

T H E
G H O S T
D I S T I L L E R I E S
O F
S C O T L A N D



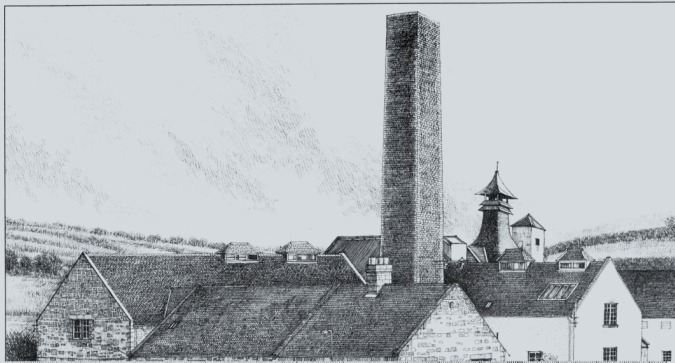
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Long after their stills bore spirit, a collection of ghost distilleries in Scotland live on through independent bottlings of their aged casks. Whisky expert Philip Morrice breathes life into the ghosts of distilleries past.

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Philip Morrice is a whisky historian and author of several books including *"The Schweppes Guide to Scotch"* and *"The Whisky Distilleries of Scotland and Ireland"* (which is the centenary re-write of Alfred Barnard's classic work *"The Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom"* published in 1887). He is currently researching *"The Guide to the Whiskies of Tasmania"* due to appear later in the year.

Although the average whisky distillery, by its very nature, has the appearance of being a permanent feature, and many have stood for well over 100 years exactly where they stand today, economic ill winds, fire and other calamities have seen many fine distilleries disappear leaving no trace of their original presence.



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Alcornie

The Excise

It is, indeed, a shifting scene. When Alfred Barnard made his celebrated tour of the whisky distilleries of the United Kingdom (which then included all of Ireland) in the 1880s, in Scotland, he visited a total of 129 establishments. When I repeated his tour 100 years later I visited 121 distilleries, but 20 of these, although still formally licensed to produce whisky, had closed and some were in the process of being dismantled (in terms of removal of the equipment) or demolished altogether. Of the original Barnard inventory, 70 had survived to be included in my itinerary, and 51 "new" distilleries had been added as a result of developments, mainly in Speyside, in the intervening 100 years. And one—North of Scotland (aka Strathmore)—had even come and gone between his journey and mine.

Whilst the number of distilleries had remained roughly the same (129 to 121), productive capacity had increased tenfold from the equivalent of 46.6 million litres of alcohol in 1886 to 459 million litres in 1979 when all 121 distilleries, which I visited, were in full production.

Although I would love to be contradicted, I believe I can safely say that, apart from *Glenugie*, there is now no identifiable whisky in existence from the 59 Barnard distilleries, which had disappeared by the time I repeated his journey. If there is, and the provenance could be verified beyond a reasonable doubt, it would be beyond price.

Which brings me to the phenomenon of the "ghost" distilleries, which are those distilleries which have long since disappeared from productive life but whose whiskies still exist, albeit for limited periods, before stocks eventually run out. And so like real ghosts, the body has been extinguished but the spirit lives on!

There are 34 of these ghost distilleries. I visited all of them in the footsteps of Alfred Barnard in the mid 1980's, except for *Glenugie* which perniciouly had been demolished just weeks before my sojourn and North of Scotland which was post-Barnard but did not survive long enough to be part of my itinerary. 24 of the 34 were already closed, some of them had lost their equipment and others were on the point of demolition. It was an eerie, dispiriting experience, as I recorded in my book at the time. Apart from the 34 ghosts, other distilleries were "silent", such as the much-cherished *Ardbeg*, at the time of my journey. However, these have mostly made a wonderful comeback as the fortunes of the industry were gradually restored following the economic malaise of the early 1980's, which had taken such a toll.

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Left
Dallas Dhu Distillery

Edition Seven

The Ghost Distilleries of Scotland

Of the 34 ghost distilleries, seven are essentially grain distilleries and the rest are malt distilleries. Without being too technical, some are distilleries within other distilleries, the distinction being the use of different types of stills, such as pot stills producing malt whisky within a patent or column still complex producing grain whisky (used almost exclusively in blending). The ghost whiskies are sought-after for their quality (by appreciative consumers), scarcity (by collectors) and value (by investors). As stocks dwindle, so the search intensifies and, of course, prices too.

The greatest cull of distilleries was undertaken by the forerunner to *Diageo* (*United Distillers* ("UD")/*Guinness PLC*)—malt in the 1980's and grain a little later.

Let's run through their Speyside malts first of all because that is where the greatest carnage took place. *Banff* (closed in 1983 with the last remnants being destroyed by fire in 1991), *Coleburn* (possibility of being developed into a resort/hotel complex), *Convalmore* (now owned by *Wm Grant & Sons of Glenfiddich* fame but used only for warehousing), and *Pittypaich* (which operated for less than 20 years and was demolished in 2002) all provided malt whisky for blending, but were regarded as either being too small to be economically viable or producing spirit which did not meet the exacting standards of the blenders. Similarly with *Dallas Dhu*, but it has survived as a historic non-working distillery museum where visitors can see and hear how whisky was made. I have a personal attachment as I was involved in trying to buy it with a group of New Zealand investors from Dunedin, but in the end the owners would not sell.

None of these distilleries had—whilst operational—official bottlings of their product as single malts. That came after they had closed, either in the *Rare Malts* or *Flora and Fauna* series. And there are numerous expressions offered by independent bottlers. Prices range from \$350 to \$1700, depending on age and scarcity. *Convalmore*, *Coleburn* and *Banff*—probably in that order—are all investment grade whiskies, not least because they are also excellent sipping whiskies and so they are disappearing quite quickly.

Still in Speyside, *Imperial* distillery at Carron had a slightly different history. Although built in 1897 its years in production were sporadic and UD mothballed it in 1985 and then sold it to *Allied Distillers* in 1989 who recommenced distilling in 1991. To their credit they were responsible for the only official bottling of Imperial—a 15 years old, which is still available, as are a number of independent bottlings. Imperial closed again in 1998 and eventually became the property of *Pernod Ricard* in the process of the latter's acquisition and break up of *Allied* in 2005. The new owners eventually demolished Imperial and have had their plans for a totally new and much larger operation on the same site but with a different name, approved by the local council. This could well lead to renewed interest in the earlier bottlings of Imperial.

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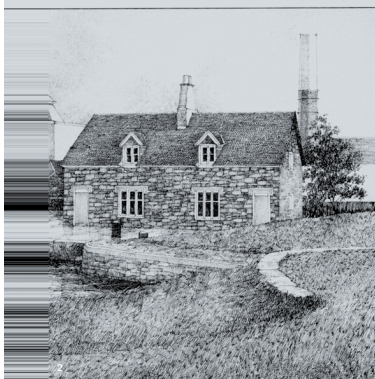


The pre-Diageo slash and burn of 1983 occurred also in the Northern Highlands with the demise of *Brora* (which has a cult following and many official and independent bottlings but nothing under \$1,000), *Glen Albyn* and next-door neighbour *Glen Mhor* (which are beginning to catch the eye of the collector/investor and at more modest prices) went at the same time. The same with *Glenlochry* also in 1983 and *Millburn* in 1985, both of which have grown enormously in popularity as stocks diminish at an alarming rate. Official bottlings of the former come at around \$3,000, independents start at \$700. There are many fewer expressions of *Millburn* but at lower prices. It was a modest operation in urban Inverness, with much of its product going into *McLeay Duff* blends.

Over on the east coast the axe swung just as effectively and United Distillers basically closed down all of their operations. Nothing was left standing—*Glenesh/Hillside* near Montrose went in 1985 but survives as maltings (there were official bottlings in the 1980's and these can be found from around \$450), *Glenury Royal* at Stonehaven and *North Port* at Brechin (sometimes called this as well) went at about the same time. They are at the more modest end of the investment grade whiskies and demand more reasonable prices to reflect this starting at about \$450, but again scarcity will continue to push these upwards.

UD were equally savage in the Lowlands where only *Glenkinchie* survived. The ancient distilleries of *Linlithgow/St. Magdalene* (1753) and *Rosebank* (1840) both went. Bottles of the former can be found under either name. *Rosebank* almost survived but eventually closed in 1993 despite the recognised quality of the whisky of which there had been a regular flow of official bottlings from the distillery. Both these Lowlanders are now much sought after for both the quality of the spirit and its rising value in the unopened bottle.

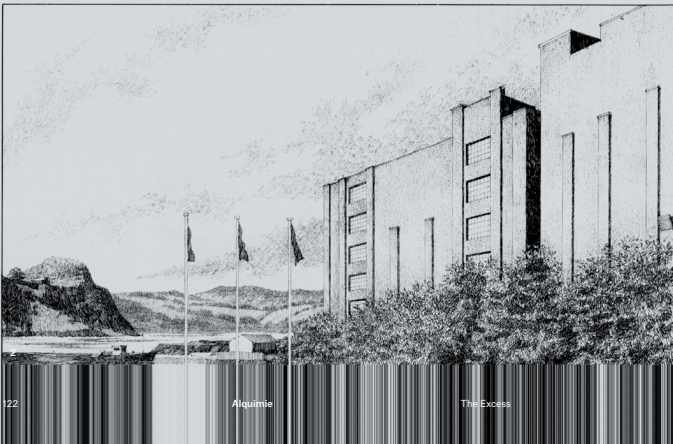
The biggest single loss, however, was undoubtedly *Port Ellen* on Islay. With *Caul Ila* and *Lagavulin* working at full capacity UD calculated that *Port Ellen*, itself a large distillery, would be surplus to requirements, but in doing so they had miscalculated how popular the peaty Islay malts were to become and in the process underestimated just what a great whisky they were removing from public consumption. Much of the stock was sold off to independent bottlers who hoarded the casks until the inevitable surge in demand for *Port Ellen* emerged to the extent that it has a huge following soaking up whatever they can find, be it official bottlings or independent alternatives. It is estimated that there are over 400 different expressions of the make, most of which are no longer available unless they show up at auction. The *Whisky Exchange* currently has a staggering 90 different options ranging from around \$1,000 to \$10,000. *Port Ellen* has been a strong investment performer with a passionate following, as have some of the active Islay whiskies like *Lagavulin*, *Laphroaig* and *Ardbeg*.



1 Port Ellen Distillery
2 Glen Mhor Distillery

* Distilleries situated within other distilleries

Distillery	Owner	Status	Years Of Operation
Banff	Diageo	Demolished	1863-1983
Ben Nevis (Grain)*	Nikka	Dismantled	1955-1978
Ben Wyvis* (Invergordon)	Whyte & Mackay Ltd	Demolished	1965-1976
Brora	Diageo	Dismantled	1819-1983
Caledonian	Diageo	Demolished	1855-1987
Cambus	Diageo	Whisky Cask Filling Centre	1806-1993
Caperdonich	Gruppo Campari	Demolished in 2010	1898-2002
Carsebridge	Diageo	Dismantled	1825-1983
Coleburn	Diageo	Dismantled	1897-1985
Convalmore	Diageo	Dismantled	1893-1985
Dallas Dhu	Diageo	Silent; Distilling Museum	1898-1983
Dumbarton/Inverleven/Lomond	Pernod Ricard	Demolished	1938-2002
Glencaig* (Glenburgie)	Pernod Ricard	Dismantled	1958-1981
Glen Albyn	Diageo	Demolished	1846-1983
Glen Esk/Hillside	Diageo	Demolished	1897-1985
Glenlochry	Diageo	Demolished	1898-1983
Glen Mhor	Diageo	Demolished	1892-1983
Glenugie	Whitbread	Demolished	1831-1983
Glenury Royal	Diageo	Demolished	1825-1985
Imperial	Pernod Ricard	Demolished in 2013	1897-2000
Kinclaith* (Strathclyde)	Pernod Ricard	Demolished	1958-1975
Ladyburn* (Girvan)	Wm. Grant & Sons	Silent	1966-1975
Linlithgow/St. Magdalene	Diageo	Demolished	1753-1983
Littlemill	Loch Lomond Distilling	Demolished	1772-1984
Lochside	Pernod Ricard	Demolished in 2005	1957-1996
Millburn	Diageo	Demolished	1805-1985
Moffat/Garnheath/Glenflagler/Killyoch	Inver House Distillers Ltd	Demolished	1965-1988
Mosstownie	Pernod Ricard	Dismantled	1964-1981
North of Scotland/Strathmore	Nrth of Scotland Distilling Co.	Demolished in 1993	1957-1980
North Port	Diageo	Demolished	1820-1983
Pittyvaich	Diageo	Demolished	1975-1993
Port Dundas	Diageo	Whisky Warehousing	1811-2010
Port Ellen	Diageo	Dismantled	1825-1983
Rosebank	Diageo	Demolished	1840-1993



Having taken out 16 of their malt whisky distilleries just as single malts were beginning to take off, UD then turned its attention to the grain whisky excess supply. As a result *Carsebridge*, *Caledonian* and *Cambus* went, in that order, between 1983 and 1993. There was then a lull before the mighty *Port Dundas* ceased distilling in 2010, although its warehousing is retained. Today, Diageo's only wholly owned grain distillery is *Cameronbridge* and for many years their *Cameron Brig* was the only single grain whisky bottled officially. There are a number of independent bottlings of these defunct grain whiskies and prices are far more reasonable than the malts, but then there is virtually no investor interest, although that could change once the much larger stocks, which are still used for blending purposes, start to evaporate.

Of the distilleries within distilleries, the standout performers, at least as investments, are *Killyloch* within the now defunct *Moffat* grain distillery and *Ben Wyvis* (sitting inside *Invergordon* grain distillery, but only for 11 years). Bottles, if you can find them, sell for \$3,000 to \$5,000. In the same category, but not the same price bracket, are *Glenflagler* (also a hybrid within the old *Moffat* complex, which also produced *Garnheath* grain whisky, a little of which has been bottled—at between \$400 to \$1,000), *Kincailth* (which sat inside the *Strathclyde* grain distillery), and *Ladyburn* (attached to the *Girvan* grain distillery). All had brief lives, and the bottlings available are highly prized and highly priced. Less so *Inverleven Lowland Malt*, which operated within the now demolished *Dumbarton Grain Distillery*. Inverleven is less hard to find than the other single malt spawned from *Dumbarton*, i.e. *Lomond* (not to be confused with *Loch Lomond*, distillery, which is alive and well). There is no evidence of *Lomond* ever having been bottled as a single malt, at least officially. *Dumbarton*, however, can be found as a single grain, mainly under the *Clan Denny* label.

A few curiosities worth mentioning are a) the *Ben Nevis* grain distillery, which operated from 1955 to 1978 within what was essentially a malt whisky distillery of the same name; b) *Glencairn* which was a malt whisky distillery adaptation using a Lomond still and a separate name, operating within the *Glenburgie* distillery and producing malt whisky for exclusive use in the *Ballantine's* blend; and c) *North of Scotland*, a grain whisky distillery which operated from 1957 to 1980 (being demolished in 1993) also had a brief period of malt whisky production under the name of *Strathmore*. Somehow a few casks of these three rarities escaped captivity to be bottled by independents.

Not all of the losses have been due to UD. I was particularly saddened by the closure in 2002 and its demolition ten years later of *Caperdonich* (originally *Glen Grant No 2* distillery) as I had always found it a rather fine but under appreciated dram. Fortunately, there are lots of independent bottlings at reasonable prices to choose from but these will eventually rise as its qualities become more widely appreciated.

Another lamentable demise is that of *Littlemill*, which was one of the oldest surviving distilleries in Scotland dating back to 1772 and classified as a Lowland malt. It was not just its great age which made it significant, but also the experimentation and innovation which took place there during its lifetime. *Littlemill* was closed at the time of my visit but after yet another change in ownership it did reopen and was active for about five years until finally ceasing production in 1994. It was dismantled three years later and the remaining buildings were sadly destroyed by fire in 2004. The ghost of *Littlemill* lives on in the various official and independent bottlings to be found. Again, prices are rising as stocks diminish. Two other whiskies came out of that distillery as *Dumbuck* and *Dunglass(s)* reflecting variations to the standard pot stills. *Dumbuck* was basically a heavily peated variation of *Littlemill* and I have never seen it as a bottled single malt and so one can assume that it may all have gone for blending. There are, however, a few independent bottlings of *Dunglass*, which was a peated experimental variation on *Littlemill*, which qualified as a separate distillation in its own right. If you can find a bottle expect to pay in excess of \$1500.

At more reasonable prices come official and independent bottlings of *Lochside*, which was both a grain and malt distillery. Most of the production went into the *Sandy Macraob* blend but some of the malt whisky was bottled by the distillery under the *Lochside* label. The distillery had a variety of owners and production ceased in 1992 and the distillery was demolished in 2005.

Scarcer and hardly known is *Mosstownie*, which was the whisky, made using a Lomond still within the traditional pot still at *Miltonduff* distillery. It was introduced in 1964 and produced a lighter malt whisky for blending up to 1981. A few casks were subsequently bought by independents for bottling as a single malt and these can be found on line or at auction in the \$500 to \$1,000 price range.

Whilst the passing of so many distilleries is a matter of regret and in some instances represents a real loss to the world of Scotch whisky, their spirit lives on, at least in most cases, in the form of the many expressions which have been bottled over the years, due in large part to the foresight of independent whisky merchants, such as *Gordon & Macphail*, *Duncan Taylor* and *Douglas Laing*. A

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1 Littlemill Distillery
2 Dumbarton/Inverleven/Lomond Distillery