

HIGHLAND PARK DISTILLERY



Sunset over Highland Park Distillery

Highland Park Distillery (HY448107), the most northerly distillery in Scotland was founded in 1798, on the site where Mansie Eunson, is said to have carried out his illicit distilling. He was a United Presbyterian Church Officer, but by repute was the greatest and most accomplished smuggler in Orkney. Very adept at evading the excisemen, he kept some of his stock in the pulpit.

Mansie Eunson The story goes that Mansie, hearing

that the Excisemen were going to search the kirk, removed all his casks to a room in his house, and covered them with a coffin lid and a white cloth. The family including the maidservants gathered together around the whisky, Mansie at the head with the big Bible, and the others with hymnbooks. When the Excisemen arrived a wail for the dead went up, and a whispered “*small-pox!*” sent them off rapidly.

Mansie Eunson apparently chose the site on account of

the water supply which comes from “Kattie Maggie’s” in a small walled field called High Park, and not for the excellent panoramic view over Scapa Flow, Wideford Hill and Kirkwall Bay. He is said to have distilled his illicit whisky in a bothy in the field.

He loved to outwit the excisemen, who on one occasion got wind that he was expecting a shipment to arrive somewhere in Holm one evening. Mansie was stopped on his way to Kirkwall with several casks of brandy aboard. Delighted with their success the excisemen walked back with their culprit, who was leading his horse and cart and at the same time dispensing fine spirits to his captors. Much to their dismay, on arrival at Kirkwall the casks had gone, spirited away by unseen hands whilst the officers were enjoying their tipple.

Highland Park is sold as 12, 18 and 25 year-old



THE GREATEST ALL-ROUNDER IN THE WORLD OF MALT WHISKY



Cutting the peats at Hobbister Hill



Steeping the Barley



Laying the Barley on the malting floor after steeping



The malted Barley must be turned several times per day



Loading the kiln with the malted barley



Drying the malted Barley over the peat-fired kiln



Stoking the kiln fire with peat and coke



Milling the dried malt

A legal distillery In 1825 the distillery “went legal”, when the oldest parts were built by a John Borwick on

property belonging to the exciseman who had hounded Magnus Eunson, John Robertson. Borwick and

then his son were managers until 1869, when James Borwick, a minister of the United Presbyterian Church

HIGHLAND PARK DISTILLERY



The malt is mashed to extract the sugars



The mash is fermented in large wash backs



Despite computers the stillman remains crucial



The clear spirit can be seen in the spirit safe

for a time inherited it (Whether there was any connection with Magnus Eunson is not known).

The Grant family of Elgin, who were later to do so much for archaeology in Orkney, first became associated with the distillery in 1888, finally selling the company to the present owners, Highland Distilleries Co, in 1936. It is now part of the Edrington Group.

Over 40,000 casks lie quietly maturing



Malting Locally-grown Bere Barley was used for many years to produce the malt, but nowadays modern strains which have more starch and less protein and thus yield much more malt are used. The distillery is unusual in that it still produces about 20% of its own malt, which is dried over a peat fire in the distinctive Pagoda-shaped kilns. The peat is harvested from Hobbister in Orphir.

One of the secrets was said to be the inclusion of faggots of flowering heather in the fire, which imparted an exclusive and delicate flavour. It is no secret however that the combination of excellent water quality, careful distilling, and long ageing in oak sherry casks result in a very fine malt whisky.

Products Today Highland Park produces a unique island malt whisky. In addition

They need to be checked now and then



THE GREATEST ALL-ROUNDER IN THE WORLD OF MALT WHISKY



The stillroom with its four large copper stills

tion to being sold worldwide as a single malt of various ages, much of the production is used for blending, especially in the Famous Grouse brand, which is one of the most popular blended whiskies where the splendid quality of the malt forms the foundation of a fine blend. Some casks are also bottled after longer maturation and are occasionally available.

Visitor Centre The distillery has an Brand Heritage Visitor Centre, where a dramatic audiovisual show gives a very good introduction to Orkney and the making of Highland Park. Guided tours of the distillery

ORIGINS OF WHISKY

The Ancient Egyptians used distillation to make perfume, but it was not until the 11th century that stills which could condense alcohol were devised. *Uisge Beata* may originally have been produced in monasteries, but by the 16th century improvements in the shape of stills and cooling of the output resulted in a quality product which could be produced in volume.

The first Scottish Excise Act of 1644 was really by Charles I to raise cash to fund the Royalist Army. At this time the stills were quite small with a capacity of perhaps 25 gallons. The 1713 Malt Tax Act had the effect of reducing the production of ale, which had been the staple drink possibly since Neolithic times. At the same time there was an increase in demand for the more easily hidden brandy or whisky.

Bad harvests in the 1750s led to a shortage of barley and the closure of many commercial distilleries, but at this time home distillation was perfectly legal for home use, but not of course for sale. The result was the growth of illicit stills to meet the demand, which in turn led to severe controls on home distillation. By 1777 the loss of revenue meant a complete ban was enforced.

Demand for the high quality illicit Highland malt whisky continued to be strong, and only with the Excise Act of 1823 were legal restrictions on the commercial production lifted by the imposition of a tax of £10 per gallon of spirit.

The "amber nectar"

