Extensive research was conducted over almost 10 years in order to carefully and accurately documents the history of the old Clynelish (later to be renamed Brora) distillery in Brora, from its foundation in 1819 until its closure in 1983, including a description of the contextual situation in Sutherland at the time of its construction.

Passionate about photography and whisky, the author combined these two interests by offering to the reader an exceptional book, with approximately 140 illustrations and photographs, and 50 whisky labels, to reveal the history of a beautiful old-fashioned distillery producing a whisky of the highest repute and of the most sought after single malt by whisky enthusiasts and collectors. This is his second book, after the well received "Glengarioch, The Manson Distillery, A Hidden Gem in Aberdeenshire".

Discover the beauty of this legendary distillery and whisky and its accurate history in this book crafted with passion, while savouring a dram.





# BRORA A Legendary Distillery (1819-1983) Whisky



Dr. Patrick Brossard

## Brora, A Legendary Distillery (1819-1983) and Whisky: The Duke of Sutherland Distillery



All righs reserved. No parts of this publication maybe reproduced, stored in a retrieval process, or transmitted in any

forms by any means without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

Dr. Patrick Brossard, www.whisky-news.com © 2016

1 of 500 copies ISBN: 978-3-033-05625-1

## Introduction

I have a soft spot for the old style of traditional distilleries producing fine malts, such as the Glengarioch distillery.

During our first trip to Scotland, in summer 2003, we stayed overnight in Inverness. On our way to dinner, we stopped at the Whisky Shop in Inverness, mainly by curiosity. Until then, my knowledge of whisky was limited to a whisky book from Michael Jackson that I received as a present from my wife. The selection of whisky at this shop was impressive. Morag the sales specialist, kindly offered us a wee dram of the Brora 1972 for The Whisky Shop. This was my first contact with the Brora single malt, an intensely peated whisky with a strong and unique personality. My wife loved it and my interest grew further after my first visit to the distillery in 2005. Located on the rugged and scenic coast of Sutherland, the distillery was as charming at its surroundings, simply beautiful. I like the distillery so much that I wrote my first book about the old Clynelish (Brora) distillery in 2009.

While the history of Brora distillery can be found in almost any whisky book, it might unfortunately be inaccurate, as authors may tend to copy and paste from previous books instead of checking the original sources or records. For instance, Brian Spiller published in 1982 the Clynelish and Brora distilleries as part the DCL distillery histories series and wrote that the distillery (Brora) was "closed after the construction of the Clynelish distillery and reopened in 1975 after the reconstruction mash house". If this was true, how can we have Brora distilled between 1970 and 1975?

As I have a keen interest in the Brora distillery and being a scientist, I have tried in this book to present the most accurate history of the distillery. After my first book about the Brora distillery in 2009, from which only two leather bound copies have been printed, I decided to put the project on hold, as too many questions remained opened.

During the research of my first published book, Glengarioch, the Manson Distillery, A Hidden Gem in Aberdeenshire (published in 2013), I discovered new elements about the history of the Brora distillery that made me resume my research about Brora. After two additional years of research, I estimated that the quantity and quality of the information was sufficient to write a book that would fulfil my requirements.

This book is thus the result of research conducted over almost 10 years, several hundreds of hours of investigation, e-mail exchanges and phone calls and going through archives from the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century until today.

To better understand the history of this distillery, it is important to put it in its socio-economical context. I therefore included a short section about Brora and the Sutherland shire in the early 19<sup>th</sup>.

As readers might be even more interested about the whisky than the distillery itself, the evolution of the packaging is described and selected tasting notes are included from the different periods of the old Clynelish/Brora whisky making. To conclude, an interview with Mr Clynelish/Brora, Serge Valentin is provided.

I hope you will enjoy reading this book and wish to thank the following persons for their help: 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 my identifying the relevant documents from the Sutherland's archives, Nick Lindsday from the Clyne Heritage Society for the old photographs from the Clynelish distillery, Ronnie Mackay to allow me using 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.

Slainte,

Dr. Patrick Brossard, Switzerland, May 2016



## Contents

Introduction	2
The first mention of the old Clynelish distillery	7
The County and the Duke of Sutherland	7
The County in the early 19th Century	7
The Duke of Sutherland	9
The foundation of the Clynelish distillery at Brora	15
James Harper	16
The Distillery and Brora colliery during the James Harper years	21
The Distillery	21
The ingredients and whisky making at the distillery	21
The Brora colliery	23
The economic situation at Brora and in the Sutherland during James Harper period	25
Andrew Ross	31
George Lawson and the prosperous years	32
The Clynelish farm	43
The Ainslie period	48
Ainslie & Co	48
Ainslie, Baillie & Co and Ainslie & Heilbron	51
The Confusing Years (1968-1975)	61
Whisky production at the old Clynelish/Brora distillery between 1964 and 1983	67

The reasons behind the closure of Brora?	71
The Brora distillery	72
The Brora distillery in figures	74
The Whisky Men	77
Inside the Brora distillery on its closing day in 1983	80
Inside views of the distillery in 2009	90
The distillery (2008-2016)	93
The brand	118
The whisky from the Old Clynelish distillery	119
The Brora single malt	131
Bottled by the distiller	131
Independent bottlings of Brora	135
Independent bottlings of Clynelish distilled at the Old Clynelish distillery	137
A taste of old Clynelish and Brora whiskies	140
Interview of Serge Valentin, Mr Clynelish/Brora	145
References	147
Photographic credits / copyrights	148

Brora, A Legendary Distillery (1819-1983) and Whisky: The Duke of Sutherland Distillery Dr. Patrick Brossard, <u>www.whisky-news.com</u> For more details and preorders: <u>admin@whisky-news.com</u> <u>Scot\_photo@romandie.com</u>



## The Distillery and Brora colliery during the James Harper years

### The Distiller

The distillery plan from James Loch account on the Estates of Sutherland provides us with crucial information about the

anomesy. As illustrated in the plan and elevation of the distillery from 1819 (1), a piggery was attached to the distillery to provide an output for the left over from the production (i.e., draft). The distillery itself was of fair propertion, with a size of approximateby 74 x 100 feet, with a steep for the barley of 7 x 85 feet, a mal barn of good propertion (20 x 81 feet), have house c(25 x 18 feet) with one washback of approximately 9 feet of diameter, a mash house (21 x 18 feet) with its cooler located on the first floor, a still house (16 x 18 feet) and a cask store house (23 x 18 feet). The kin was located on the first floor, not pot of the three three that are character of the still house (16 x 18 feet) and cask store house (21 x 18 feet) with its cooler located on the math bare. Since the still were of small size (200 and 87 gallons), the still house was small enough to have a second small breve house on to p of it. The cooperage was installed on the first floor above the spirit, tellar. Suprisely, the boilt was located on the first floor, no top of the breve house. Interestingly, a round horse-course was indicated on the plan, indicating that mechanical power for the elevation of the barrey from the ground floor to the first plan and for the mall was provided b horsepower, and possibly, the same power source was used for the mash tun. By 1833, a steam engine was installed on the

The ground floor was about approximately 11 feet high and the first floor, at its highest point, was 21 feet (from ground to peek)

### The ingredients and whisky making at the distillery

This was a purposed built distillery, designed to maximise efficiency. Barley was grown on the arable land of the Clynelish farm and purchased from other local farmers. The 6-row larkey known as "how" in the South of Southan or "fogg" in Abredeenshire, would have been the major type of barley used during the early times of Clynelish (11), as this yeps was hardler and ripened earlier than the 2-row barley, but resulted in a lower yield of spirit. With the improvement of agriculture in the Stutheriand estate, the 2-row barley, which was superior for mailing purposes, progressively replaced the bere. The details on

21



### Fishing was attempted in Brora, Unfortunately, the inhabitants from the glens had no fishing experience and fishing result were highly variable, although it was reported that "*besides the regular and continual supply of white fub, with which with shores thins abandu*, the coast of *Subterland is annually visited by your of those vari stoads of herrings, which frequent it coast of Scotland*"(5). The visit of herrings did not take place annually, especially during the 1820s,

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that James Harper lost over £1,000 during his time al Clynelish. The timing of erection of the distiller was also unformate for him, since major changes took place in the whisky industry, mainly associated with new regulations. The same year he signed the lease (1819), the mall dairy was sharply increased in the Highlands and competition from illegal spirit was rife in the early 1820s. With the new licensing act of 1823, making legal distilling more attractive, the number of new distilleries boomed. In order to survive, distillers had to establish a requiration for quality and 12-). In addition, 1825 await the collapse of the whisky market at home (i.e., Schuland), as spirit dealers began apain for whisky by bill in an effort to lengthen credit terms (9). The end of the 1820s and the 1830s awa a decline in the number of distilleries.

When he went back into business in early 1828 in spite of a difficult economical context at Brora and on the whisky market, the distillery hand to be close to his heart and he saw prospects for its high quality product. Some records indicate that he employed up to 50 people, but this figure scens vastly exaggerated, even if most of them were employed in farming, since the Clynelish farm was part of the lease and an important source of income. No records can be found about James Harpe customers, but one can expect that his produce was old to local customers, and the majority of his whisky certainly shippe by sea to the South, probably to the Leith area.

by sea to the South, probably to the Leith area. James Harper was sequestrated before Whit-Monday which was announced in the press on March 02, 1833. Sequestration having been due to "considerable arrears of Rents, a Decree of Irritaney of his Tack, and of removing from Clynclish were obtained against him" (13). Another document from the Sutherland Estates provide further details, indicating that James Harper had great debs estimated to E1208 11s 084 from which, E4073 were deduced as part of the value of the distillery buildings to which he was entitled. Mention was also made to "Distillery extra buildings executed by the tenant" valued to £500 35.20. No description is made about these improvements, but considering the initial costs of £750 for the distillery, this suggests substantial additions.

James Harper and his family were removed from the Clynelish farm sometime after the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1833 and moved to Aberdeen. The situation between him, the Dake of Sutherland, James Loch and the factor George Gunn, was conflictual, with numerous letter exchanges taking place between 1833 and 1834, and persisting until at least 1840. These were linked to in-

27



rebuilding of the much house in April 1975. Born was chosed by DCL in the week of Markh 26, 1983, together with 16 other distilleries of the DCL (36). The mash tun-led a capacity of 31,500 linty feeding 6 wooden with backs acids of 29,500 lints. The wash and spirit stills capacities were of production was 3790 link. As reported to me by Bob Robertion, with the exception of the use of hardly period mail in the 1970s, the production process regulation of the production of the start of the start of the start in the start of the start of the start regulating distillation, rela-iteration of the start regulating distillation, rela-iteration of the start and start of the start and the start of the start in th

Ainsic & Heilbron company remained the owner of the distillery until its dissedurion in 1993 as part of a general rational-aging of Guinness holdings, and its surviving easies were transferred to Diago company following the merger of Guinness and Grand Metropolitan (45), until its sale in 1998 to the Belgan company Bruggeman and Co. Ld. now part of the French group La Martiniquaise group (owner of the Gien Morzy distillery in Eigen).

## Whisky production at the old Clynelish/Brora distillery between 1964 and 1983

The production volumes from the distillery between 1964 and 1983 are displayed in the figure below. These are based on the detailed annual Production Statistics from the Scottish Malt Distillers (SMD) Limited and Associated Companies. The figure on the next page indicates that the distillery was working close or at the maximum of its capacity (1.05 mo fires of part alcohol) from 1964 to 1967 and from 1969 to 1977. After the market reduction of 1975 due to the mash house reno-vation, production increased until 1978, before heim propersively endoced until the closure of the distillery in 1983. From 1964 until 1974, with the exception 1968 when the distillery was closed for reneval, the distillery was working be-tween 47 and 52 weeks per year, with the distillery closed only for a couple of weeks for maintenance and repairs. The yields

67



IFinancial year 1982/1983)
Thancial year 1982/1983)
Mail Bins 6 wooden fleeted bins. Bins 1 and 2 were operated
were operated individually, meaning that 4 bins were effect.
Were 182, 384, 5 and 6.
Destour: Pertes
Mail weigher: Avery
Mail weigher: Avery tive: 1&2, 3&4, 5 and 6. Destoner: Porteus Malt weigher: Avery

that weighter. Avery Mill: Two sets of rollers, made by Robert Boby Water source: Brora had two original sources!) the Dabh Loch (of Loch Dhu, as reported in the lease of 1888 between George Lawson and the Dake of Studentand: O.S. Grid NCS80078) and 2) a reservoir / dam / on the barn at Che-nchritton.

Malt: From the Glen Ord maltings (7 ppm, 45 ppm during the early-mid 1970s). In 1983, 13% Scottish and 87% English

Mash tun capacity: 31,5000 litres Washbacks: 6, of wood, Each with a capacity of 29,000 litres Yeast: DCL and Brewers compressed

Wash still size: 4953 gallons (22,500 litres) Spirit still size: 3911 gallons (17,700 litres)

Yield: 387 litres/tonne of malted barley Cooling system for distillation: Worm tubes

74





Two different views of the distillery, when cask filling was done on site (cit





## A taste of old Clynelish and Brora whiskies

of Clynclish/Brora had a very small output, the quality of the (tasting notes of Clynclish single matts distilled until the mic

Nose: Waxy, 1 melon and slig with the miner.

Taste: At full strength, it is very nustard seeds and some coastal i time, it becomes more mineral The finish is long to very long.

as some perper-tassome depletions old style of Clynelish, mineral, interne and peppery, with a most pleasant smok. . It is more smoky than peary, as the peart flavours are light to moderate. These old Clynelish were but wary to very wary, with only a faint influence from the oak casks, and markedly different from ated floren disilled during the early 1970s. Clynelish 14 years old bottled by the Royal Marine Hotel, 92° proof.

## Colour: Old gold

E

Nose: Starts on floral notes (daffodils), with some citric no vours (flint stone) and clean peat can be smelled. Taste: Clean, complex, subtle, rather heavily peated and n

140

# Impression: An excellent old co-peaty flavours. Bottled for the co-of the hotel, it is a remarkable of E. Giaccone.

## Clynelish 1965, 28 ye

Choicis 1965, 23 years old, Sign Colour: Old gold Nose: Grassy, slightly mineral, on bonfire smoke and old leader. Taste: Spiry, mineral, proy, weed, thick and wravy on the palate. Dilu eral, wavy, peay, and fruity. Dilug of the excellent Chyneith ställtel at the on a fraithese coming from a maturation of a deminating the character of the distillate.

a 1972 for World of Whiskies, 40 years old, or

## ar. Old gold

ereaty to very peaty, smoky, deliciously comple-sat smoke, some tar, iodine, light mineral and fin-acty well smoothness and peatiness.

perty well smoothers, smoky, salty, rich, intense, med perty to very peaty, smoky, salty, rich, intense, med of serveeds, some mustard seeds, white pepper, far