

THE GLENKINCHIE STORY

THE MUSEUM

It was the aforementioned James Risk who was primarily responsible for the scale model of a working distillery (one sixth actual size), which occupies pride of place in what is now the Museum of Malt Whisky Production (which itself occupies the area of the building where previously the maltings had been). The model is based on an amalgam of several lowland distilleries although the stills, specifically, are modelled on Glenkinchie's.



Risk employed the Northampton-based firm Bassett-Lowke to build the model (which he had designed along with George Cruikshank of the Linlithgow distillery), for the Scotch Whisky Exhibit in the Palace of Industry at the Empire Exhibition, Wembley, in 1924-25. When the Exhibition was over DCL lent the model (which is quite unique) to the Science Museum, London, where it was displayed continuously from 1926 to 1949.

In that year as a result of a drastic reorganisation of the Museum's collection, the model was dismantled and packed into 19 cases and put into store. It remained there until 1963 –

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undisturbed except for a twice yearly inspection by H M Customs & Excise to ensure the stills had not been adapted for some more serious and practical purpose! It was returned to DCL that year and stored at Glenlossie Distillery near Elgin before being transferred to Mortlach Distillery about 1970. In 1974 Glenkinchie's Manager of the time, Alistair Munro, took it upon himself to rebuild the model from scratch.

As for the rest of the museum, it started life as a fine personal collection of tools and implements that had been used at various times throughout the distillery's history. There were the strange canvas boots that maltmen would wear while working in the maltings. These were designed to inflict minimum damage to the malt that lay on the floor. There were also pram-like barley-scoops and copper 'dogs'. The latter were extremely cunning devices used to smuggle illegal spirits out of distilleries – some in the form of thin tubes that could be hung inside a trouser leg, others in the form of a hot-water-bottle-cum-breastplate, which would be tied with a string around the torso, concealed beneath a shirt. All of this equipment had been discarded at Glenkinchie and had formed the nucleus of the museum until, with the support of SMD's directors other SMD distilleries were brought into the scope of the project. The museum was duly renovated and reopened as the Museum of Malt Whisky Production in 1995. The renovations included an extensive refurbishment of the model distillery.



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The museum was originally opened in 1969, following the closure of the maltings the previous year. (In 1968 SMD ceased floor malting at no less than 29 of its distilleries. It also temporarily closed the distilleries at Oban, Glenlochy and Glengarioch, but reopened Clynelish.⁴³) These temporary closures were reversed in 1969 and Oban's fortunes, like Glenkinchie's, have flourished ever since that time. Alistair Munro, the manager at the time, would comment that this "brought home to me how much and how fast our industry was changing: and I felt that something of that disappearing past should be preserved and recorded for the future"⁴⁴ – hence the museum.

The closure had resulted in about half of the distillery's staff being made redundant. It was deemed sensible at that time to centralise the business of malting. (Glenkinchie would work with 25-ton batches of grain, compared to the modern-day typical batch size of about 300 tons.) DCL had opened a mechanical drum system malting plant at Burghead (at a cost of £1.25 million), which had achieved full-scale production by June of 1966 and was designed to produce 26,000 tons of malt per year.⁴⁵ All of this centralisation, and the use of larger quantities, led to a far more consistent standard. Since 1968 malting has been carried out at four different Diageo plc locations, two of which are in Speyside, one in Islay and one just north of Inverness, at Glen Ord. The Islay maltings services the Islay distilleries too, making it a very profitable enterprise for United Distillers. This does mean, however, that the Glenkinchie single malt is not made exclusively from East Lothian barley, as it was until 1968. The barley used now comes from various parts of Scotland.

MORE RECENT TIMES – FROM THE 1980s

The whisky industry went into a period of severe contraction in the 1980s. This was brought about by intensive over-production and over-stocking in the 1970s, when production was generally regarded, by government and industry, as king. The exponential sales forecasts of the 1970s didn't bear out in reality. Obviously, in distilling, companies produce well in advance of when the product will actually be sold. Forging ahead with production in expectation of 10–20% growth, when in reality it would turn out to be more like 3–5% growth, resulted in a huge surplus.

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Because of the surplus the demand for production fell and many distilleries started to take such measures as the 3-day week. Many ultimately closed down.

By 1981, SMD were operating a total of 45 malt whisky distilleries, associated maltings and bonded warehouses throughout Scotland, and still owned the 22 houses of Glenkinchie village.⁴⁶ Glenkinchie rebuilt its still house that year, converting the stills to the internal steam heating system.

In 1983, St. Magdalene would join the long list of those distilleries that didn't make it through this period of contraction to be followed by Bladnoch and Rosebank in 1993 thus leaving only Auchentoshan and Glenkinchie to represent the lowland distilling tradition. This state of affairs remains to the present, though there is a possibility that Bladnoch (in Wigtownshire) could reopen (see below). Since then, ownership of the SMD and DCL distilleries has changed considerably – the earliest hint of change came on 14th June 1985 when Guinness announced their intentions and their offer to buy Bells. The offer was flatly rejected by the managing director of the time, Raymond Miquel, but by mid-August, after an intense period of negotiation, a Guinness offer of £370 million had been accepted. Miquel would soon resign. Then, on 17th and 18th September, the DCL management committee met for what would be the last time for, in January 1986, Ernest Saunders of Guinness would begin a bidding war with the food group Argyll, for DCL. On 18th April their £2.5 billion offer was accepted and that particular war was over.⁴⁷

Saunders won plaudits all around the business world, but was soon being quizzed by official inspectors from the Department of Trade and Industry. The arrest of American arbitrageur Ivan Boesky would be the beginning of Saunders' troubles. As part of a plea bargain Boesky had informed American authorities of a share dealing arrangement that had been designed to underpin Guinness' stock price while it was pursuing DCL. In December 1986 the DTI began their investigation into the takeover bid and, one month later, charged Saunders with a variety of financial offences. Saunders was ultimately convicted in 1990, along with businessman Gerald Ronson, trader Anthony Parnes and consultant Jack Lyons. Saunders was sentenced to five years imprisonment, but later had his sentence halved on appeal.⁴⁸

In 1987 DCL merged with Arthur Bell and Sons and all changed their name to United Distillers.⁴⁹ Only then did

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Glenkinchie begin the business of resurrecting its single malt from commercial oblivion. It hit the marketplace the following year. Some time after the formation of SMD Glenkinchie ceased selling bottled single malt, such was the whisky's success as a blender's favourite. It was only in the mid 1980s, when some of United Distillers marketing men in London dreamt up the Classic Malts package, that it would again see the light of day. The Classic Malts range capitalised on the emergent desire for knowledge of malt whisky, being a range of six malts each one representing a different region of Scotland (Cragganmore representing Speyside, Dalwhinnie representing the Central Highlands, Glenkinchie representing the Lowlands, Lagavulin representing Islay, Oban representing the Western Highlands and Talisker representing Skye). Many competitor companies followed suit with similar packages.

SMD finally ceased to exist as such in 1988 when United Distillers formed United Malt and Grain Distillers Limited (UMGD) to merge and take over SMD and the Scottish Grain Distillers (SGD).⁵⁰

United Distillers had owned the aforementioned Bladnoch until the early 1990s, at which time it was sold to an Irish entrepreneur. He has often hinted at re-opening it but has yet to do so. It has been out of production since 1993. Glenkinchie's continued survival, however, seems fairly assured. Most blenders insist on having at least one lowland malt in their blends, to add mellowness to the flavour, and the blends in Glenkinchie's portfolio (Dimple, Bells, White Horse, Johnnie Walker) are no exception. Lowland whiskies tend to be softer, drier and milder than those from other areas of Scotland. Their flavour tends to be uncomplicatedly malty – there's no particularly strong presence of peatiness, smokiness, seaweed or brine. Limestone deposits in the local soil make the local water relatively hard by Scottish standards.

The lack of any serious competition surely secures Glenkinchie's usefulness. The museum also contributes greatly to Glenkinchie's continued prosperity. Finding out about Scotch whiskies didn't really become popular as a tourist activity until the 1980s. Glenkinchie is just one of the many distilleries who took to heart public requests for tours and information and opened museums and guided tours as a result. Again, proximity to the tourist magnet that is Edinburgh makes Glenkinchie an attractive package for visitors, who can make their visit part of a package that includes a stop at the Scotch Whisky Heritage Centre close to

Glenkinchie Staff – 2002



Back row L-R
Sandy Rae – started at Rosebank Distillery in April '91 and transferred to Glenkinchie in July '93 when Rosebank closed down – Process Operator
Adam Christie – started in Jan '90 – latest in a long family tradition of Christies at Glenkinchie stretching back to 1800's – Process Operator
Colin Thomson – started in March '91 – painter by trade who helps to keep the distillery up to scratch, was an active Territorial Army member until recently – Process operator
Hector MacDonald – started in May '63 left for 9 months, came back in Jan '64 and been here ever since. Family has strong connections with Glenkinchie, father was horseman, brother was brewer, and sister-in-law was office cleaner. Hector is our local Mr. Fixit – Process Operator
Pud Gibson – started with Bells at Dunfermline in Jan '84, moved to Aberfeldy in Sept. '94 then on to Glenkinchie in April '97. Has stayed in Rosyth all his working life and commutes approx. 80 miles round trip daily to get to work. – Process Operator
Bob White – started in August '97, came from an engineering background and his experience is well used in keeping Glenkinchie together. When not busy doing that he looks after all the Warehousing operations.
Walter Barker – started at Rosebank Distillery in June '90 and transferred to Glenkinchie in July '93 when Rosebank closed down – Process Operator
Ronnie McMurchie – started in July '79. Was Bio Plant and warehouse operator until retirement in 2002.

Front Row L-R
Isobel Gardner – started in March '91 as part time guide is now permanent staff as a Brand Home Lead guide
Mike Casey – started in July '89 followed his dad into the distillery, brother also started at Glenkinchie and now works at Glen Ord – Process Operator
Duncan Tait – started training at Aultmore in Dec '89, moved to Teaninich, transferred to Elgin Group distilleries, trained as a Site Operations Manager (SOM), moved to Cardhu group before being appointed to Glenkinchie in June 2000 as SOM
Charlie Smith – started with Bells in Jan '75 at Pittyvaich Dark Grains Plant, moved into distillery in Feb '78, transferred to Dufftown distillery in May '82, moved to Cardhu in June '93 and to Glenkinchie in Oct '98 – Distillery Manager
Mary Darling – started April '86, as part time guide is now permanent staff as Brand Home Manager
Walter Cockburn – started in March '77 and hasn't managed to get away ever since – Process Operator
Andrena Gray – started in April '90 as part time guide is now permanent staff as a Brand Home Lead guide