

Schweppes Guide to Scotch

1. We're here obviously to talk about the book specifically, but first, can you provide a little background on how you became involved in whisky and what motivated you to write the Schweppes Guide to Scotch?

I was born and raised in the North-East of Scotland, the home of many malt whisky distilleries, particularly in Speyside. However, in those days whisky distilling was a rather secretive industry, there was no such thing as distillery visits, and everyone was tied to his particular brand of blended whisky. In my father's case, it was "The Famous Grouse". Whisky and distilling for me was of absolutely no interest and in terms of my future, and developing a career, I soon headed South. That brought me to enter the usual examination process to join HM Diplomatic Service and to embark on a career, which was to take me all over the world – 9 different countries across all five continents.

My first posting was Malaysia and there everyone in those days seemed to drink "Johnnie Walker Red Label". I recall that it was imported by a very old trading company, Caldbeck Macgregor, which had been founded in Shanghai in 1864. It had grown to become the biggest wine and spirits importer in the Far East. They are still around but I don't know which Scotch brands they now represent since clearly Diageo (as United Distillers) saw merit in having direct control of their various leading brands and eventually dispensed with their long-standing agency arrangements. However, that was when I first became acquainted with "Hankey Bannister", which was then owned by Saccone & Speed Limited which seemed to be almost a monopoly supplier of wines and spirits to both the British armed forces (arising from their origins in Gibraltar), and the Diplomatic Service.

After a stint in London working on Britain's second bid to join what was then the EEC, my next posting was Venezuela and there was a very strong market there for Scotch, no doubt reflecting the fact that Scotch had become very fashionable in the US and anything that was in vogue there was soon making its mark in Caracas. At this time the leading brand was "Buchanan's", although another DCL de luxe brand, "Chequers", which has since disappeared, was being prominently advertised on television. The Venezuelans, however, drank their expensive whiskies with Coca Cola and ice. I knew that this was wrong but how could I educate them if I knew so little about the subject myself! Coincidentally, it was at this time that I was introduced to my first-ever single malt. A colleague in the Embassy had recently been to Islay and had fallen in love with "Bruichladdich". He managed to persuade some of us to join him in a minimum order of, I think, 12 cases of the 10 years old. And so, an entirely new world was opened up for me. Partly on that account and because so many people, when I told them I was from Scotland, saw whisky as the one aspect of Scotland with which they were familiar, the inevitable barrage of questions followed, which invariably I could not answer and so I decided to educate myself in the subject. I found it so fascinating in terms of its social, economic and historical perspectives that I simply dug deeper and deeper and, in the end, saw the need for what I thought might be an in-depth look at the industry in Scotland. This interest also enabled me to maintain my links with Scotland and return there reasonably frequently for research but also to visit family and friends. The rest is history.

2. How did Schweppes become involved? The book was published in 1983, so obviously the book was green-light prior to that. Did you find it problematic to find a publisher for your idea initially? Was it a case of several rejections before finding a publisher?

I discussed the project with my brother, Ronald, who sadly died at Christmas from Covid. He had some business connections with the publishing world and said that he would talk to some of his contacts there. The very first one he approached was a small specialist publishing house called Alphabooks which was owned and run by a delightful individual, Tony Birks-Hay, and his wife, who actually edited my book and did a very good job of it. And so, I did not go through the usual new author's trials and tribulations of submitting to numerous publishing houses and receiving endless rejection slips. And in that I was very fortunate, and I have to thank my brother for that.

Tony encouraged me to get on with the writing whilst he worked on the commercial feasibility of the book. His conclusion was that he would have to find a sponsor, which worried me slightly. I told him he could not approach any of the whisky companies because if one or other of them did provide some sort of backing then the book's independence would be destroyed. Shortly after that conversation, he came up with the idea of Schweppes. The then managing director of the company was a great whisky enthusiast and Schweppes were to be celebrating their 200 years of existence in 1983. In return for taking multiple copies of the book – I think about 6000 out of a total print run of 12,500 – they required their name to be in the title – as in “The Schweppes Guide to Scotch” - and to have some supporting text within the pages of the book. I was aghast at this at first and said that I was concerned that this would be seen to be compromising the project in terms of its independence and integrity. Tony looked at me wryly and simply said, “dear boy, it is either the Schweppes guide or no guide!” That was the end of the argument and I had no trouble writing Schweppes into the manuscript, particularly as they were then the owners of Malvern water which is an excellent accompaniment to any whisky.

The book came out in three different formats. Most of the copies were in hard back but there were also, I think, about 500 copies of the paperback version and a small number – probably no more than 200 – rendered in a mock leather binding. The latter went to Schweppes's top customers, the hard back to their general trade customers and I think some of the paper back copies went to staff. The balance of the hardback and paperback versions then became normal trade publications and sold well through the usual channels. I don't think the mock leather version ever went on sale and was a purely promotional tool for Schweppes.

Whilst purists might look askance at having Schweppes in the title of my book, the fact of the matter is that it has made it instantly recognisable and easy to distinguish from all the other scores of whisky books written since. The titles of such books are generally rather pedestrian because they have to reflect the subject matter in a way that makes the book recognisable for its content, but having Schweppes in the title has simply made it stand out over the years and, as you know, many people in the whisky world know it for this reason.

3. I believe that David Daiches 'Scotch Whisky: Its Past and Present' was an inspiration for your own whisky discovery. What other books would you recommend and how do you view today's whisky books that are far more numerous compared to those you initially enjoyed in the 70s and 80s?

When embarking on my research, I duly identified two or three existing books, the best of which was undoubtedly the late David Daiches' “**Scotch Whisky: Its Past and Present**”. (The

good professor subsequently did me the honour of a half-page review in the “Times Literary Supplement” of “**The Schweppes Guide to Scotch**” by generously describing it as then being “the best book written on the economics of Scotch whisky”!). However, I also drew much pleasure and information from Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart’s much earlier work “**Scotch: the Whisky of Scotland in Fact and Story**”. He too had been a British diplomat, albeit one with a much more colourful story to tell than me, and the professional link gave me some encouragement to get on with my own whisky-related literary endeavors.

In terms of other books, Alfred Barnard’s “**The Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom**” became my Bible in terms of individual distilleries both existing and departed. What a herculean task he had undertaken at a time when travel in Scotland – and in Ireland – was treacherous, uncomfortable and uncertain. Of course, he was the inspiration for me to write my own version of the great Barnard trek but more about that later.

Since 1983, many more accomplished whisky writers have emerged including Jim Murray, who openly flatters me by telling me that the Schweppes Guide was what got him going. And what a tremendous contribution he has made to the world of whisky with his annual **Whisky Bible**, which I have always at hand. I am very sorry that Jim has come in for some woke criticism of late simply because of his colourful use of nuanced language when describing certain whiskies. If authors have to be constantly looking over their shoulder for fear of offending some overly sensitive element of society, literature will be the loser and whisky writing will be reduced to being the product of jobbing scribes simply repeating all that has been said before in so many bland volumes. Jim Murray’s various other books on whisky are all on my shelves. I particularly like – and indeed consult – “**The Art of Whisky**” and “**Classic Blended Scotch**”. I think of all the whisky writers, Murray has the broadest perspective.

That is in no way to devalue the work of other recognised whisky writers such as Ian Buxton, Gavin Smith and Charlie Maclean. And then there is the late Michael Jackson, although I did pick up the odd quite glaring error in one or two of his works, but then I have myself made the odd howler in my own books, but I won’t tell you what they are here! These writers have all made serious contributions to whisky literature and all are in my library which runs to nearly 400 volumes, all of them about whisky - and whiskey - from all over the world but mainly from Scotland.

I review numerous whisky books sent to me by the publishers and usually give a favourable assessment, which they invariably deserve, and place the reviews on my website under “Biblioteca”.

I am currently reviewing Nicholas Morgan’s “**A Long Stride**”, which is the Johnnie Walker story and has been a long time coming but who better than Nicholas, an accomplished historian who set up what is now the Diageo Archive, to have written it. Which recalls another academic textbook that I frequently consult, namely R B Weir’s “**The History of the Distillers Company: 1877 -1939**”. Perhaps Dr Morgan might take on the writing of the next volume, which is sorely needed in terms of completing the record of DCL, by far the most significant player in the development of the Scotch whisky industry.

There is a tendency in the whisky literature of more recent years simply to repeat much of what has gone before and that is understandable because you cannot change history - or you do so at your peril. This is not surprising since anyone writing a general book about

whisky obviously has to set out some of the basic facts and most of those have not changed that much. Although they can be repetitive, I do find that most of them have some kernel of unique knowledge or information to offer and so I do enjoy going through them in order to find the pearl. And then there are the books which attempt, with varying degrees of success, to educate us in the enjoyment of whisky, which whiskies to drink, where to find them and their price bracket. That was not something I really attempted to address in my own books because I feel that trying to describe a particular whisky is a very subjective exercise and what might please my palate may be totally foreign to that of the next person.

The third category of writing and probably the one that appeals the most to me is where the author has taken a particular aspect of the subject and dug deep into it. There are some splendid distillery/company profiles which are full of history and are not necessarily overt propaganda for the brand in question and Ian Buxton, whom I first met at the launch of my Schweppes Guide in Edinburgh nearly 40 years ago, is a particular master of this genre.

4. At over 400 pages, the Schweppes Guide to Scotch it is a true labour of love – how long did it take you to complete the book and is there anything you'd wish that you had included originally?

I guess I started the process of outlining what the book would cover and doing some of the basic desk research during my time in Brussels (1975 to 1978), which was odd as I had a very busy job there. Prior to Brussels I had been in Paris at the UK Delegation to the OECD (1973-75). I had become very much involved in the setting up of the International Energy Agency (IEA) within the OECD and so, by chance, became something of a – temporary - international energy expert. This led to my transfer to the UK Permanent Representation to the European Community as First Secretary (Energy). My job was, principally, to keep North Sea oil free of any European Community encroachment and so was highly sensitive, not least because the then Secretary of State for Energy, Tony Benn, who had become a highly critical opponent of European integration, kept a very close eye on everything that was going on in Brussels. We also had the North-South Dialogue following the OPEC restrictions on oil exports to the West going on in Paris and so I was spending large chunks of time back there as part of the UK element in the European Community delegation.

And I had a new wife and so where did I get the time, energy and inspiration to be writing this book? On reflection, I needed something that was a complete break from my intense work routine and so I embraced the project with the necessary enthusiasm and the more I dug into the subject the more fascinated I became with the history and the people who had created the great industry which Scotch whisky had become. In all this, I was greatly helped by my new wife, Gillian, to whom the Schweppes Guide is dedicated. We had met in Paris where she had been a personal assistant at the OECD and after my move to Brussels we got married. She was a very good organiser in a quiet but highly efficient way and she tirelessly helped me with the research, preparation of manuscript and the voluminous correspondence involved in all this. Sadly, she passed away in Edinburgh some years ago, but one thing is certain and that is without my brother Ronald, whom I mentioned earlier, and Gillian, the Schweppes Guide would never have happened!

From Brussels, I was transferred back to London to work at the FCO (1978 – 81) and again I had very busy jobs, first of all as head of the South Africa desk and then as number two in

the Hong Kong Department. However, my presence in the UK allowed me to do the very necessary field research which involved a long series of interviews with companies and visits to distilleries. Sometimes, I would be accompanied by Gillian, whose parents conveniently lived in Edinburgh. It was a useful way of using up my accumulated leave which had built-up over the years in Paris and Brussels when it was hard to get away for anything other than brief holidays.

My stint in London lasted about 2 ½ years until I was transferred in July 1981 to Rome where I headed up the Commercial Department in the embassy. This was my first encounter with the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) who took a very strong interest in how Scotch whisky imports were treated by the Italian authorities since Italy was a very important market – and still is – particularly for single malt whisky.

As an aside, the SWA at first seemed somewhat dismayed to learn that I was writing a book about their very subject since they were much more used to briefing people who knew nothing about it. However, any initial awkwardness was soon overcome and I developed a really good working relationship with the head of the international department, Tim Jackson, who did much to smooth the way for Scotch whisky in so many markets around the world. An ex- army officer, he seemed totally dedicated to the task and as I subsequently held various trade related appointments in countries where Scotch whisky was prominent – and often discriminated against – there was a natural affinity between us. However, my relationship with the SWA was not always sublime and they could be quite pernicious with anyone who was perceived to be stepping out of line. I recall one day being summoned by my ambassador in Rome, the late Lord (Tom) Bridges, who said that he had received a rather odd letter from a senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in London passing on a complaint from the head of the SWA, no doubt on behalf of DCL the only producer of a bottled single grain whisky at the time, about a comment I had made in one of my articles regarding the rather characterless nature of grain whisky compared with the variety and individuality of malt whiskies. I explained to his excellency the differences between the two with a bit of history thrown in, to which he said that as he had delivered the ticking off he was required to, as far as he was concerned the matter was closed. I subsequently received from him his copy of the Times Literary Supplement in which he drew my attention to the full half page review of The Schweppes Guide by David Daiches, which he had annotated with the words “a favourable review” – words of passion from a man not given to praise!

Having finished off the manuscript in Rome to meet the 1983 deadline, The Schweppes Guide then had a number of launches, firstly at the first ever Whisky Festival in Speyside, at the Edinburgh Book Fair and even in Rome itself. The director of the British Council there, who clearly enjoyed his whisky, thought it appropriate to give the book some official backing in a country where Scotch whisky was so prominent. It was a nice touch, the publisher came over and subsequently this led to The Schweppes Guide being translated into Italian, which I proofed, and to which I added to the original text a chapter on Scotch whisky in Italy. It appeared as “La Guida allo Scotch Whisky”. It was published by Dilettoso & Co SPA, who were the publishers of the main trade magazine in Italy – Bargiornale, and I contributed many articles on Scotch whisky and distilleries to that publication. But then I was also writing for Harpers Wine and Spirit Gazette, Decanter Magazine and various others.

As a result of The Schweppes Guide and its Italian equivalent, I became something of a “Signor Whisky” in Italy, somewhat to the annoyance of the local SWA representative in

Rome who had become overly fond of the product he was promoting. I recall our taking a visiting senior Conservative minister to Burns night Italian fashion, which we could not get him to leave, so much so that he missed his flight to Brussels the next morning and an important European Community meeting but that's another story. What is much more interesting is the call I had from the Foreign Office around this time to say that the Prime Minister – Margaret Thatcher – would be hosting the heads of all the other European governments in her role as president of the European Council of Ministers. As was the norm, she would want to present each one of them with a present to record the visit and which would typically be wholly British in character. She was personally inclined towards a really good bottle of Scotch but wanted independent advice. Could I help? I had no hesitation in suggesting my own favourite tippie of the day - The Macallan 18 years old, but why not go for the 25 years old if the Treasury would agree! I believe my advice was accepted and later in my career I got to know Margaret Thatcher really quite well. She was a strong advocate for Scotch whisky and its industry and a devoted consumer, whereas Dennis was more of a gin and tonic man.

Another famous person whose association with Scotch whisky became evident in Italy was Princess Margaret. My colleague in Florence – the consul there – told me that on her not infrequent visits to his patch, where he had to meet her at the airport and convey her to her Tuscan residence, he had always to make sure that there was a good supply available to her of her favourite brand. To his dismay it was common or garden Bell's!

In the course of my duties, I got to know all of the main Scotch whisky importers quite well and Italian government restrictions and discrimination were a constant source of dismay to them. To try and increase their influence I proposed the setting up of an Italian Whisky Importers Association. This found favour with the SWA until they learned that the importers wanted to make me the first president! This was clearly not appropriate, but the association was formed and did have some influence, its first president being Dr Enrico Wax, the owner and chairman of Wax and Vitale, the well-known importers of Johnny Walker. I was, however, getting slightly nervous about the impact of my involvement with Scotch whisky, as an author, on my official standing. As a result, we organised, with the full backing of the Department of Trade and Industry, the first ever British Gin Week anywhere in the world and where else to have it but Rome. The gin distillers, led by Norman Burrough of Beefeater fame, were delighted, gave their full support and a great time was had by all as we were able to recruit the top bars and restaurants to the cause and, of course, Romans love a party, especially if it goes on all week. We even had Gina (get the pun?) Lollobrigida as the guest VIP at one of the functions. Thereafter, my conscience was clear.

Is there anything I regret not covering in the guide? I don't think so although I did feel at the time that I had concentrated perhaps too much on the commercial side of Scotch whisky rather than on the distilling, but that was taken care of when I did the centenary re-write of the Barnard book a couple of years later. And so, I guess that preparation, interviewing, writing and reviewing between Brussels, London and Rome would've taken roughly 5 years, but not an intensive five years as clearly my professional duties came first.

5. Have you kept all of your original research and notes? Are there any plans to release this information in any form?

Well I guess they are around somewhere in my rather shambolic archive. I really did try and get down in print in the book every relevant detail and so I'm not sure that there would be

all that much to add, except perhaps the notes I made on the individuals I interviewed, some of whom were less than welcoming and were presumably worried about spies from Japan and China, which I clearly was not. Anyway, I am open to suggestions. What I have thought of doing is seeing whether the information gathered for The Schweppes Guide and that for the Barnard rewrite might be brought together and merged in some sort of way to produce detailed histories of different companies and distilleries. And I do have on tape the interviews I did for the Barnard book with the managers of all the distilleries I visited and that would give a unique snapshot of the distilling industry in Scotland and Ireland in the mid 1980s, but then that wasn't a particularly happy tale. It might be worth seeing if they can be rescued from the tapes and put on some sort of disc.

6. Back in the 1970s and 80s, things I presume were less instant without the modern methods of communication today. What parts of the book took up most of your energy? Did you hit any brick walls?

The interviewing was the most time-consuming aspect and had to be done nearly always on an eyeball to eyeball basis as I simply was not going to lift things from existing publicity material. That then had to be turned into copy using a conventional steam age typewriter because word-processing was still in its infancy. And, of course, no mobile telephones. However, as I have mentioned before, the publisher did an excellent job of editing and indexing the book and I think The Schweppes Guide is a model of just how a detailed book should be indexed.

One problem we did have was how to illustrate the book. At first, the publisher thought it would be a good idea to feature bottles of whisky alongside each company or distillery entry. I duly requested bottles from companies large and small and so our house in Chiswick became the receiving point for an endless stream of deliveries of these bottles. Sometimes they were dummies for display purposes, and that was alright, but in the vast majority of cases they were the real McCoy. Only one company asked for the return of its bottle after it had served its purpose – The Army and Navy Stores (owned by House of Fraser). They had had their own label for many years but now no longer exist under that name. I relate this because all of the other bottles were left with me and formed the nucleus of what was to become my extensive collection of Scotch whiskies. I would love to find a bottle of the old Army and Navy blend now, if only for reasons of nostalgia!

In the end, however, the publisher rather shamefacedly told me that a fully illustrated book as originally planned would not be financially viable, even with Schweppes' support, and so a different approach would be needed. What we ended up with was a smattering of pen and ink drawings by Peter Hailay, an artist known to Tony Birks-Hay, and he did rather a good job, which was a curtain raiser for the outstanding job he subsequently did with the drawings of each and every distillery to be featured in my Barnard rewrite.

7. Being published in 1983, it's a date many whisky enthusiasts will associate with widespread cuts and closures across the industry. What was your view on these closures and did you feel that the book was overshadowed by industry events at the time? Did sales meet expectations?

It was a bleak time for the industry and a huge whisky loch had developed and this led companies, and in particular DCL, to examine closely their assets and eventually assign too many of them to the sale room or for demolition. I actually witnessed a number of closed distilleries and some even in the process of demolition as I visited distilleries as part of the preparation for my second book, **“The Whisky Distilleries of Scotland and Ireland”**. The tragedy is that many of these distilleries were producing fine whisky and were of considerable historical significance. The only one I missed was Glenugie (owned by Allied at the time of its demise) where the wrecker’s ball had already done its worst before I could get there. And I never got to the North of Scotland Distillery which was supposed to be operational at the time but, in fact, was not. It is the only time that I have written about a distillery which I hadn’t visited but based my description (in The Schweppes Guide) on a telephone conversation with the owner who rather misled me. I never did that again as it really caught me out.

I am not sure if DCL ever explained in detail the rationale behind their approach to the massive culling exercise they undertook in the mid 1980’s. Generally speaking, they earmarked smaller malt whisky distilleries which were deemed to be unsuitable for expansion. Dallas Dhu springs to mind and I did, in fact, with a couple of Kiwi friends in London, try to buy the distillery on behalf of a group of New Zealand investors of Scottish origin in Dunedin, who had the idea that owning a distillery in Scotland would give them justifiable reasons for visiting the old country on tax deductible expenses! It is a long story, but we got caught up in the Guinness takeover and the fallout from that and our offer, which had initially been accepted in principle, was in the end rejected. However, I did get a trip to New Zealand to present to the potential investors and explain why I had singled out Dallas Dhu as a worthy object of their desires. Coincidentally, my trip to Dunedin enabled me to visit Wilson’s Distillery, which was quite a serious operation at the time and had been around for a good century but sadly is no more. Happily, despite all this Dallas Dhu was not turned into a supermarket or a beauty salon and remains as an historical model distillery courtesy of Heritage Scotland.

But it wasn’t only malt distilleries that were ejected. Four of DCL’s grain distilleries also eventually went, as did Garnheath and Dumbarton.

All of this led me to take a particular interest in the “ghost” distilleries of Scotland and I think we have at least one bottle for sale on our website from every one of those distilleries and they can be accessed at <https://mywhiskyjourneys.com/collections/ghost-distilleries>

None of this dampened my enthusiasm for writing about whisky and I don’t really think that the bleak mood at boardroom level had much effect on the sales of my books. The Schweppes Guide enjoyed at least moderate success because of Schweppes’ commitment to take half the initial print run and the rest sold quite successfully through the usual channels, although I did see it remaindered in Menzies about two years after publication. However, I was assured by the publisher that only about 200 copies got the remainder treatment, and I was rather annoyed with him that he had not given me the option of buying them as a job lot which I certainly would’ve done. Nevertheless, I did secure from him a very small cache of the hardback which I will eventually sell through my website

8. It's a book I constantly recommend, because when I'm looking at blends in general at auction, it's a valuable resource regarding brand history and ownership. How difficult was it to piece together all of the brands, owners and associated details? Blend history is such a grey area and generally undocumented.

It was really quite challenging and, of course, there was no Internet and so all research had to be done the good old-fashioned way. Companies House was a good starting point in both Edinburgh and London. However, a number of companies had subsidiaries which they would use for the marketing of secondary brands. Arthur Bell, Inver House and William Whiteley were prominent in this, but there were others, usually much smaller, who had a whole plethora of subsidiaries and brands the aim being not to detract from their main, more expensive brands, by cheapening them to get into the lower levels of the market but to have secondary brands to meet that demand. DCL also had a wide range of subsidiaries, many of them with quite distinguished histories and brands to match. Sometimes those brands would be focused on a particular market such as White Horse in Japan, McCallum's Perfection in Australia and Macleay Duff in New Zealand. That did not mean to say that they were not available in other markets but simply that that particular market was where they were dominant from within the DCL portfolio.

9. Did you find yourself approaching companies for information regarding their brands and history? How difficult was it to piece everything together? What resources did you find most beneficial?

It required a lot of unravelling of the often quite complicated relationships between companies and subsidiaries or cross shareholdings such as the mysterious web involving Robertson and Baxter, Highland Distilleries and Berry Brothers and Rudd, which had been around many years but was somewhat cloaked in secrecy. Discussions with the three component companies helped me to lay it out in the book. This sort of quite detailed investigation was necessary as some of the companies were shy about being overly transparent. The ability to use different brands and different company names assisted them in this and I guess it still goes on. In each case, I approached the parent company and either visited them or had a telephone conversation. I would then draft the relevant chapter and clear it with them. Sometimes they were less than pleased that I had flushed out so much detail about them, but on the whole, they were generally cooperative. Apart from the information contained in company records, as required by law, my other main source was **Harper's Wine and Spirit Gazette**, which had a long history and followed the whisky industry in some detail. In fact, I ended up writing for them and they eventually became the publishers of my second book, but we are dealing with that later in the interview.

10. I've often felt enthusiasts I've met dismiss the book based on the mention of Schweppes – did you feel it was problematic?

As I have already mentioned, it was either The Schweppes Guide or no guide and so I did not have any choice. At first, I was a bit dismayed at the thought of all my hard work being hijacked by a commercial entity but, in fact, it proved to be a blessing in disguise. There are so many whisky books around these days, most of them with rather banal or unmemorable titles, except perhaps for the "**Whisky Bible**", that The Schweppes Guide actually stands out and is easily remembered. It is certainly widely known within the industry and so the original association with Schweppes, which was initially seen as a problem, has become an enormous advantage. It is a perfectly respectable

commercial name and who has ever raised question marks over “**The Guinness Book of Records**” and its association with a beer brand and so why should they raise questions over the association between a soft drinks company and a book about whisky? Interestingly enough, I was approached in around 1992 by the publishing arm of Guinness, after their parent company had acquired DCL, to write a completely new book on whisky to mark the 400th anniversary of the first record of whisky making in Scotland. For what I suspect were internal company politics the contract was soon cancelled at the request of United Distillers and I was paid what I estimated would be the full financial benefit to me from the book, although I had written only about two chapters. I never got to the bottom of that, but we parted on good terms and I had an excellent relationship with the United Distillers Asia-Pacific team in Hong Kong who took a keen interest in what was happening to the whisky market in Taiwan where I was then posted.

11. It’s a book I’ve continued to recommend over the years to countless people and it seems to have taken on a life of its own; have you been surprised by how it continues to be appreciated and that it has a timeless quality?

Yes, I have been pleasantly surprised by the fact that it is still used and recognised as a serious work on the subject of Scotch whisky. My publisher was then very positive about its future and we did have plans to bring it out in subsequent editions but for reasons which I shall explain later, that never came to pass. It really is a snapshot of the situation in a very important industry at a time when it was coming to a crossroads. There was some fear that the industry had taken the wrong turn by closing down so many distilleries and abandoning so many brands, but the marketing genius of the companies prevailed, and the industry has gone from strength to strength and is much admired and emulated around the world. I’m so glad that my book, and the other one on distilleries, has found a niche within the industry itself. So much of the material and information within The Schweppes Guide would’ve been lost forever had I not recorded it at the time.

12. I’ve given tastings and people have pulled out their phone and ordered a copy based on my recommendation! However, I’ve noticed that the secondary value of the book is increasing, unless you’re fortunate enough to stumble across a copy in a charity shop. Is the rising secondary value something you’re aware of? How long was the book in print for?

It came as something of a surprise and I only became aware of it when all of the editions of the book on the website – www.mywhiskyjourneys.com - suddenly disappeared in one fell swoop. Further investigation revealed that the price on the secondary market had indeed shot up, in one instance to more than US\$1000. This was in stark contrast to the days, not that long ago, when I would buy used copies in good condition on eBay or Abebooks for a few quid. It annoyed me that such a worthy work was being disposed of at such low prices and so I bought them up whenever I could, which has turned out to be a good investment. I was also amused to find that one of these second-hand books I acquired had an inscription on the fly-page from me to a then very prominent member of society, who had either fallen on hard times or had passed away and his library was being dumped by his relatives!

I think the book was in print for only a couple of years before it went on the remainder shelves, but that is publishing for you. If anyone wants to understand just what a boorish business it is they should read “Author! Author! Author!”. I knew nothing about it being remaindered until an envious busybody contacted me with some glee to say that they had seen it going for a couple of pounds in Menzies, the Scottish bookshop chain. I was very disappointed – in fact it was the only issue I ever had with the publisher – that they had not come to me in the first instance to offer me the unsold copies, of which there were about 200 I understand, instead of just dumping them.

13. Have you any inkling to return to the book and do a revised and updated version?

An interesting question. Alphabooks wanted to bring out a second updated version about five years after the first edition. We signed a contract and I was about to start work on it when Alphabooks was acquired by a very old Scottish publisher whose name escapes me right now although I believe they were based in Edinburgh. This posed a major problem inasmuch as the acquiring company had within their policy or conditions of business that they would not publish any books on alcohol and presumably other forbidden subjects like sex and religion! Tony Birks-Hay was extremely embarrassed and said that I could keep the advance and he also transferred to me all of the rights inherent in The Schweppes Guide which would normally remain with the publisher.

That was a long time ago and it has remained dormant since then until, having shed a lot of my consulting work, I started looking at the prospect of bringing out an updated version. I had some discussion with the PR agents of Schweppes, who seemed quite keen, but could not extract from the current owners of the Schweppes brand the necessary budget. Perhaps I will go back to them on the back of this interview and the renewed interest in the original Schweppes Guide, but, of course, Schweppes is quite a different company to what it was in the 1980s. On the other hand, we might go for something quite different such as the "Fever Tree Guide to Scotch"!

14. You also worked on the centenary rewrite of the illustrious Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom by Alfred Barnard. How did that opportunity come about and what difficulties did you face with such a hugely respected book?

I quickly became aware of the Barnard book as part of my research for The Schweppes Guide. It is a fascinating work particularly when one considers the conditions under which the arduous journeys were undertaken in the 1880s by him and his team which included an artist. I discovered copies of the original volume in several of the distilleries where the managers said that they still regarded it as a useful volume of reference. Given that The Schweppes Guide was published in 1983 and the centenary of the Barnard book was rapidly approaching in 1987 I took the initiative to contact the original publishers, Harper's Wine & Spirit Gazette, to see if they would consider backing a rewrite of the Barnard volume along similar lines to the original, but with me as the author. The magazine was then owned by the Straker brothers who took to the idea with great enthusiasm and were a delight to work with. They gave me a travel budget of £10,000, an Olivetti word-processor – which was a considerable step up from the complete lack of technical support I had for The Schweppes Guide - and the assistance of one of their editorial staff.

By this time The Schweppes Guide had gained considerable traction with the industry and so when I announced that I was doing a rewrite of the Barnard book, concentrating on the distilleries, the doors literally flew open and I was given an enormous amount of time and support both by the head offices and the individual distillery managers. All of them knew of the Barnard book, of course, and many were familiar with my own work. This had been helped by my writing a series of articles on Scotch whisky for publication in the Harper's weekly. I adopted a style, largely factual with little opinion or commentary, as befitted the Barnard model. I also followed his route to the letter and engaged an artist to do drawings of the distilleries just as Barnard had. I was fortunate to be able to persuade Peter Hayley, who had done the small number of drawings in The Schweppes Guide, to take this on and I must say that the results were splendid. So much so in fact that the publisher managed to sell most of the original drawings to the whisky companies and I believe quite a few

hang in their boardrooms and so there is no question that Peter's work greatly enhanced the end product.

15. Can you solve a mystery for a friend? He has the limited-edition release of the centenary rewrite (an edition of 1000 copies), but his book isn't signed or numbered. From what he believes there was a warehouse fire and much of the edition was destroyed?

I am afraid that it has largely to remain a mystery. After the book was launched in London in 1987, for which I returned briefly from Lagos, I more or less lost touch with it and with the publishers. It had been quite an undertaking and I was simply glad to get it away and didn't take much interest in it thereafter. I made no financial gain from it and I'm not sure that the publishers did either. However, I do remember sitting down in the Straker offices and signing 1000 numbered flyleaves which were supposed to be inserted into the books as they were bound. It was done this way because I was not going to be available in London at the time the books were to be released. Obviously, something went wrong in the process because subsequently I was approached on a number of occasions to sign copies of the book purchased by various people. Most recently this was in 2019 when I signed both copies purchased by John and his late father, George Grant of Glenfarclas and also at the same time the copy purchased by Alan Winchester, who had recently retired from being the Master Distiller at the Glenlivet group. I recall Alan saying rather waggishly in an email to me that he had had to take out a second mortgage in order to be able to buy his copy as he was only then an assistant distiller at the time of my visits to the various distilleries.

I have heard references to a fire and the loss of many copies of the book, but I know no more than that and was never informed of this event, real or imagined, either by the publishers or any other source, including the party who was supposed to be looking after my interests whilst I was in distant parts. What happened to the signed flyleaves is anyone's guess. But a bit of mystery helps to colour what is an otherwise rather pedestrian subject.

This I think reflects what I thought at the time was a mis-judgement by the publishers in making it a highly exclusive limited-edition, admittedly beautifully finished in Moroccan leather but, because of the price, available to very few. I had hoped that it would be made into a more generally available publication, but I had no say in the matter except that I did get a grudging admission by the Strakers that they may bring out a cheaper version further down the track. That never happened.

When people approach me asking me to sign their copy of the book, I am only too pleased to do so but it is up to them to get it to me here in Australia and to provide for its return from whence it came. Alternatively, I have signed copies during visits to London and the UK in general including Ian Buxton's copy and so it is owned by some quite distinguished whisky people. You rarely see copies for sale, and I think the last one I noticed was on offer for £1000 and so not a bad investment on the original pre-publication price in 1987 of £325.

16. Alfred had a particular writing style. How challenging was it to maintain that character and be faithful to his work, but also create something readable?

Well, I think the Barnard style is quite readable and has a certain charm and so without being too prescriptive, I followed it as much as I could and tried to replicate his format as much as possible. For instance, I always mentioned the people being interviewed and where space permitted, included descriptions of the countryside and the conditions of travel. I think only once did I manage to stay in the same lodgings as Barnard and that was at the White Hart Hotel

in Campbeltown where the proprietors kindly provided me with free accommodation once they realised that I, like Barnard, would mention the hotel in the book. I am delighted to see that it is still around.

As I have already said, Barnard's writing was pretty straightforward, and he was intent on giving an accurate description of the premises visited. I did much the same and, of course, one of the abiding features of the whisky industry has been consistency and heritage and so the distilleries which I visited, even if they had not existed at the time of the Barnard sojourn, were not all that different from those of his era.

Also, where appropriate, I made comparisons between the situation that Barnard found and the one that confronted me. This is perhaps most poignantly brought out with regard to our respective visits to Campbeltown and here I quote from my chapter on Springbank Distillery where I set the scene for my visit at that time as follows: "When Alfred Barnard and his companions travelled to Campbeltown they did so by steamer to Tarbert, and then traversed by coach for six hours the 40 miles between East Tarbert Pier and Campbeltown. Although I, by necessity, used modern conventional means of transportation, my journey through Kintyre was no less impressionistic and, as it took place in weather which must have been similar to that described by Barnard, I had the same sensation of beauty and nature mingled with well-tended agricultural activity with which he came away. However, I spent only 24 hours in Campbeltown whilst this former whisky metropolis – as he described it – and ancient capital of Scotland, held him and his companions for a full fortnight. But then, at the time of his visit, the town and surrounding area boasted 21 active distilleries. At the time of my visit, there were but two, and of these only Springbank was producing. Nevertheless, I followed their example and lodged at the White Hart Hotel".

I went on to explain that "Barnard was in fact in Campbeltown in its heyday when its whisky was described as "the Hector of the West". The industry there, however, never recovered from the decline which set in after the First World War. A combination of factors hit the Campbeltown distillers particularly badly. These included the exhaustion of a local coalfield which had supplied a ready source of cheap fuel, and a shift in taste away from peaty West Coast malt whisky to the subtler, less robust whisky of Speyside. Later, those Campbeltown distillers who were still active indulged in questionable practices, such as the use of low-quality barley, in order to meet the demands of the rum runners in the United States during the Prohibition period. Campbeltown whisky's reputation suffered as a consequence and the closure of the industry was all but complete."

17. Looking back on all the distilleries you've visited and personalities you've met, do any stand out as being particularly memorable?

Every distillery manager or owner had something to contribute but it would be silly to claim that I can remember them all but some of them do, however, stand out. For instance, Hedley Wright of Springbank, who was managing director at the time and is now chairman, is not someone you would forget in a hurry! I think at the time Springbank was, uniquely, not a member of the Scotch Whisky Association and I guess this reflected the robustness of Mr Wright's forthright character. And why not, if you are the great great-grandson of the founder!

For entirely different reasons, I remember rather well the distillery manager at Ardbeg, a certain Mr D Raitt, who was clearly depressed and disturbed by the way that his gorgeous distillery had fallen into virtual disuse as a result of lack of interest by the then current and former owners. I commented that “the manager and his skeleton staff are making tremendous efforts to keep the distillery in good repair..... and the stills will hopefully run again before too long”. What a contrast to the Ardbeg of today which has flourished under LVMH ownership. However, how much of that was due to Mr Raitt’s efforts and determination is nowhere recorded on the company website.

Between publication of The Schweppes Guide and my undertaking the Barnard rewrite, DCL had disappeared into the maw of Guinness plc. The latter had, however, retained the two operational subsidiaries of Scottish Malt Distillers Limited and Scottish Grain Distillers Limited to run, respectively the company’s malt whisky distilleries and the patent still distilleries. It was through their respective headquarters that programs had been arranged for me to visit each and every one of the distilleries including those where the license was still extant, but the distillery was no longer running. In most cases, I met the managers and a fine professional group of men – I recall no women – they were. There seemed to be no particular pattern as to how long and where they would serve within the network of distilleries, but most had moved around quite a bit between them and so the collective knowledge was quite breath-taking. However, there was a certain uniformity, as demanded by headquarters, and so it would be invidious to select any particular individuals from this cohort except that one does stand out and I don’t think any of his colleagues would’ve taken exception to my singling out Evan Cattanach, the larger-than- life manager of Cardhu Distillery. The distillery’s association with Johnnie Walker had thrust it into public prominence and Evan was just the man to take full and sympathetic advantage of that. This eventually led to him becoming ambassador at large for Johnnie Walker and I was delighted years after to meet up with him again when he was undertaking ambassadorial missions abroad including countries in which I was serving, such as Taiwan.

Having said all that, I must say that it is the Grants of Glenfarclas who, to my mind, represent the best in traditional Scotch whisky distilling and who have contributed, in their own quiet way, the most to the industry’s standing in the world today. Fiercely independent but with a lovely – sometimes wicked – sense of humour both the late George Grant and his son, John, are giants of Scotch whisky whom I have always found a delight to deal with. Shrewd in business, generous as friends, although George never really forgave me for going to the wrong school (Robert Gordon’s College) instead of his beloved Aberdeen Grammar School!

18. What whiskies do you enjoy and view as being the most memorable?

Sorry to be boring, but that is something I never put on the public record. Obviously, I have my preferences, but these do change depending on circumstances and where I am at the time and also the company I keep. Naming particular whiskies might please a few people but it will also annoy others. I have had excellent support and cooperation throughout the whisky industry and so it would not be appropriate to single out any particular whiskies as being favourites. Having said that, you might get a general idea as to where my preferences lie by looking at the whiskies featured on my website – www.mywhiskyjourneys.com – which restricts itself to whiskies from Scotland and Tasmania.

19. Thanks to your career as a diplomat, you've travelled the world and experienced the huge reach that whisky has. What is it that many find so compelling about a mere liquid in your view?

Whisky is a drink that has immense appeal, not just to the sophisticated but also to the man in the street or increasingly to the woman in the street. It can be the chosen drink of Kings (witness the number of Scotch brands which carry the Royal Appointment) and Prime Ministers (Margaret Thatcher was a fan), Ambassadors and Generals (duty free of course), but equally of film stars, gangsters and hustlers. It is as much at home in the boardroom as in the humblest kitchen cupboard. It truly has a universal following. And as consumers have become more sophisticated, more enquiring, they have been delighted to find that the product has history, character and a sense of place. All of this has been encouraged by the development of whisky tourism, particularly in Scotland, but also in the United States and Ireland.

There is also a certain romanticism associated with whisky, thanks to the efforts of Hollywood and certain novelists. Product placement was once commonplace in movies with J & B, Ballantine's, Black & White and Dewar's getting much exposure. Against that background, the industry has been very clever in the way it has set various price points so that even the humblest consumer can drink a decent whisky at a reasonable price in the expectation that if his personal fortunes prosper, he can move up in the world simply by paying more for something that may be older and possibly better, but which will be recognised as reflecting his own success. In other words, and putting it rather crudely, start with red label, then move to black on your first promotion, then on to gold as head of department and finally secure the blue label when you reach the boardroom. And then there is an enormous spectrum of taste, categories and expressions. What other consumer product has that level of appeal, penetrating every country in the world and every strata of society?

20. We're almost 40 years on from the publication of the Schweppes Guide to Scotch, what do you see as being the major changes in whisky since 1983?

There have been many changes, some good, some less so. Most prominent, has been the rise in popularity of single malts, almost to the point of obsession, with most adherents overlooking or not even knowing that if it had not been for the advent of blended whisky in the late 19th century the Scotch whisky industry, as we know it today, probably wouldn't exist. There has also been the "corporatisation" of the blended category which has led to the disappearance, or marginalisation, of many prominent old blends and the concentration on a single brand at multiple levels of quality and pricing, as we have seen most prominently with Johnnie Walker and Chivas Regal.

This movement towards single malts and an emphasis on origin has led to the growth in whisky tourism as people increasingly want to know where their favourite dram comes from, who distils it and what its history is. That has been greatly beneficial in terms of raising the industry's profile, throwing open the doors of distilleries which at the time of my research were, with one or two exceptions, well and truly shuttered to the public.

The dominance of the traditional whisky producer countries has been challenged by the emergence or re-emergence of both "new world" and European distilleries from Australia and New Zealand to India and Israel, from France to Sweden. And some of them are really rather good, my own preference being the amazing kaleidoscope of whiskies that come out of Tasmania.

The emergence of the whisky collector and the whisky investor is also relatively new and has in many ways distorted the market with some new releases hitting the shelves at prices which would have been unthinkable a few years ago. This has boosted greatly the value of many bottles, usually

after they have gone out of general circulation, and, as I can say from personal experience, are usually a safer bet than investing in casks. I did start my own collection, almost by accident, as I received, as a whisky author, many bottles from producers. Indeed, far too many for me to consume and so I used them as the nucleus of my own collection, which has grown over the years.

Even as late as the 1980's, whisky was still seen very much as a man's drink, and the industry was largely a male preserve. How different is that today! Women have not only become significant consumers and sophisticated ones at that, but they are increasingly occupying senior positions in the industry itself, both as distillers and marketing executives, as well as holding board positions in the larger companies. During my hundreds of interviews and visits in connection with the research for my two main whisky books in the 1980's, I do not recall a single woman with whom I interacted during the entire process. How different it is today. That is not to say that there were no women involved in the industry in its earlier years, some of whom are featured in Fred Minnick's excellent book "**Women and Whiskey**".

My re-write of the Barnard book included Ireland. There were then – in what is the original home of whisky – only two distilleries – Bushmills in the North and Midleton at Cork in the Republic – compared with 28 when Barnard made his sojourn in the 1880's when Ireland was a single entity within the United Kingdom. As of December 2019, Ireland had 32 distilleries in operation, with more either planned or under development. That has to be a welcome change.

And so, to sum it all up, the big changes/differences are single malts over blends, whisky tourism, new producer countries/regions such as Tasmania, the return of Ireland, and women. These are, to my mind, the key differences but there have also been changes in production, particularly with reference to environmental aspects, as well as to packaging and marketing. What an exciting business it all is!

21. You've lived in Australia since 1995 and written a book on Tasmanian whiskies. Australian whisky in general seems to be thriving right now, but remains out of reach of many of us here in the UK. Are there any Tasmanian whiskies you'd recommend and what do you find exciting about what's happening in Australia?

Yes, I was transferred to Sydney from Taipei in 1995 and after I completed my tour of duty, I took early retirement from the Diplomatic Service in 1999 and stayed on in Australia. I created a new career in strategic consulting and, separately, renewed my interest in whisky, including Australian whisky.

I was actually introduced to Tasmanian whisky by Jim Murray. He and I were both presenting at the first ever Australian Whisky Convention in Canberra in, I think, 2000. He brought me over to meet Bill Lark and said I should keep a watchful eye on Tasmania, as it would certainly go places as the quality was such that it would eventually rival its Scottish peers. How right Jim was, as he has been on so many other whisky matters. I immediately took to Bill as a modest and sincere but dedicated craftsman and I watched Lark develop and grow in subsequent years. I was a fairly frequent visitor to Tasmania and so this was a relatively easy task, and, in the process, I also got to know Sullivans Cove, where Bill Lark had also been involved, and whose success has been quite phenomenal.

What else appealed to me was the fact that the Tasmanian industry, or at least some of the distilleries, had quite well-established links with Scotland and the Scotch whisky industry. Bill

Lark is the first to acknowledge this and in particular the help he had from John Grant at Glenfarclas, who is one of the few distillers from Scotland to have visited Tasmania. His first visit was many years ago, and he was there the day Bill Lark made his first whisky and enjoyed a very good lunch with him to celebrate his 'new make'.

John Grant has had a long association with Australia and Glenfarclas is well represented there thanks not only to the excellence of the product but also to the efforts of the Angove's, one of Australia's oldest wine making families. On a recent visit to South Australia, I enjoyed a splendid Sunday Long Lunch at the Angove estate in McLaren Vale with Richard Angove as my unexpected host. We had long chats about Glenfarclas, whisky and wine during which Richard revealed that Angove would in fact be shortly releasing its own Australian single malt whisky, using their old brandy stills at Reynella, which must be over 100 years old.

That Australian connection is important for the Scotch whisky industry because Australia was for many years - and prior to the boom in the US market - by far the industry's biggest single export destination. So much so in fact that the Australian Government of the day was the first in the world to introduce discriminatory taxation against Scotch whisky simply because the Treasurer at the time felt that too much of the country's foreign exchange was being spent on one single consumer product, namely Scotch whisky! The latter's relationship with Australia is a long and fascinating story and I suspect a new chapter is about to be opened with the imminent signing of an Australia/UK free trade agreement. What I would like to see is the free flowing of whisky in both directions but obviously with the Scottish product dominating!

As more and more distilleries popped up on the island the idea developed of writing a book solely on the Tasmanian category and I started work on that quite earnestly in 2016. However, it remains a work in progress for a number of reasons.

Initially I was surveying about a dozen distilleries. Although I was allowing for more to come on stream, I had no idea that they were going to grow like topsy and so I thought I had better wait until numbers had settled down or reached a plateau. Five years on and that has not happened and there are now around 40 establishments making whisky with more planned. I did not want to bring out a book which would be immediately out of date.

Apart from that, three other factors emerged which combined to put a brake on things:

- a) The scandal of the Nant barrel investment scheme gone wrong, which was not a good look for Tasmania and caused me to wonder if there were any other bad practices needing to be flushed out;
- b) Extensive reorganisation of the then Australian Whisky Holdings Pty Ltd and its constituent brands (Lark, Overeem and Nant) and the need to let that settle down; and
- c) The publication of "The Devil's Share" in 2019, which was a rather controversial work with threats of lawsuits, litigation and tarring and feathering flying around!

Against that background I decided to put my own effort on hold and a quick survey of the distillers revealed what I suspected, which was that the industry was not ready for another publication on their fortunes and misfortunes. As and when it does come out "The Tasmanian Guide" will probably be an e-book to allow for easy up-dating and with links to products which the reader can immediately buy on-line.

One thing I have really enjoyed about getting to know Tasmanian distilling is the people behind this quite extraordinary phenomenon. There are the four "musketeers", if I may use that term – Bill **Lark**,

Casey **Overeem**, Patrick Maguire (**Sullivans Cove**) and Mark Littler (**Hellyers Road**), each a pioneer in his own right but none of them still in the original role in which I first met them. Behind that cohort there follows legions of newer, sometimes younger distillers, including both the Lark and Overeem offspring, and all of them bring a uniquely Tasmanian character to their respective endeavours.

Whist there are too many to mention by name, one person who does deserve acknowledgement and who stands out in the crowd, more as a consultant to other distillers than as an entrepreneur, and who helped me better understand historically the Tasmanian distilling scene, is the late Brian Poke. Here I quote the Facebook post of Joe Lahra, the person responsible for the re-emergence of Cradle Mountain Distillery:

“The industry mourns the loss of Mr. Brian Poke. Legendary Cradle Mountain Whisky Grandmaster Distiller passed away 29th April 2021 on the 32nd anniversary of the company. Brian Poke was the iconic Founder and Grand Master Distiller of Cradle Mountain Whisky. Brian Poke was recognised as the first whisky distiller in modern Australian history, starting operations in 1989 on the island of Tasmania. Brian was a mentor and coach for many early whisky producers and assisted greatly with the succession of Cradle Mountain Whisky distillery to the next generation of distillers, the Lahra family. Brian passed away peacefully after a return of cancer which “took his strength, but not his sense of humour until the very end”, said Faye his loving wife for 58 years. Brian will be remembered as a key pioneer figure of the whisky industry. His vision and efforts to start the first commercial distillery has now evolved into a booming craft whisky industry in the country. He will be missed”.

Tasmanian whisky is not easy to find. Much of it never leaves the island and the little that does rarely goes beyond the Australian mainland. That may change as both volume and the range of brands grow, but it is not inexpensive – a reflection of quality, small production runs and high taxes.

Again, I won't name favourites. I wish to remain a welcome visitor on the island – all of the island! I am in the fortunate position of having tasted whiskies from all of the distilleries and I can say, with hand on heart, that I am yet to be disappointed. I love sampling the whisky at the distillery with the owner/distiller but always make a point of buying the whisky, either in the barrel whilst maturing or in the bottle. This is both for enjoyment with like-minded friends and for eventual reselling in order to give the wider public access to a taste of something really special.

I have restricted myself to the whiskies of Tasmania because of its unique qualities – the purest of water, a wind-swept environment free of any pollution, excellent local barley and genuine community of spirit amongst the distillers whether they be traditional pot-still people or high-risk innovators, all in a unique, geographically delineated island state.

That is not to dismiss whiskies from mainland Australia. It is just that I have not had the time or opportunity to give them much attention and they are too scattered across the continent to provide anything like the sense of cohesion which the Tasmanian product provides. However, I have visited the distilleries and enjoyed the whiskies of Archie Rose and Joadja in NSW, the Tin Shed at Timboon in Victoria and Fleurieu in South Australia. Perhaps more will follow but I am looking at ways in which the Tasmanian product at least can enjoy easier access to the UK market. Unfortunately, the arrival of the Covid 19 pandemic has interfered with that but it is still on my list of things to do.

22. You're also a director of MyWhiskyJourneys. Can you tell us a little about this and any other projects you have in the works?

MyWhiskyJourneys is a company I own equally with Philip Mussared, a friend of nearly 50 years standing – we were both young diplomats (he for Australia and I for the UK) in Paris in the 1970s and my arrival in Australia in 1995 allowed that friendship to re-flourish. The company is a reflection of my whisky experience and interests over a very long period and embracing many countries, and his skills as a first class administrator with reasonable Internet abilities. The company is registered in Tasmania and he is the licence-holder, and we operate purely online. Here is the link www.mywhiskyjourneys.com so that I do not have to go into too much detail about it here, but suffice to say that our aim is to try and offer products which are no longer in general circulation and represent an historic shop window on fine whiskies from Scotland and Tasmania. We also have whisky books and memorabilia in which there is a growing interest as consumers identify increasingly with the history and origins of their favourite drink and the natural human desire to explore and experiment.

I have invested in whisky over the years and whilst some of what is on the website represents my collection, I should emphasise that most of it is jointly or separately owned by friends who have asked me to help them invest in whisky and whom, I believe, have enjoyed the experience.

I particularly see the Tasmanian collection as being of significance and I believe that we have the widest range of Tasmanian whiskies available anywhere. None of them is now in general circulation as we try and avoid competing directly with the distilleries or existing retail establishments. And so my first objective is to make www.mywhiskyjourneys.com work, see it more widely accessed and have it regarded as an important online source for rather unusual or very scarce whiskies, be they from Scotland or Tasmania.

Separately, other projects in mind are to get Tasmanian whiskies into the UK and I have been talking to a number of the distillers and importers about that; issue The Schweppes Guide and “The Whisky Distilleries of Scotland and Ireland” as historical reprints, possibly in e-book format; and look at doing updates of both books.

All of that to be fitted in between regular rounds of golf and tennis games which help me bring balance to what is probably an over ambitious program for a retired former diplomat, although neither of my children, nor anyone else for that matter, has had the temerity to say so!