

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.



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Brora: A legendary distillery and whisky, Dr. Patrick Brossard

# BRORA

## A Legendary Distillery (1819-1983) Whisky



Dr. Patrick Brossard

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



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# 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 Lindsay 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



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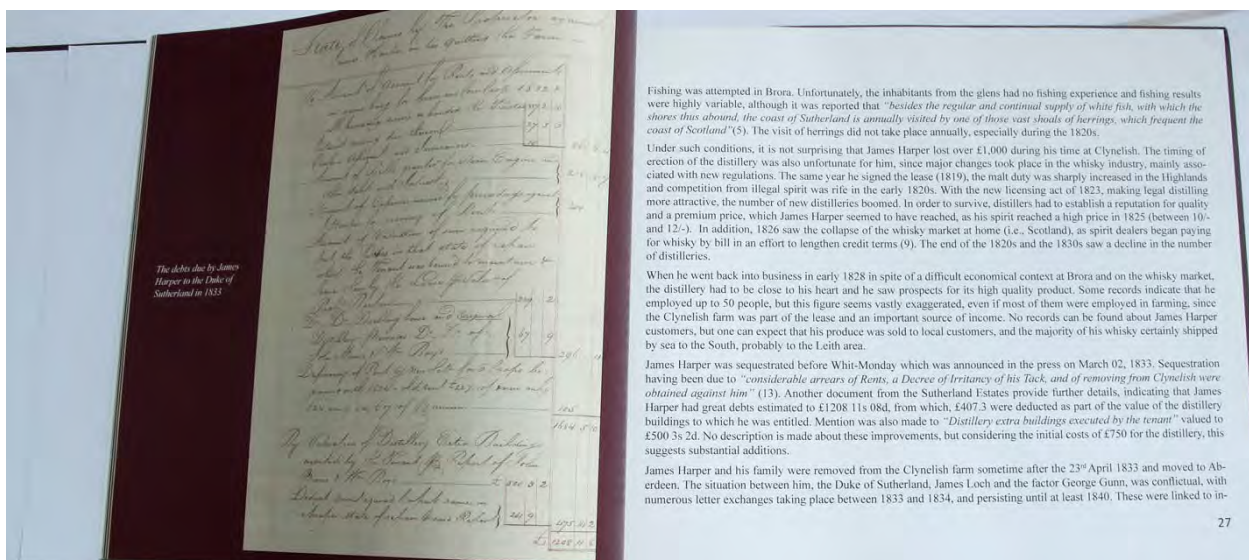
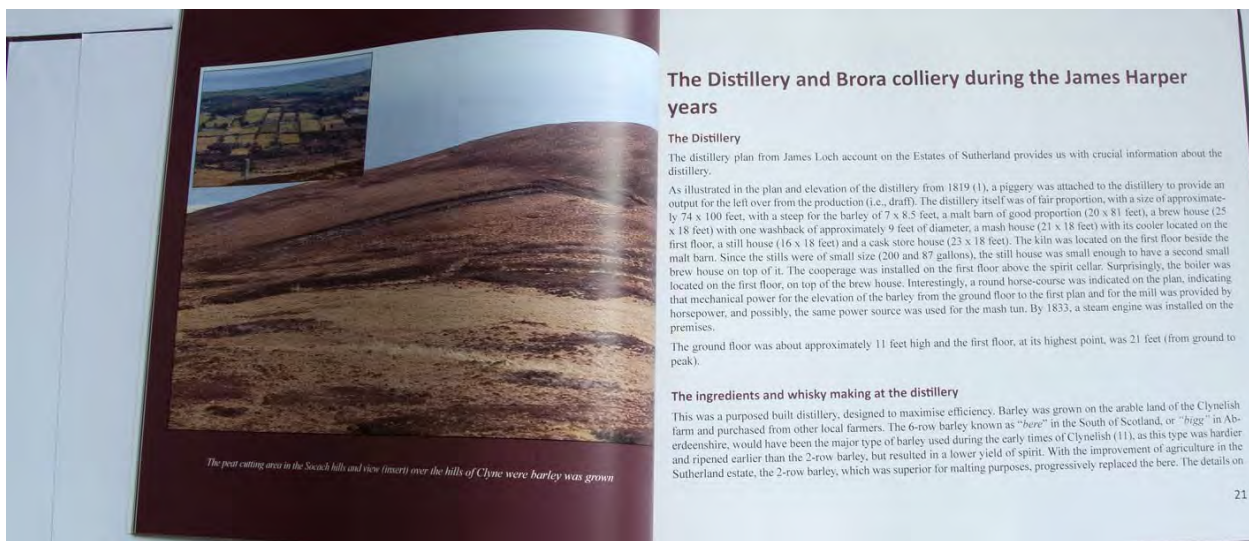
# Brora, A Legendary Distillery (1819-1983) and Whisky: The Duke of Sutherland Distillery

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The distillery in 1974

rebuilding of the mash house in April 1975. Brora was closed by DCL in the week of March 26, 1983, together with 10 other distilleries of the DCL (36). The mash tun (483 and 391 gallons, respectively) had a maximum capacity of production of 1.05 mio LPA, but throughout in its last year as reported to me by Bob Robertson, with the exception of the use of heavily peated malt in the 1970s, the production process (mashing, distillation, etc...) remained the same from the 1960s until its closure.

"Turn around time for the wash still charge to charge was about five hours. Turn around time charge in charge for the spirit still was about seven hours. After collecting 'forewash' the start of the spirit run would be around 28 percent over proof spirit would be collected over the next two hours until the strength had dropped to about 12 over proof. Ferries would then be collected until all the alcohol was collected. The next charge to the spirit still was made up of forecast ferries and low wines from the wash still."

Atmsie & Heilbron company remained the owner of the distillery until its dissolution in 1993 as part of a general rationalisation of Guinness holdings, and its surviving assets were transferred to Diageo company following the merger of Guinness and Grand Metropolitan (45), until its sale in 1998 to the Belgian company Bruggeman and Co. Ltd, now part of the French group La Martiniquaise group (owner of the Glen Moray distillery in Elgin).

### Whisky production at the old Clynesh/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 mio litres of pure alcohol) from 1964 to 1967 and from 1969 to 1974. After the marked reduction of 1975 due to the mash house renovation, production increased until 1978, before being progressively reduced until the closure of the distillery in 1983.

From 1964 until 1974, with the exception 1968 when the distillery was closed for renewal, the distillery was working between 47 and 52 weeks per year, with the distillery closed only for a couple of weeks for maintenance and repairs. The yields

### The Brora distillery in figures

(Financial year 1982/1983)

Malt Bins: 6 wooden fleeced bins. Bins 1 and 2 were operated as one, and the same applied to Bins 3 and 4. Bins 5 and 6 were operated individually, meaning that 4 bins were effective: 1&2, 3&4, 5 and 6.

Distoner: Porteus

Malt weigher: Avery

Mill: Two sets of rollers, made by Robert Boby

Water source: Brora had two original sources: 1) the Dubh Loch (or Loch Dhu, as reported in the lease of 1884 between George Lawson and the Duke of Sutherland; O.S. Grid NC880078) and 2) a reservoir / dam / on the burn at Clyneshkirkton.

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

Mash tun capacity: 31,500 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

Spirit safe: Mc Millan & Co  
Spirit vat: 16,406 litres  
Warehouses: 3 damage-style on site.  
Whisky produced: 378,051 litres  
Maximal capacity: 1,05 mio litres of pure alcohol per annum



Two different views of the distillery, when cask filling was done on site (circa mid 1970s)







The label of the first 100° proof 12 years old Clynelish (top left) and the "old" Clynelish 12 years old (top right). The one of the bottom right was for the Swiss market

The label for the US market (top left). The orange/red label on the middle top is of unknown date, while the one on the top right and the one on the bottom left are from 1977. The two on the bottom right were labels for Belgium (left) and Germany (right) from 1978

