

DE FONTE LEPORUM

(THE FOUNTAIN OF DELIGHTS)

OR

Some Notes Towards an Understanding of
THE SUBLIME MYSTERY OF

Malt Whisky

as enjoyed since time immemorial by

THE ANCIENT CALEDONIANS

together with

INSTRUCTIONS ABOUT HOW BEST TO APPRECIATE ITS EXCELLENCE

and

SUNDRY REMARKS UPON

THE USEFUL ACTIVITIES OF

THE ADELPHI DISTILLERY LIMITED



BY

JAMES WALKER

ESQUIRE

EDINBURGH, 1993

Updated by the new proprietors at Glenborrodale castle in 2004

Malt does more
than Milton can
to justify God's
ways to man.

A.E. Housman

At the outset we must distinguish two distinct styles of Scotch Whisky – *malt whisky* and *grain whisky* – differentiated by their methods of production, and by the cereals which they employ. Mixed, they make 'blended whisky'.

Malt whisky is the nobler spirit, and was the original *aqua vitae* of Scotland and Ireland – **UISGE BEATHA** in the Gaelic tongue, meaning simply '**WATER OF LIFE**'. Its origins are obscure, but it was certainly being made in quantity by 1494, and by the end of the next century so much was being produced that there was a shortage of barley for baking bread.

Well-matured in a good cask, Scotch malt whisky is considered to be the finest distilled liquor in the world.

ADELPHI DISTILLERY HAS BUT ONE AIM: TO OFFER ITS CLIENTS THE VERY BEST OF THESE MALT WHISKIES.

WE ARE HELPED BY HAVING JUST TWO ACTIVITIES: IDENTIFYING THE VERY BEST CASKS AND OFFERING THESE TO OUR CUSTOMERS. WE HAVE NO DISTILLERIES OF OUR OWN. THIS ALLOWS US TO OFFER A FULL RANGE OF WHISKIES, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, TO BE WHOLLY OBJECTIVE WHEN SELECTING THEM.

WHILST WE AIM AT ALL TIMES TO OFFER A RANGE OF STYLES AND REGIONS, OUR WHISKIES ARE SELECTED ON THE BASIS OF EXCELLENCE ALONE. TO ENSURE THIS IS THE CASE, THE DIRECTORS ARE ASSISTED BY A PANEL OF PROFESSIONAL "NOSES", CHAIRED BY CHARLES MACLEAN. THEY ALONE CAN APPROVE THE SELECTION OF ANY CASK.

OUR WHISKIES ARE OUR REPUTATION

*“Inspiring, bold John Barleycorn
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
Wi’ tipenny we fear nae evil:
Wi’ wisghe beath we’ll face the devil!”*

Robert Burns

Distilling was formerly a branch of alchemy, and in truth the transmutation of two simple and natural elements – barley and water – into a golden liquid of infinite worth can be described accurately as an alchemical process.

Malt whisky is an elemental elixir, its ingredients no more or less than the **WATER** the **AIR** the **EARTH** and the **FIRE** of Scotland. Nobody knows for certain what role each of the elements plays – just that malt whisky made anywhere else in the world, even to precisely the same recipe in exactly the same way, is but a pale shadow of *wisge beatha*.

It used to be thought that soft mountain water – rising through peat and flowing over granite – was the crucial ingredient. But excellent whisky is also made with hard water. Barley is the quintessential harvest of the earth and Scots barley is perfect for distilling, but much barley now comes from abroad. Highland peat once fired the kilns and the stills, but today it is used sparingly and the flavour of the whisky is probably better. Finally there is the air of Scotland: cool, temperate and generally damp – a crucial factor in the spirit’s maturation.

THE ORIGINAL ADELPHI DISTILLERY WAS BUILT IN 1826 ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER CLYDE IN WHAT IS NOW THE HEART OF GLASGOW. THE TWO ACRE SITE HAD BEEN AN ORCHARD, FRONTED BY A WHARF, AND BY THE 1880’S, WHEN JAMES WALKER’S GREAT-GRANDFATHER BOUGHT THE COMPANY, IT WAS ONE OF THE MOST ADVANCED AND PRODUCTIVE DISTILLERIES IN SCOTLAND.

ADELPHI WAS REVIVED IN 1993 BY THE FOUNDER’S GREAT- GRANDSON IN ORDER TO EXPLORE THE MYSTERIES OF MALT WHISKY MORE FULLY AND TO MAKE A NUMBER OF RARE, WELL AGED AND TOP QUALITY MALT WHISKIES AVAILABLE TO DISCERNING CUSTOMERS. THIS CONTINUES TO THIS DAY.

“The rate at which whisky matures depends on the size of the cask (the larger, the longer it will take to mature) and how often it has been filled with whisky. After two or three fillings the vital contribution made by the cask is greatly reduced. What is more, some whiskies peak twice, with a dull middle period, and very old whisky can become undesirably woody.”

Charles MacLean (1993)

“The oak casks are permeable and allow the air to pass inwards to tone down the harsher elements in the spirit. The temperature and humidity of the warehouse also influence maturation. A damp atmosphere reduces the strength, rather than the bulk of the spirit, and dry conditions reduce the bulk rather than the strength.”

Stuart Robertson (1993)

Scotch whisky must mature in casks for a minimum of *three years* before being bottled, although in practice, malt whiskies are normally matured for at least *eight years*. The casks must be made from **OAK** and only two oaks are used - **AMERICAN WHITE OAK** and **EUROPEAN OAK**, usually from Spain. The casks will have normally been used before to prevent the whisky becoming over-wooded. Since US law dictates that all American whiskies are matured in new casks, it is not surprising that some 95% of scotch whisky is *matured* in casks made from American White oak.

No matter how good the distilled spirit, the choice of cask—indeed the individual cask itself will influence the quality of the outcome. European oak casks usually result in a *mahogany* coloured whisky, the American oak more a *golden yellow*. The more times a particular cask is filled, the softer the colour of the whisky that will emerge. Whilst a very pale whisky may imply a non-active cask, this will not always be the case. And some casks allow the contents to mature for up to **50 YEARS** whilst others do not.

We recently tasted 2 consecutive casks from a well-known **SPEYSIDE DISTILLERY** – the first was a deep *mahogany* colour, and turned out to be one of the best whiskies we have ever found. However, the second was pale and tasteless – the unfortunate product of an inactive cask. It pays to be *selective*.

A small amount of whisky is *matured* in sherry butts, which can round off the flavour **DELICIOUSLY**, but can also mask more subtle malts. Some distillers will re-rack in sherry-wood only for the last year or so of the whisky's *maturation*.

ADELPHI'S WHISKIES SPAN A RANGE OF COLOURS FROM PALE GOLDEN YELLOW TO DARK MAHOGANY.

OUR DISTINCTIVE LABELS ALLOW THESE WONDERFUL COLOURS TO BE ENJOYED.

“£1.8 billion was contributed to the trade balance by Scotch exports in 1991. Without Scotch, the UK food and drinks trade deficit would have increased by almost 40% to reach £6.8 billion. It is also rumoured that the Angel’s Share is equivalent to the reserves of the Bank of England.”

Charles Alexander (1993)

The wood makes the whiskey, was a saying among distillery workers in days gone by. Only in recent years has the truth of the adage been understood by sensory chemists.

Each cask matures its contents slightly differently, depending on a number of factors - not least, how often the cask has been used for maturing whisky, and for how long. The first time a cask is filled with whisky, the wood has a powerful impact upon the spirit. Maturity can be achieved after only a few years, but sometimes a cask can work its magic for 50 years or more. On the other hand, after three or four fills, the cask becomes a mere container, incapable of maturing its contents.

To ensure consistency of their whiskies from batch to batch, distillery owners iron out differences by combining the contents of a number of casks for each bottling. Furthermore, in order to make sure that each batch has precisely the same appearance as the last, it is common practice to adjust the colour by the addition of small amounts of spirit caramel.

Finally, most proprietary malt whiskies (and all blended whiskies) undergo a process called 'chill-filtration' prior to bottling, by which the temperature of the spirit is lowered to around freezing, after the whisky has been reduced to 'bottling strength' (usually 40%Vol), in order to 'polish' the whisky by precipitating certain compounds and filtering them out.

OUR BOTTLING POLICY IS QUITE DIFFERENT TO THE NORM.

AFTER THE MOST RIGOROUS CASK SELECTION PROCEDURE, DESIGNED TO CHOOSE ONLY WHISKIES AT THE PEAK OF PERFECTION, WE CELEBRATE THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERISTICS BESTOWED BY INDIVIDUAL CASKS BY BOTTLING DIRECT FROM THE WOOD, AT NATURAL STRENGTH, WITHOUT THE ADDITION OF ANY ARTIFICIAL COLOURING AND WITH NO CHILL-FILTRATION.

NOTHING ADDED; NOTHING TAKEN OUT: SINGLE CASK MALT WHISKY AS IT WAS ENJOYED IN THE OLD DAYS.

“We asked a celebrated Parisian perfume-noser to analyse the bouquet of our malt whisky. He identified 26 distinct scents, including: bergamot, gentian, liquorice, orange, apricot, verbena, wild mint, nutmeg, ginger, pepper, vanilla, cinnamon, narcissus, crushed fruit stone, peony, pine resin and bitter almond.”

Neil McKerrow, Managing Director, Macdonald & Muir

“I knew of one small town with seven distilleries, and I knew an expert who could distinguish the seven by bouquet alone. These seven were within one mile of a highland river; they used the same water; peat and malt, and the methods of brewing and distillation were identical. Yet each spirit had its own individual bouquet.”

Maurice Walsh, in the Introduction to Scotch Whisky
By J.M. Robb (1950)



The Malt Whisky

distilled at Adelphi was described as 'Lowland' for, just as the wines of Bordeaux vary according to their place of origin – Medoc, St. Emilion, Sauternes, and so on – so the malt whiskies of Scotland acquire characteristics from the region in which they are made.

The traditional classification was **HIGHLAND, LOWLAND, ISLAY** and **CAMPBELTOWN**. Then '**SPEYSIDE**' [part of *HIGHLAND*] was given its own denomination, '**ISLAND**' became an accepted category and '*CAMPBELTOWN*' was dropped since all but two of its thirty-two former distilleries closed down.

Although it is difficult to generalise about regional flavour characteristics – so much depends upon the kind of cask in which the individual whisky has been matured, for how long, and under what conditions – certain features may be discerned.

ADELPHI WHISKY SHOULD BE SERVED AT ROOM TEMPERATURE IN A GLASS WHICH WILL ALLOW YOU TO CONSIDER ITS COLOUR AND BOUQUET. THE GLASS SHOULD GATHER THE AROMAS, SO A TULIP-SHAPED SHERRY COPITA IS BEST. THE TRADITIONAL WHISKY TUMBLER IS DESIGNED FOR WHISKY AND SODA AND IS WORTHLESS!

OUR WHISKIES ARE USUALLY TOO STRONG TO DRINK NEAT: AT 100 DEGREES PROOF THE ALCOHOLIC VAPOURS TEND TO ANAESTHETISE THE PALATE. SO A LITTLE WATER SHOULD BE ADDED THE AMOUNT IS A MATTER OF TASTE AND DEPENDS ON THE NATURE OF THE WHISKY. PROFESSIONAL TASTERS DILUTE TO 20% ALCOHOL.

THE WATER RELEASES THE FLAVOUR-BEARING ESTERS AND AWAKENS THE BOUQUET AS IT AGITATES THE SPIRIT YOU WILL SEE THE OILS SWIRLING IN THE GLASS. IT ALSO HELPS TO RELAX THE WHISKY, SO IT BEGINS TO UNFOLD AND GIVE ITS BEST.

LOWLAND MALTS

The whiskies made south of an imaginary line drawn from Greenock on the west coast to Dundee in the east, tend to be light in body and colour and to have a grassy or hay-like aroma, with some cereal notes.

HIGHLAND MALTS

North Highland malts tend to be medium-bodied and fresh-flavoured, with heathery, nutty notes. Those from the West add smokiness and spice to this while Central Highland malts often have floral aromas.

SPEYSIDE MALTS

Often described as the 'Premiers Grands Crus' of malt whiskies – they can vary from highly perfumed, light-bodied confections, perfect for a summer's afternoon, to chocolate and fruitcake-rich digestifs, comparable to old cognac.

ISLAY MALTS

The eight distilleries on the windswept Isle of Islay produce some of the most aromatic of whiskies, often redolent of peatsmoke and seaweed. much of the Island is peat and this taints the water, some distilleries draw their water from springs to avoid this, others use heavily peated barley to reinforce it.

ISLAND MALTS

Orkney, Skye, Mull, Jura and Arran each have their own distilleries, producing individual whiskies with some of the characteristics of Highland malts, but often with a rebellious edge.

CAMPBELTOWN MALTS

From a small town on the Mull of Kintyre come two remarkable malts with a misty flavour and a trace of salt.

“Whisky suffers its worst insults at the hands of the swillers... the boozers, the ‘let’s have-a-spot’ and ‘make-it-a-quick-one’ gentry, and all the rest who dwell in a darkness where there are no whiskies but only whisky – and of course, ice and soda...“As a result there has been a tendency to abolish whisky from the table of the connoisseur to the saloon bar and the golf club smoke-room. The notion that we can possibly develop a palate for whisky is guaranteed to produce a smile of derision in any company except that of a few Scottish lairds, farmers, gamekeepers and bailies – all relics of a vanished age of gold when the vintages of the north had their students and lovers.”

Aeneas MacDonald, Whisky(1930)

THE ADELPHI DISTILLERY LIMITED SELECTS AND BOTTLES CASKS OF RARE MALT WHISKY AND MAKES THEIR UNIQUE CONTENTS AVAILABLE BY MAIL ORDER TO THOSE WHO APPRECIATE FINE LIQUOR, ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.

THE INDIVIDUAL WHISKIES ARE EACH OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY AND THE CRITERIA FOR SELECTION INCLUDE RARITY AND MATURITY, BUT ABOVE ALL FLAVOUR.

EACH CASK IMPARTS ITS OWN CHARACTER TO THE WHISKY IT HOLDS, SO TO ACHIEVE BRAND CONSISTENCY IT IS CUSTOMARY TO MIX THE CONTENTS OF A NUMBER OF CASKS PRIOR TO BOTTLING. WE DO NOT DO THIS: WE ARE NOT SEEKING UNIFORMITY. FURTHERMORE, IN ORDER TO RETAIN THE FULL FLAVOUR OF THE WHISKY, IT IS BOTTLED STRAIGHT FROM THE CASK – WITHOUT CHILL FILTERING, OR DILUTION.

OUR WHISKIES ARE THUS STRONGER THAN PROPRIETRY BRANDS. USUALLY BY ABOUT 30 PROOF, OR 17% ALCOHOL (THE EXACT STRENGTH WILL VARY ACCORDING TO THE WHISKY’S AGE).

IN SHORT, THE WHISKIES SELECTED BY ADELPHI WILL BE THE TRUE AND UNADULTERATED SPIRIT, AS ENJOYED BY OUR ANCESTORS!

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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