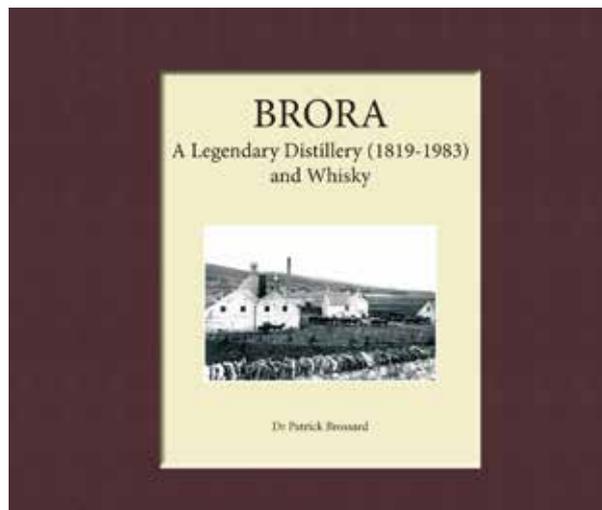


Made in Switzerland

## Brora, The Making of a Book

Whisky enthusiasts might not only enjoy drinking whisky, but they wish also to learn about their favourite distillery. Information can be obtained from books or via electronic media, but as I discovered over time that the quality of most books or even through the distiller's website might be partially inaccurate, or partially wrong. The next logical step is then to do research, and to verify it. Eventually, one might want to correct what is written about his/her favourite distillery and decide to write a book, as I have now done twice.

Since several whisky enthusiasts are interested in doing the same, I will be sharing in this article my experience with my two books: Glengarioch, the Manson Distillery and Brora, A Legendary Distillery (1819-1983) and Whisky: The Duke of Sutherland Distillery. The main focusing will be on the Brora book.



## Foreword:

Before starting writing a book, keep in mind that:

- If you are thinking about making money or a rapid financial return (less than 2-3 years time), forget about writing a book.
- Be patient and do your research carefully. If the quality is poor, the book will not sell and your reputation will match the quality of your work.
- Define your target audience, expected sales volume, network of distribution and final price.

## What is needed?

- **Money:** Unless you are famous and contracted by a company, you will need to finance your travels, reading material, fees (copyrights, photocopies, etc.), computer hardware and softwares, photographic equipment, book designer work, printing fees, shipping fees and eventually advertisement fees. To facilitate some parts, you might want to work with a publisher. Depending on where you live, travelling to the distillery might be expensive (air tickets, car rental, meals, bed and breakfast). From continental Europe, a trip to any Scottish distillery will cost you around £300-500 (400-600 euros), including 1 night in a bed and breakfast.
- **Camera:** Due to copyright reasons, distillery owners might not be able to share with you their pho-

tographs. Eventually, you might want to purchase images from photographers (typically around £30/40-50 euros per images depending on the number of copies and distribution: hard copy or e-book). Prices for any decent photographic equipment (tripod, camera (digital single lens reflex, DSLR), and wide angle lens) will cost you around £500-600/ 800-900 euros. If you go with a full frame DSLR (e.g., Canon 5D Mark 2/3) and a wide-angle camera (e.g., Canon 16-35 f/2.8), the costs will be in the £2500-3000/ 3000-3500 euros. Alternatively, if you do not own the equipment, you can rent it or pay a professional to do it. For my book, as photocopies of the Diageo Archives were not allowed, I made photographs of the records with a 100 mm/2.8 Macro lens. You might want also surf the web for good photographs and ask the owners for their permission, but if you want to make an original work, you need original photographs. Do not use any images in your book without permission. With some distillers, taking photographs inside the distillery might not be allowed, or under strict condition. For instance, with a certain company, I had to subscribe for a £10mio risk insurance (around £300/400 euros, depending on your insurance company for such a temporary insurance) in order to take photographs.

- *Patience:* If you want to conduct proper research, do not expect to write a book in a few months, unless you can work on it full time. You will certainly need to identify archives at Libraries, read books, and when doing this, you might identify new references, order articles and photocopies. In the context of the Brora book, while I worked on my Glengarioch book, I discovered when reading the customs and excise reports from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that official records misspelled or used alternative names from Clynelish, thus my whole research was redone using all the alternative spellings identified. Sometimes, you might need to read 500-page books for a few lines of information.

A good source for old records is [books.google.com](http://books.google.com). Patience is needed to write your book, to rewrite section, perform proof reading, proceed with image processing and page layout.

Also, in order to access to the distiller's archive, it might be necessary to establish a relationship of confidence with them. This might take several years to gain.

- *Skills:*

o *Photography* has been a hobby for me since 1990 and started to work on image processing around 2005. Image processing (e.g., with Photoshop, Aperture or Photoshop elements) combined with images in RAW format will allow you to get the best of your images. Images made with smartphones or pocket camera might not be suitable for a high quality book, especially when taken in low light conditions. Photography is more than point and shoot. As the printing process does not use the standard Red Green Blue (RGB) colour space, but the Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black (CMYK) space, you will need to ensure that all images are in CMYK. Conversions from RGB to CMYK might result in colour shifts (quite noticeable in the green and black tone). In addition, adjustments in tones, sharpness and highlights are often required and sometimes, high dynamic range (HDR) merge is desired when working with very contrasted scenes. A calibrated colour screen is highly recommended in order to ensure a colour consistency throughout the whole process. Standard computer screens are NOT calibrated. Thus you might want to purchase a calibrated screen (800 euros or more) or purchase a calibrating device (around 250 euros).

o *Writing* can be trained over time. This might not be my strongest skill, but after years of efforts, I think they are quite decent. In any cases, proofreading by 1 or 2 persons is a must.

o *Page layout (PAO):* You might have beautiful images and a well-written text, but if the page layout is poor, the potential reader will disregard your book. You need to capture his/her attention within the first 10-20 seconds. Microsoft Word® is a good software for text editing, but poor for writing richly illustrated books, as the document size increases with each illustration and thus, becomes unstable and/or slow over time. The use of professional PAO softwares such as Adobe InDesign® is highly recommended.

The research

While Google and [books.google.com](http://books.google.com) are very good sources of information, they are limited to digitalised information. Research in libraries such as the British Library and the National Library of Scotland are a must. Consider a few visits and a few days of research on site. Alternatively, if you know which records you are interested in, you can order them online or pay someone to do the research for you, but then make sure to provide clear guidance to that person. Do not forget to consult and read book about its regions and/or founders. For the Brora book, I purchased a couple of books about the Duke of Sutherland, Brora and the county of

Sutherland. A budget of 100 to 200 euros should be suitable for that.

Establishing a good relationship with the distillery and its mother company, as applicable, are crucial to identify what they have. By talking to them, explaining what you are looking and what is your purpose, they might not only provide you access to their archives, but also provide you with some advices or contacts. Do not talk to only 1 person, but to anyone you can, and eventually ask it twice.

Companies might be quite sceptical about your project and although this might be of high importance to you, this is not their priority. The distiller and its owner are concerned about running the distillery and the archivist might be overloaded with requests from their marketing department, if they have one. In short, you are on the bottom of their list of priorities.



Archives consulted at the Diageo Archives during my second visit

records they might own. As I experienced with [RCAHMS](https://www.rcahms.gov.uk), for many images, thumbnails are not provided when they have not been digitalised. In order to download the full resolution image, this will cost you £30 per image + VAT if you live in the EU. For my initial screen, I ordered 8 different photographs.

In addition, you will need to pay £30 per image as copyright fees (for up to 1000 hard copies) if you want to reproduce it. For my Brora book, £300 (+ £150 for copyright fees) was spent for images with RCHAMS, £180 (+45 CHF for customs duties) for photocopies and £240 for the digitalisation and copyright fees with the National Library of Scotland. Thus, costs associated with images are quite substantial, especially when the number of copies is low.

## Photographs

In addition to the purchased photographs, I took over 3000 photographs of the Brora distillery, including the ones with a different exposure bracketing.

For distilleries, a full frame camera such as the Canon 5D series with a wide angle (e.g., 16-35mm) lens is almost a must, as you will be working often in a confined space. A tripod and a shutter are also a must to accommodate with the low light condition in the distilleries. A tilt-shift lens might be useful as well. Purchased new, such full camera equipment will cost over 5000 euros. Renting such equipment for 2-3 days would cost you around 400-500 euros, depending on the company. Using a local photographer might not cost you much more.

A substantial amount of time is then needed to back up your images, to catalogue them and to process the selected ones. Using macros with the Adobe products allows saving time, but most of them required individual adjustments, cropping and/or framing. With an average time of 20 minutes of processing each image,

For companies such as Diageo, you will have to sign confidentially agreement and can only publish your work after their approval. While some distilleries/distillers have extensive records (e.g., Laphroaig or Ardmore), most of them have only a limited amount, as most were lost during a fire, a change of ownership or simply to make space. Retracing the history of a distillery is a very time consuming process, with many frustrations, but the personal reward is great when you find the missing information.

For the Brora book, well over 300 hours of research were conducted.

Do not hesitate to check [rcahms.gov.uk](https://www.rcahms.gov.uk) and the local history associations for photographic images and any

approximately 50 hours were spent on that task.

While many use Adobe®Lightroom, I prefer to use, an old software, the Microsoft® Expression Media 2.0 for image cataloguing. For image editing, Adobe® Lightroom or Photoshop Elements. Each software will cost you between 100 and 200 euros, unless you want to use Adobe® Photoshop, which is markedly more expensive. Make sure to burn your images of DVD or Blu-Ray in duplicate and keep them separated to avoid any loss.

In order to select your photographs, the best is to print a contact sheet to identify the images that would fit to the text.

## Writing

About 40-50 hours were spent for writing the first version of this book. The main challenge was to define the story line and then to fill the different sections with text. Often at this stage, one will notice the missing information and additional research will be needed to fill the gaps. Once the first draft is written, several hours are needed to go through the text a few times, rewrite some sections and finally to share it with naïve readers for proof reading.

Probably, the most difficult part in writing is the balance between the amount of information and the fluidity of the text. One might be tempted to provide all details collected, but by doing this, the text might be dry and most reader will stop reading it. Also, keep in mind the number of pages for your book, as this will impact the final costs and the shipping fees of the finished book.

The text writing was done in Microsoft® Word and then imported in a PAO software.

## Page Layout and PAO

The page layout and PAO is challenging and critical for the success of the book. Who wants to read a book that looks ugly?

The first questions you will need to address are: What is the page format? How many pages? Hard cover or soft cover?

### *Format*

I selected the 20x25 cm (8"x 10") Landscape format, as most of my photographs are in landscape. The 8"x 10" format was selected, as I planned to publish my first book via a print on demand printer and the A4 format was not available. As I was pleased with the format of my first book, I kept the same for my second one.

### *Pages*

For my first book, the number of pages was driven by two factors: price and amount of information. By print on demand, with the selected printer, the price was defined by page ranges (e.g., 70-79, 80-89 pages), and thus, I tried to target the upper number of pages in the desired range. Based on the amount of information I had, I fixed the limit to 90 pages for the Glengarioch book.

With the experience gained with my first book and the fact I moved to another printer, I removed any page limitation for the Brora book.

The cost per page depends on the number of copies and the quality of the paper. For a standard thickness and normal paper, this might cost you only a couple of cents per page, but for heavier and specially coated papers, as I have selected, costs might be up to 0.40 euros per page, depending on the number of copies.

As I had limited experience with paper quality at the start, I ordered samples of different papers weight and type (e.g., glossy, semi-matte, matte, I paid around 15 euros for my samples).

As part of the printing process for the Glengarioch book, for the final paper selection, I ordered 1 copy of the book with 3 different paperweights and 2 different types (from 70 to 130 euros per copy!!). Based on these test prints, I opted for a semi-matte 148 gsm paper, which offered the best colour rendition and contrast for the photographs.

### Hard cover vs. soft cover

I prefer a hard cover book, as it looks better on my bookshelf and it gives a more “luxury” aspect to it. However, the cover is more fragile and subject to bending. In terms of shipping, you cannot ship a hard cover book in a soft pouch, as the corners of your cover will be bent. You will need to purchase special and more expensive shipping material.

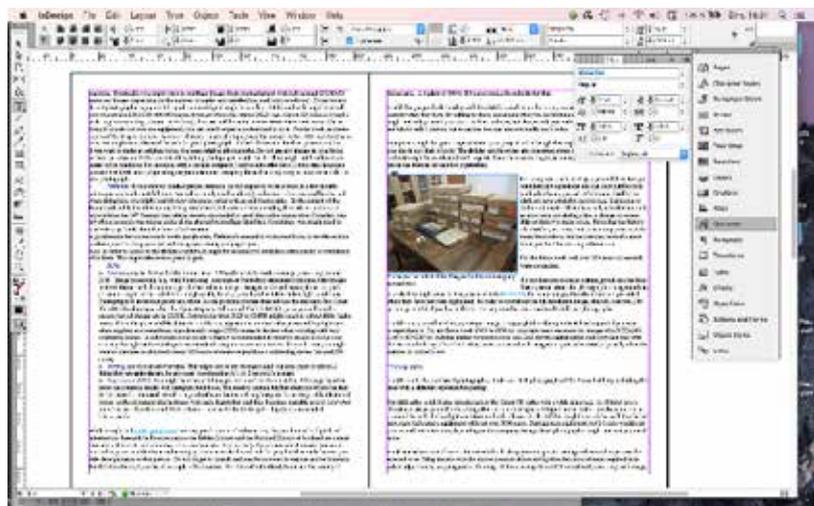
As the Glengarioch book was a small output (250 copies), the cost of a hard cover was prohibitive (approximately 10 euros extra per copy), not including extra shipping costs due to the added weight. For the Brora book, the number of copies was larger and reduced the additional costs to about 5-6 euros per copies for the hard cover. Cost will decrease for a larger output.

### Page Layout

The page layout is a challenging task. It is composed of several aspects: page margin, frames and text.

I opted for relatively large margins to give space to the text. A standard frame was selected for the text. For the images, a black frame was added to some selected illustrations.

You can do the entire page layout in Word, but you will be quickly limited by the software limitations. Either you pay someone to do this work for you, or you invest time and money by acquiring professional softwares such as Adobe® InDesign. The flexibility of InDesign is impressive and allows you to add easily images in the background, with e.g., controls on the transparency or size, or page disposition. In addition, it has embedded



Screen view in Adobe InDesign. A large screen is highly recommended.

For the colours, I used mainly the colours used on the box and labels for the Brora 35 years old Special Releases from Diageo.

### Cover page

The cover page should be a reflection of your book. The layout selected reflected the box of the Brora bottled and the image, an old photograph of Brora, to reflect the history of the distillery. The back of the cover page provides the key information about what the reader can find in this book.

functions to check the resolution of the images (i.e., if suitable for printing, pre-flight) and for export a final PDF document of your document in CMYK with all the printer marks. Without printer marks, the colours and the format of the final printout might be different from what you expect, as I have experienced.

Do not overlook this part, as all your work might fail if this stage is not controlled. Selecting the page layout, adding the text into frames, creating tables of contents and adding images easily takes dozens of hours. For the text, I printed sentences using different font types, sizes and spacing until satisfaction. For the colours, I used mainly the

If you want to get an IBAN number for your book, recommended, this might be very cheap for a publisher (around 15 CH in Switzerland), but quite expensive for a private person (125 CHF).

## Printing

Identifying and selecting a printer was not easy. Based on an online price calculator from a print on demand company, the price per copy for 500 copies with hardcover, excluding shipping and importation fees amounted to over 40 euros per copy. I moved from a digital printing solution to offset printing to decrease the costs by approximately 50%. Before going for the full print run, I have asked for test copies (about 110 euros per copies) to avoid any surprises.

For the Glengarioch book, considering the volume and weight of the 250 copies, shipment and importation to Switzerland was straightforward. For the Brora book, the situation was markedly complicated, as the printer could not shipped it the same way, due to the weight (1 palette instead of a few boxes). As the printer was inexperienced with the Swiss requirements, it was shipped only to a Port Franc. I had then to find an import/export company to deal with the last part. As the first transporter and the printer did not correctly do the paperwork, additional documents were required, this delayed the shipment of 2 weeks and an extra 300 euros, plus the VAT and taxes. Instead of receiving the books early July as expected, importation took place at the start of my vacations. Since I was away, they had to hold the shipment, resulting in additional storage costs. This might “only “ be a couple of hundred euros each time, but considering the low number of copies, the costs of these unexpected or unforeseen events, represented more than 1 euro per copy.

## Distribution and Shipping

Unless you work with a publishing company, you will need to find a solution for selling your books. A convenient way is to sell them via websites such as Amazon, but please be aware of their conditions. They will not distribute your book for free and the fees can be as high as 25% of the final price, for a non-professional seller.

To keep the final price as low as possible, I decided to go for direct sales. This enables to be in direct contact with your buyers, but very time consuming: answering e-mails, preparing the parcels, going to the post office, keeping track of your answers, etc. To be more quantitative, I spend almost 10 min per order to prepare it. Then, books are sent every second week, as almost 1 hour is needed for the posting.

In addition, I started to list the prices both in Swiss francs (CHF) and Euro. Unfortunately, the Euro declined compared to the CHF. As additional complications, the postal fees changed mid-late 2017 and seemed to vary depending on the post office employee. Thus, some copies were sold at a loss at the start, since I pre-sold some books at the old shipping prices and exchange rate. In addition, finding shipping boxes at a reasonable price, was not straightforward. The initial boxes were too thin. I was more fortunate with the second order.

As with shipping, some copies might be lost or damaged during transit, therefore you need to take into account 1-2% loss in your plans.

## Conclusion

Writing a book about a distillery is not an easy task, especially if you want your work to be a reference as I intended. The writing might be improved, as my writing style is more a scientific one than a journalistic one, but the amount and depth of information provided would be difficult to match, unless more official archives could be identified.

From my initial work until its completion, it took me almost 10 years to complete, and the amount of time spent was certainly in excess of 500 hours.

As this book was made with passion for whisky fans and lovers of the Brora/old Clynelish distillery, the number of potential reader is limited and estimated that 500 copies would be a fair amount. In addition, 500 copies correspond to a palette of book and I had no additional storage capacity.

Costs for writing and publishing a book are very important. I did not calculate the costs in details, but well over 10,000 euros have been invested in the preparation and printing of the book, excluding travel costs, photographic and informatics equipment. Thus, after all copies will be sold, this might pay a part of my travel costs, but not much more, i.e., no financial return.

In order to generate some profits, either you try to negotiate better the printing costs, sell the copies at a higher price (at least 40 euros) and/or print a higher number of copies (at least 1000 copies)...

The purpose of this article is not to discourage you from writing a book, but to highlight the hurdles that you might be facing. Having done this exercise done, I appreciate better the work of the whisky writers. Writing a book can be done for your CV and reputation, but this will not make you rich, unless you can sell at a fair price a whisky book printed on standard paper in black & white in large amounts.

I take this opportunity to thank again all the people who helped me with the book

Christine Jones McCafferty and Joanne McKerchar from the Diageo Archives at Menstrie for preparing and sorting out the requested documents, Sandy Sutherland for all his support and beautiful photographs, Bob Robertson to clarify the “confusing years”, Dr Emily Goetsch from the National Library of Scotland to help me identifying the relevant documents from the Sutherland’s archives, Nick Lindsay from the Clyne Heritage Society for the old photographs from the Clynelish distillery, Ronnie Mackay to allow me to use his large collection of photographs, Tom Jones for the proof reading, Serge Valentin to take the time for the interview and my wife for her support.

Feel free to make any comments on my Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/whisky.news.3/>

and if you want to order a copy, you can [contact me directly](#).

Slainte,

Patrick Brossard ©05 Fe

