

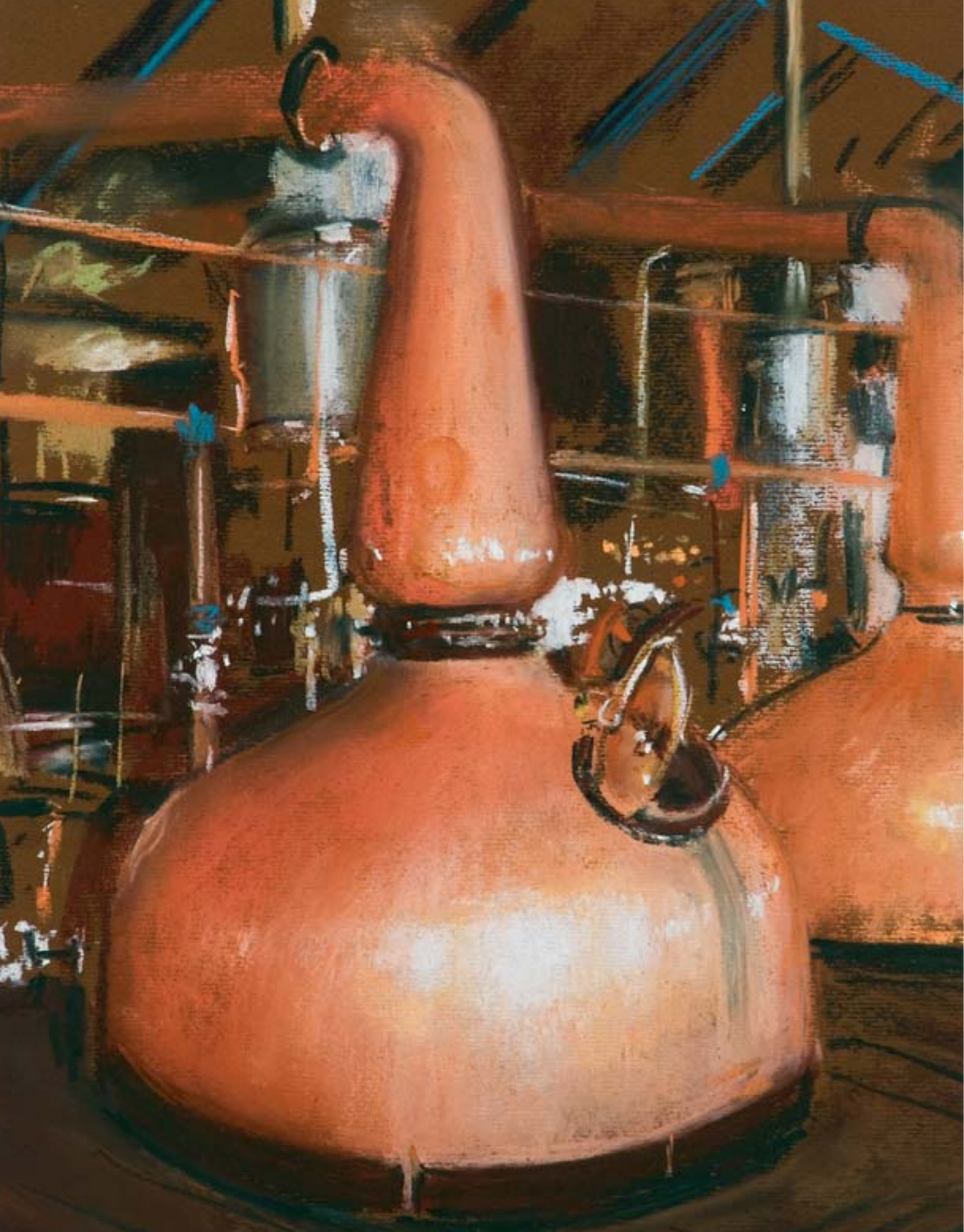


The Legend of

LAPHROAIG

Marcel van Gils & Hans Offringa





Foreword

Charles MacLean

This is the story of one distillery, and it is the story of many distilleries: Laphroaig's history is paralleled by that of others. With a significant difference: much of the documentation relating to Laphroaig's history still exists. It was not cast in the fire by subsequent owners, like that of so many other distilleries. Instead the documents were lodged in various scholarly archives in Glasgow for safe-keeping (and the gathering of dust) until they were discovered by Marcel van Gils and Hans Offringa. Many of these documents are presented here for the first time, and for the first time it has been possible to tell the story of Laphroaig in detail.

Hans and Marcel are to be congratulated. Their research has been thorough, but they do not allow their scholarship to slow down or encumber the narrative. Their style is crisp and fast moving, unburdened with over-technical language or legal jargon. The picture they paint is detailed and comprehensive, but easily assimilated and colourful, and it is embellished by the authors' wonderfully atmospheric photographs, as well as archival images that have never been seen before.

Through documents relating to tenancies, legal wrangles, family trusts and arrangements, plans and designs, the history of Laphroaig emerges as a focussed snapshot of what happened at many other distilleries during the 19th and early 20th centuries, when they were still privately-owned enterprises. Many, but by no means all, for few distilleries can boast owners of such foresight, skill and determination as the Johnstons of Laphroaig, their descendent, Ian Hunter, and his heir, Bessie Williamson.

The opening chapter provides a summary of the obscure origins of distilling and a brief account of how the art arrived in Islay from Ireland with the MacBeatha/Beaton physicians in 1300. Over-modestly, but with an historian's thoroughness, the authors entitle this 'The Myth'. Then they provide a brief account of the history of Islay, focussing on the island's ownership. Admirably concise, this provides a necessary backdrop to the enlightened lairds who owned the land upon which the distillery stands: the Campbells of Shawfield (who bought the island in the 1720s with the monetary compensation received for supporting the Government's unpopular Malt Tax, and as a result having their

Sandy Johnston had already started a big renovation plan in 1884, resulting in expansion of the existing buildings and adding new ones. A photograph taken around this time shows the extensions to Laphroaig as well as the ruins of Ardenistiel farm and distillery. First Laphroaig House was rebuilt and a new byre was added, to be followed by new stables in 1888 and Warehouse No.3 in 1889. Around 1900 the barn consisted of two storeys and the west end of the complex looked more consolidated. Another three warehouses (4, 5 and 6) were erected on the west side of the distillery grounds.

Sandy around 1905.



Above: Laphroaig Distillery in 1886, the year Alfred Barnard visited.

At the west end (left) is an open structure; this building was probably used for cooling the wort before fermentation. The maltings are under construction (middle). The little road along the shore would later be relocated north of the main building. The house in the back (right) is referred to as Bleak House. The ruins in the right bottom corner would have been Ardenistiel Distillery.



Left: Laphroaig around 1900.



The life and times of “Bessie” (1910-1982)

Elizabeth Leitch Williamson was born on August 22, 1910 in Glasgow. Her father served with the Royal Garrison Artillery and was killed in action at the end of World War I in 1918. Bessie was raised by her mother, together with an older sister and younger brother. In 1927 she matriculated at the University of Glasgow. In 1932 she graduated and planned to become a teacher. While waiting for a vacancy she started working at her uncle William Paton’s accounting firm and combined that job with attending night classes at the Glasgow and West of Scotland Commercial College.

In 1934 she went on holiday to Islay with her best friend Margaret Prentice, saw and responded to an advertisement for shorthand typist at Laphroaig Distillery. She got the position and prepared to stay on the island for three months. It would turn out to be a lifetime. Ian Hunter was duly impressed by her work and personality and came to trust her completely over the years. He died childless and left Bessie not only the distillery but also Ardenistiel House and nearby Texa Island. From 1954 on she managed the distillery by herself and became a spokeswoman for the Scottish Whisky Association (SWA). She won several prizes and was elected Woman of the Year in Great Britain in the 1950’s. After her marriage to musician Mr. Wishart Campbell on August 15, 1961 in Glasgow Cathedral, she gradually relinquished control of the distillery.

Between 1962 and 1972 she sold Laphroaig Distillery in three chunks of shares to the Seager Evans Group (part of the Schenley Corporation, one of the stronger distilling companies that emerged in the USA after Prohibition came to an end in 1933). She was appointed to the board of Long John Distillers (to become Long John International), the subsidiary that managed the distilleries in the group. Bessie continued to live with her husband at Ardenistiel House, tending her flowers and greenhouse, as well as organizing musical and social events. For her charity work she was awarded the Order of St. John. She died intestate on May 26, 1982 at Gartnavel General Hospital in Glasgow. Her husband died one year later in 1983. Bessie’s niece Helen Powell inherited the lady distiller’s possessions.



Some personal belongings of Bessie: various medals; sheet music she enjoyed playing or listening to.
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Page 74: Bessie in 1965.



The People

The way single malt whisky has been made in Scotland through the ages hasn't significantly changed since its beginnings, regardless of the modifications implemented over the years. That statement also appears to be applicable to the attitude of the people involved. The current crew at the distillery makes Laphroaig 7 days a week, 24 hours a day in the same way their predecessors have done for nearly 200 years, with the same zeal and dedication. After all, making whisky is first and foremost a people business, then come the water, the barley, the ubiquitous peat, the yeast and of course, all material involved in the entire process. This chapter tells about today's practice at Laphroaig. In 2007 the distillery employs 4 women and 21 men. These are their names, in alphabetical order:

From left to right:
Eddie Morris,
Andrew Hamilton,
Peter MacTaggart,
James MacGregor.

Emma Boyle	Assistant Administrator/Tour Guide
John Campbell	Distillery Manager
William Campbell	Mashman/Stillman
Jack Dunford	Tour Guide
Alex Gunn	Mashman/Stillman
Andrew Hamilton	Warehouseman
Arthur Holyoake	Maltman*
Alan Hylsop	Mashman/Stillman *
Ashley Hyslop	Tour Guide*
Billy Johnston	Mashman/Stillman
Tristan Jorgensen	Mashman/Stillman *
David Livingstone	Assistant Manager *
John Logan	Mashman/Stillman
Norman MacDonald	Mashman/Stillman*
Neil MacDougall	Maltman
James MacGregor	Warehouseman
Nigel MacTaggart	Engineer *
Peter MacTaggart	Warehouseman
Gregor MacTavish	Maltman
David McLean	Maltman *
John McNiven	Mashman/Stillman *
Caroline Morris	Administrator
Eddie Morris	Warehouseman
Donalda Shaw	Cleaner*
Donnie Stevenson	Mashman/Stillman *

Together they are responsible for the fact that every *Friend of Laphroaig*, registered or not, can savour the dram, wherever in the world he or she is.

* At the time when research and photography were done at the distillery, these persons were not interviewed and therefore not portrayed in the book.



The Dram

Drinking or collecting? This question has fuelled debates between whisky devotees for many years. Those in favour of savouring the dram state that whisky is made to drink and they do not always appreciate the practice of collecting and auctioning bottles of their preferred tittle. It raises the price of a particular dram into a realm outside numerous drinkers' financial reach.

Collectors have different motives. Some collect to have an eternal hobby. There is as much enjoyment in chasing a missing bottle as in acquiring and admiring a new one. The worst thing that can happen to them is "completeness" in a similar way as "discovering the ultimate truth" is for a philosopher. Luckily for them distillers keep pouring out different expressions on an almost yearly basis. Not to forget the independent bottlers with their own variations on the theme. Others collect for historical purposes and like to spot differences, like philatelists do. Some people even consider collecting whisky a sound investment. The price development of a rare bottle of whisky can be tremendous; however, the market is also spoiled with counterfeits. Therefore it is important to ask advice from experts in the trade before investing in an obscure bottle. A fourth group likes to collect *and* taste. The more fortunate ones can afford to buy two bottles of each expression: one to taste, one to collect.

Collectors are supported by on-line auctions. Traditional auction houses have also recognized the market for collectible whisky. At whisky festivals throughout the world, many sought-after bottles change hands.

Whatever the intention of a collector may be, in the end he or she keeps history alive. The last chapter of this book gives an overview of bottles, packaging and labels, from past to present, as far as they were obtainable for reproduction. More than 90% comes from the private collection of Marcel van Gils, who reckons himself in the fourth group and happily shares old and rare drams with his whisky friends. Thanks to his initiative many Laphroaig bottles could be immortalized on the bookshelf. Now his collection is no longer confined to a private museum in The Netherlands, but visually made available to a worldwide public. It is for the reader to enjoy, preferably while savouring a wee dram of Laphroaig.

These first six extremely rare bottles are very difficult to date, due to their scarcity.



US import by the Carlton Co. in Baltimore "Unblended 10 years old", 4/5 quart (75cl) at 91.4 US proof (45%ABV) Given the statement "Islay Malt Scotch Whisky" probably from the 1940s or 1950s.



"Laphroaig non-peaty". 26 2/3 OZ at 80 proof. No age given. Probably 1930s.



Laphroaig Scotch Whisky 10 years old. 4/5 quart US import at 91.4 US proof. Probably 1940s.



Laphroaig Scotch Whisky 14 years old. 4/5 quart US import at 91.4 US proof. Probably 1940s.



Laphroaig Pure Malt Scotch Whisky (unusual statement for the time) at 43%. No volume given. Probably 1950s or 1960s.



Laphroaig Scotch Whisky 10 years old. 4/5 quart US import at 91.4 US proof. Probably 1940s.

Seven bottles “Islay Malt Scotch Whisky”/10 years old/75cl
 From the late sixties and seventies. Five bottles 43% ABV; two bottles 70 UK proof (40% ABV)
 Two bottles with the Italian tax seal are the famous “Bonfanti’s” Italian import.



Two extremely rare “short cap”
 Laphroaigs from the 1960s/
 75cl/43% ABV.
 Note the glass dot on the neck,
 only seen on very old bottles.



Another Bonfanti Laphroaig with rare
 presentation box/75cl/43% ABV



Famous Italian import by Filippi.

Bottle with sun stained label
 obtained from Gibraltar.

Fourteen “dumpy” bottles Signatory vintages:

four bottles from 1966, 30 years old: cask no. 559, 560, 561 and 1089

one bottle from 1966, 31 years old: cask no. 1093

four bottles from 1967, 27 years old: cask no. 2955, 2956, 2957, 2958

two bottles from 1967, 28 years old: cask no. 2201 and 2205

one bottle from 1974, 16 years old: cask no. 5119 (dark sherry, with famous “inkpot” label)

one bottle from 1981, 14 years old: cask no. 4604

one bottle from 1999, 7 years old: cask no. 2756.



Eight more recent Signatory bottles. From left to right:

two bottles port finish “The Un-Chillfiltered Collection” 1990, 12 years old, cask no. 02/1075

one bottle 11 years old 1992 “Straight from the Cask” port finish, cask no. 03/258/3

one bottle 15 years old 1988 “Straight from the Cask”, cask no. 3599

one decanter “Cask Strength Collection” 1992, 13 years old from bourbon barrel no. 3407

one decanter “Cask Strength Collection” 1991, 15 years old from bourbon barrel no. 6978

two bottles “The Un-Chillfiltered Collection” 1988, 15 years old, cask no. 3604 and 3601.



The "holy grail" of collecting: five "old brown dumpies" from Cadenhead.

These 75 cl bottles are very much sought after and hard to find. All are bottled at 46% ABV.

