly, even outside the UK itself. The firms changed too, from concentrating exclusively on Scotch Whisky to managing a portfolio of drinks brands of all types and even becoming part of conglomerate groups with interests far outside beverage alcohol. Internationally, the large groups often control significant distribution interests and, with their broad portfolios, can offer equally large customers attractive deals. Smaller independent firms have found it increasingly hard to obtain quality distribution in a global market ever more characterised by prices and deals than by personal relationships.

Much of what has happened was driven by changes in the customer base. Most of the whisky brokers who in large numbers added such colour to the Scotch Whisky scene are long gone, along with the independent off-licences and chain operators who were, until recently, such a familiar part of the UK high street.

Industry consolidation has removed the brokers' role and giant supermarkets now control much of the off-licence market. At the same time, the UK has lost its rich heritage of independent brewers.

In 1838, for example, just two years after Glenfarclas obtained its first licence there were some 49,200 'common brewers' (i.e. brewers for sale as opposed to holders of domestic brewing licences) in the United Kingdom. By 1900, there were fewer than 6,500[1] and, by 1976, the number of commercial brewers in the UK had fallen to 142. Though that number has now increased due to the recent boom in boutique craft brewers, the number of small and medium-sized independent brewery companies with tied houses has continued to decline, in part due to the ill-conceived 'Beer Orders' of 1989.

1: *Journal of the Institute of Brewing*, vol 7, 1901, page 64

The significance of these numbers is that this part of the licensed trade formed long-standing symbiotic links with firms such as Glenfarclas. Not only did they buy both new fillings for their own blends and mature whisky for their trade customers but they were also an important source of good quality sherry casks. European law now forbids the export of sherry in cask but, until the practice of shipping in cask to the UK for local bottling was outlawed, the independent wine and spirit merchant and the independent brewer were vital to the distiller who now has to source casks in Spain, at substantially higher cost.

What also may not be fully appreciated is how important family and social links between the various businesses were to the maintenance of good trading relationships. John Grant can recall lengthy trips round the UK to long-standing brewery customers, punctuated by extended lunches, shooting parties and a generally more convivial approach to business! It was a common practice on their entry to the trade for young family members to be placed with another family company and begin to learn the business from the ground up: in the current John Grant's case, after a spell with the Bank of Scotland, this meant three years working for Wm. Teacher & Sons (today part of Beam Suntory, though for how long is uncertain, such are the vagaries of global ownership). As we will read elsewhere, this led to the happy appointment of Glenfarclas' French distributor Mähler-Besse S.A.

However, whatever the changes in the whisky business and the reasons for them, Glenfarclas has evidently prospered in this new reality. Some far-sighted decisions lie behind this success.

It is no coincidence that the distillery's oldest stocks — the foundation of the Family Casks collection — date from the 1950s. It was one of Scotch Whisky's periodic great booms and a time of confidence, expansion and increased production with the worst period of consolidation still some time in the future.

However, though no one knew it at the time, there was a price to pay, particularly for those companies such as Glenfarclas with little or no branded business or their own. As John Grant recalls in the little booklet that accompanies the Family Casks, '*... the filling price began to fall. In 1952, the market filling price*



was 16s 0d (80p) per original proof gallon. It was the mid-1960s before the price returned to this high level.'

Despite this, the decade from 1950 was characterised by expansion and modernisation: new warehouses were built; new equipment installed and increasing volumes of spirit produced. By 1959 it was becoming evident that the old still house, effectively dating back to Doig's 1897 design, was inadequate to support the demand for new make and the decision was taken to add a second pair of stills at a cost of some £40,000, thus doubling capacity. It soon proved necessary to construct a new pipeline on Ben Rinnes to ensure consistent water supplies.

At the same time a new warehouse, number 13, was added. With a capacity of 8,000 casks it too was soon filled, but remains the only racked warehouse at Glenfarclas. The 1950s era ended both chronologically and socially, with the last Christmas Day filling on December 25th 1959.

Also in 1959, a bonded warehouse was built in Elgin to facilitate bottling of whisky for export. In 1965, a 50% share in this business (Grant Bonding Co Ltd) was sold to Gordon & MacPhail of Elgin, who until then had been bottling duty paid in the cellars of their South Street premises. This was wound up in 1978. Today bottling takes place in the former Saccone & Speed plant in Broxburn, near Edinburgh where Broxburn Bottlers Ltd is a joint venture with the well-known firm of brokers and distillers, Peter J. Russell & Co Ltd. That business, still highly successful, celebrated its 25th Anniversary (with a lunch and special bottling, naturally) in August 2009. 35 years were duly marked at the July 2019 AGM.

There were also significant changes in farm operations during the 1950s, a reminder of the link — now all-too-often forgotten — between distilling and the land. In 1955 the last pigs were sold off and it was decided to concentrate on the herd of pedigree Aberdeen Angus beef cattle. This was to enjoy some success before farming was, reluctantly, abandoned: in 1973 the home bred bull Percy of Glenfarclas



Broxburn 25th Anniversary Commemorative Bottling



George Grant at an SWA Reception in Lyon, 1966

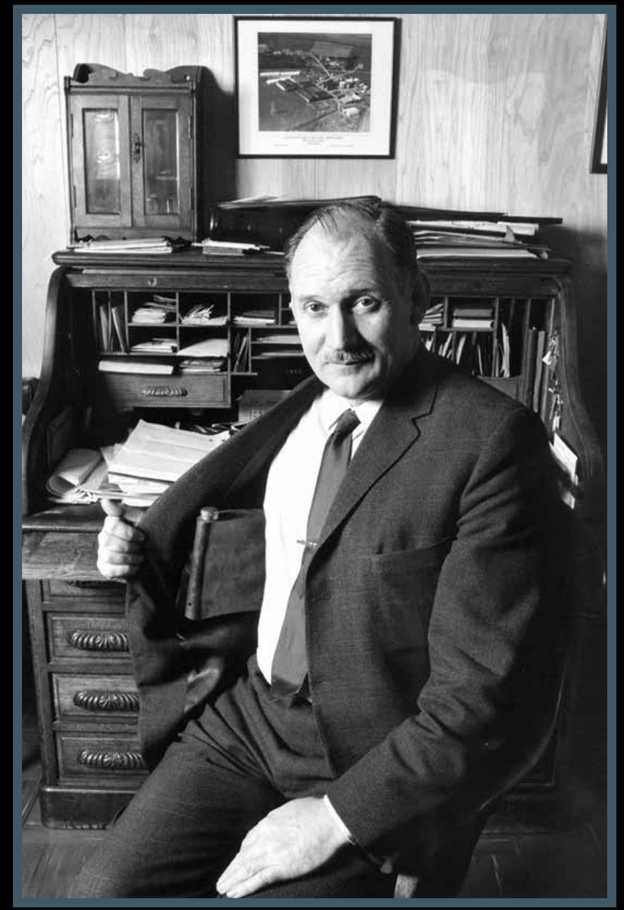
was first in class at the Royal Highland Show, selling for 6,000 guineas and in 1974 the herd took home another first in class, this time at Smithfield. Farming, which had run in the Grant family since 1670, finally ceased in 1987/1988.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the company continued to concentrate on supplying the blending market, understandably so as sales of single malt whisky remained tiny and Glenfarclas chose not to compete with their principal customers by launching and developing a major blended brand. However, the records show small quantities of bottles of single malt, at 12 years of age, being shipped to customers in Switzerland (1962), the USA (1963) and West Germany (1964). By 1967, UK sales had reached the heady heights of 4,000 cases and the first advertising since the ill-fated Pattisons (see page 38) appeared. 840 cases were shipped to Italy but sales to that market quadrupled in just two years. Also in 1968 the first 15 year old Glenfarclas was bottled as single malt.

By 1965 demand from the blenders had reached such a pitch that supplies were rationed, and in the following year production hit a record mark of 500,000 original proof gallons (1.3 million lpa). However, with the company so heavily dependent on the blending market, the decision by the DCL not to fill Glenfarclas in 1969 was greeted with some alarm. Production was still booming, such that further warehouses had been constructed but the loss of such an important customer could not be ignored. George Grant determined to continue production but to fill on the company's own behalf, determining that sales of bottled malt would determine the future.

It was a momentous decision.

A sensible hip flask







George and Joan Grant
at Rome airport, 1970

THE MODERN ERA: 1969–2011

The early indications were that there was some slight opportunity here, but he was presumably influenced by the conspicuous achievements of his near neighbours the Grants of Glenfiddich who had begun serious promotion of their eponymous malt some ten years previously. In this he was remarkably prescient; the majority of the industry still inclining to the view that Glenfiddich was something of a one-off phenomenon and not the start of a trend. Other smaller companies, notably MacDonald & Muir Ltd (with Glenmorangie) and Macallan-Glenlivet Ltd (with The Macallan), both then still independent, were also slowly beginning to promote their single malt, but they were lonely pioneers.

Though perhaps hard for the present-day reader to grasp in view of the ubiquity and proliferation of today's single malt expressions such a view was entirely reasonable at the time. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the entire global Scotch Whisky industry had been built on the success of blended whisky and, in the late 1960s, sales of bottled malt accounted for considerably less than 1% of the total



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.

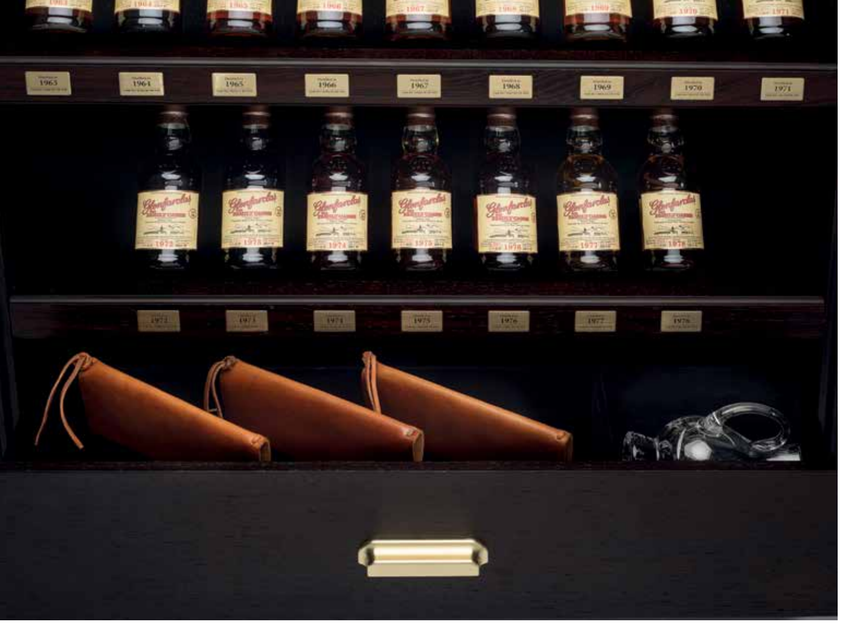
The period following has been a hectic one. Worldwide appreciation of single malt whisky has been followed by a gratifying growth in sales.

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











A TURBULENT DECADE: 2011–2021

How to sum up some of the most dramatic years in Scotch Whisky's long history?

In some ways, this has been a golden decade: expansion across the industry, both for established distillers and new boutique operators, with prices rising (great for the operators and retailers, perhaps not so welcomed by consumers) and markets growing. The Scotch Whisky Regulations were amended in June 2019 permitting maturation in a variety of novel casks, including those previously used to age agave spirits (including Tequila and mezcal), Calvados, barrel-aged cachaça, shochu and baijiu, as well as some other fruit spirits. Loyal drinkers need not worry, however. With its deeply-rooted commitment to traditionally matured whisky Glenfarclas has no plans whatsoever to use any of these casks.

The theory behind such changes is that younger consumers will be attracted to try Scotch. Whether for this reason (and it is likely too soon to tell) Scotch Whisky, especially single malt, continues to attract new drinkers in hitherto unexplored markets and there has been a welcome boom in distillery tourism

Opposite:
Family Trunk

and live tasting events. Alongside this, and perhaps somewhat in consequence of it, the public's levels of knowledge and appreciation have never been higher.

Other whiskies too have enjoyed good times, so competition has grown. The Irish whiskey industry has recovered after many years of decline and Japanese whisky has new-found fashionability and credibility. New countries, such as Taiwan and Sweden have begun to produce their own whisky and there has been an international explosion of so-called 'craft' distilleries (with 'craft' being widely used as a synonym for 'small'. I should quickly point out that there is no shortage of craftsmanship employed at Glenfarclas and other larger distilleries). Gin, too has enjoyed levels of popularity not seen since the infamous 'Gin Craze' of the mid-1700s, though with somewhat more discernment in production and consumption.

But if the boom stirs uncomfortable memories of the heady days of the 1890s (Pattisons and all that) we should also note that there have been unprecedented challenges in the past ten years. The prohibitionist lobby has grown stronger, fueled by concerns over health and 'wellness'; single malt whisky has been hit by new high tariffs in the USA, a hugely important market, collateral damage from an unrelated trade dispute; great uncertainty remains over the consequences of Brexit vote and the coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating impact on the licensed trade across the entire globe. The world economy may take several years to recover and whisky will surely take its share of the resulting pain. We enter the new decade with uncertainty and some trepidation.

Yet Glenfarclas has survived hard times in the past, from World Wars to earlier global recessions and unreliable partners to water shortages (yes, in Scotland!). Whisky has had its fair share of boom and bust and emerged all the stronger. However, the last ten years have been good ones for the company which can face the future with justified confidence. The combination of a strong balance sheet; deep stock reserves; a wider customer base and a diversified product range will all serve Glenfarclas well. Several ultra-premium expressions such as the Family Trunk and the lavishly decorated Pagoda Series have been developed to satisfy the world's growing appetite for luxury and great exclusivity. And, as I write, news arrives of new markets opening up with the appointment of distributors in Jordan and Sri Lanka, the latter a long established family business.

This steady and well-founded progress has accompanied work on the distillery, notably in process control systems, expanded warehouse capacity and major expenditure on a new effluent plant. In addition, the facilities at the Broxburn Bottlers operation (a joint venture with Ian Macleod Distillers Ltd) have received very substantial investment to improve capacity, increase efficiency and add to the cask storage capacity. The employees have not been forgotten, and a new staff welfare block was opened recently. Around £3m has been spent here, as a result of which the Broxburn plant is now able to bottle over 40m bottles per annum in the most modern of facilities. Customers are drawn from all across the industry from some of the largest companies to small independent bottlers and a full range of spirits can be handled in sizes of up to 6 litres.

But, more significant than all of those factors, important though they are, is the long-term nature of family ownership. Free from the vagaries of the stock market, with its persistent demands for quarterly reports, constantly growing dividends and the ever-present risk of hostile takeover the commitment to independence and all that that implies represents an enviable strength. It's an asset to be prized beyond price and one that will continue to serve Glenfarclas and all its stakeholders — owners, employees and customers — well into the future.

So, if I'm spared, I look forward to revising this book in another 15 years when Glenfarclas will celebrate its 200th anniversary. That will surely be marked with the most memorable of parties and a renewed commitment to the spirit of independence.



Pagoda Series





‘*Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen pounds nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.*’

Perhaps John Grant lives by Mr Micawber’s famous maxim. Certainly he referred often enough in our many talks during the writing of this book to his father’s advice only to distill whisky that the company could pay for, without recourse to the bank or outside financiers. Glenfarclas’ adventures with the Pattison brothers cast a long shadow; the details are recounted here under ‘History’ but they are real enough to provide a vivid, living example of the benefits of prudence.

Thus, it strikes me; John Grant sleeps soundly, peace of mind coming from the serried rows of casks all slumbering quietly in the warehouses that he can see from his home. All paid for, they provide a security that is literally liquid. Beholden to no man, there is circularity here: independence is the company’s



GEORGE S. GRANT

As we have learned, George's grandfather (and namesake) was abruptly catapulted back home with just eighteen months industry experience, none of which was at Glenfarclas. His father John had five years as understudy but was only 28 when he took charge of the company. The current George has already seen longer service than both of them, but finds himself in a greatly-changed and faster moving industry than was the case even twenty years ago.



CALLUM FRASER

I sense that under Callum Fraser's professional exterior lies a romantic soul. *'People make whisky',* he told me *'and that's why I get out of bed in the morning'.* Not that he has a lengthy commute. The walk from the Manager's house is a hundred metres or so and it's clear that Callum would spend all day here if he could, and the night as well. *'I love the work, love the place, love the people',* he volunteered.

But despite his appreciation of Glenfarclas' traditional values and production methods, Callum has eagerly embraced the benefits of modernization and improvement in the past decade of sustained investment. He's seen old warehouses upgraded and new ones built; more precise control equipment installed in the still house and new bio-treatment plant commissioned. The result: greater overall efficiency; tighter control of spirit character and yield and process traceability that he spoke of with real enthusiasm and a firm belief in its benefits. Yet the spirit produced remains Glenfarclas and true to its origins: he's utterly clear about that and unswerving in maintaining that ageless standard.

TOMMY WEBSTER

Tommy is the Warehouse Foreman at Glenfarclas. At least, that's his official title but I think he's one of the distillery's 'characters' and anyway, as he trenchantly puts it, *'it depends on what humour folks are in whit you get cried'*.

My impression is that he doesn't mind what folks cry ('call') him — he knows what he's doing and why he's doing it, and gets on with it in his own way. He's steeped (deliberate choice of words there) in distilling: brought up at a distillery, his father worked at nearby Cardhu, then joined the building trade and helped construct warehouses at Glenfarclas; his brother is a cooper at The Glenrothes. Tommy was briefly a butcher, but whisky is in his blood (in a good way): it feels inevitable that he would find his way here. It's emotionally and practically his home, which you can glimpse from the distillery.

Starting in the warehouses, and then moving to the mash house before returning to the warehouse



Glenfarclas

Aged 16 and considering a naval career
I spent a summer as tour guide
and stayed for four years,
learning distilling.
Later, a further spell saw me rise to Distillery Manager.
These were formative years, which set me securely
in the industry I love
and which have guided me ever since.

I look fondly on this place.

ALAN WINCHESTER, MASTER DISTILLER, THE GLENLIVET



saved me from the sea!

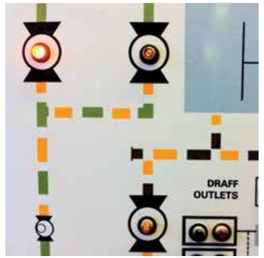


All single malt whisky is, more or less, made the same way — yet every single malt whisky tastes different. It's a conundrum, albeit a delightful one.

For the past hundred years or so the distilling of Scotch Whisky has, all too often, been treated as an arcane and esoteric blend of art and science, the secrets of which were presented as impenetrable to the average drinker.

Over time, a comforting series of legends grew up: the water source was of critical importance; certain varieties of barley were essential to flavour; it was critical that dents in a still were faithfully copied; even warehouse cobwebs were to be left undisturbed lest the magic be lost. Such tales were repeated ad nauseum in whisky's literature; in tartan-draped visitor centres and in the distillers' marketing materials. Faint echoes remain to this day, repeated for the mystification of the tourist and casual student.

It's all wonderfully romantic. Unfortunately, rather too much of the story-telling owes its genesis to



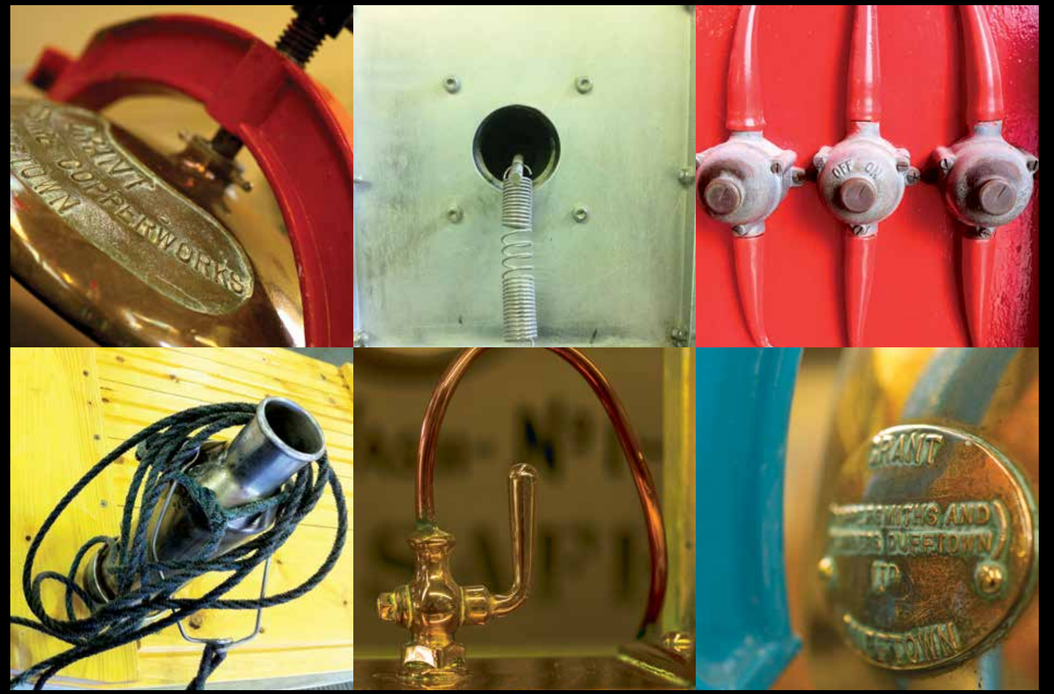
speculation and its persistence to the lazy repetition of comforting myth. While there are grains of truth here, and no one would deny the contribution of water, barley and still shape (though we can with confidence sweep away the rest of the cobwebs), they do not have the central importance that the uncritical reader would be led to believe.

The greater understanding of distilling science that has developed over the last two decades leads us to say with some confidence that the truth, if not prosaic, is more steadfastly matter of fact. Here we may identify three key elements that make the difference between Glenfarclas and Glen This, That and The Other. They are direct firing, sherry casks and dunnage warehouses, damp and low-lying. Without the fortuitous alliance of this trinity the whisky would differ in some regard: it might be fine, but it would not be Glenfarclas.

Of course, the same could be said of every distillery in Scotland and, indeed, the world. Factors unique to each site and to each operation determine the spirit character for good or bad. But the world does not make us all equal. There are many clarets, but only one Cheval Blanc; many cheeses, but only one Parmigiano Reggiano; many whiskies, but only one Glenfarclas.

The distillery itself runs much like any other and its processes are the same as found elsewhere. The facts, too, are simply recited. It is in the totality, the understanding that only by comprehending that all the parts of Glenfarclas are intimately interconnected, sometimes in ways that defy analysis, and explicable only by reference to the whole that we fully appreciate this whisky. To borrow from whisky's poet, Aeneas MacDonald, *'there are flavours in it, insinuating and remote, from mountain torrents and the scanty soil on moorland rocks and slanting, rare sun-shafts'*.

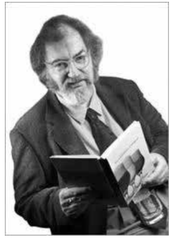
MacDonald of course was the High Priest of whisky lyricism and writes of the cratur *sui generis*. To ground this particular flight of fancy, further analysis is best done by the glass.




Nº 2 WASH
Nº 1 WASH
Nº 2 LOW WINES

The Glenfarclas malts are the strong, silent type: tall, dark and handsome, notably firm-bodied, but willing to reveal a sweet side to their nature. They are excellent company at any time, and especially after dinner.

MICHAEL JACKSON, MICHAEL JACKSON'S MALT WHISKY COMPANION



175
The Ceilidh



A fortunate 53 'survivors of the 150th' (as John Grant termed them in his speech of welcome) were among 330 guests celebrating the 175th Anniversary at a memorable Dinner and Ceilidh on Friday 20th May 2011. All were in for a pleasant surprise.

Warehouse 14, site of the 150th party, had been cleared of casks, thoroughly swept out and transformed. Arriving to the sound of the Dufftown Pipe Band, to enter through a glamorous tented curtain worthy of a Cannes film premiere, lights glittering and flashbulbs popping it was impossible to imagine that whisky had ever matured here.

The normally stark and utilitarian interior had been draped in red and white voile; dramatic lighting installed; tables elegantly dressed and a dance floor laid. Waiters moved seamlessly round the guests; champagne was served (magnums of Pol Roger no less, but Glenfarclas the natural option) and an electric mood of excitement and anticipation was everywhere. Different accents, different languages filled the room — this was a celebration both international and democratic, as company directors mingled with pensioners; senior distilling competitors mixed happily with the Glenfarclas workforce; international distributors met Speyside tradesmen — even some whisky writers were admitted!

The dress code suggested kilts, lounge suits and a touch of tartan but the guests had made sartorial efforts well beyond the minimum, well aware that this was *the* whisky industry social event and celebration of 2011 and taking the opportunity to dress in their finest.

As we ate, the Elgin Strathspey & Reel Society and the Glencraig Scottish Dance Band played, later providing the tunes for some energetic dancing. The superb dinner would have graced any restaurant table; fine wine flowed freely (elegant white burgundy, followed by magnums of 2005 claret), and then there was the whisky.

The whisky! On such an occasion it was to be expected that the distillery would bring forth its best. We were not to be denied: John Grant had selected something exceptional to conclude the meal.

A single refill sherry cask of a little over 18 years provided exactly 200 bottles, filled at its natural strength of 55.5% abv. There was no age declaration or flowery description on the simple label. John Grant said, *'I thought I'd let the whisky do the talking'*.

And so it did. Whisky writer Charles MacLean described it as *'a classic example of Glenfarclas — rich, fruity, spicy and tannic'*, whilst Gavin Smith found the whisky to hold *'big, spicy sherry notes on the palate, with ripe cherries and background pipe tobacco ... long and fruity in the finish'*. It was a superb end to a superb evening, that ran seamlessly; a fitting focal point to a year of celebration and enjoyment.

'Mark your diary', said John Grant, *'for Friday 23rd May 2036; the 200th'*. If that party reaches, let alone surpasses this event, it will be memorable indeed.















All the Glenfarclas pensioners.
Eddie Thomson, Harry Fisher, Jimmy Munro, Annette Tweedie, Jock Munro, Isobel Leslie, Jimmy Tarling, Charlie Fraser & Philip Hutcheon.
Over 300 years service between them!





Even some whisky writers were admitted.
Alan Gray, Martine Nouet, Gavin D. Smith, Ian Buxton, Charlie MacLean



Above and to the right:
Kate & Greig Henderson
Below:
Nikki & Steve Brand, Marjorie Walker, Ishbel & John Grant



Above:
Stephanie-Anne & David Harris and Ishbel Grant
Below:
Richard Murphy, Stewart Wilson, George Grant, Jennifer Walker



Winter 2010



AUTHOR

Ian Buxton is best known for his best-selling series of books under the 101 to Try Before You Die label. In a varied career of more than 30 years he has worked as marketing director of a well-known single malt, consultant and author.



PHOTOGRAPHER

After graduating from Glasgow Photography College in 1982 John Paul moved to the Highlands and has been living the dream ever since. Published widely in national newspapers and magazines he now works mainly in the whisky industry.



DESIGNER

Jules Akel makes sure that companies and brands continue to prosper through thoughtful design work. His studio is in Dalwhinnie.