

## HELEN'S WHISKY NEWS CHRISTMAS 2011 & NEW YEAR 2012

2011 is nearly over and I have been very bad at keeping you all informed of my whisky world. I am sitting here at my desk with the sun shining on a cold winter's day and the fire burning in the grate, so what better time to write about whisky

### What I have been doing.

The last few months have been closely involved with blended whiskies.

I was delighted to be asked by Ian Buxton to collaborate with him and eight other whisky writers on **CUTTY SARK, THE MAKING OF A WHISKY BRAND**, a book commissioned by Jason Craig who is the Brand Controller at Cutty Sark. I was asked to write about the artist James McBey who was responsible for the original label design of the tea clipper the Cutty Sark in full sail. Anyone who knows me well will realise how excited I was to do so, as I am passionate about art and finding out more about James was a magical journey. I thoroughly commend this book to you, not because I have written a chapter, but because of the great contributions by my fellow scribes. It is also beautifully designed and will be an enduring record of this special blended whisky.

I have also been working hard on the life of **George Ballantine**. I had worked on the original archives when the brand still belonged to Allied Distillers. Sadly we didn't have very much in the archives about George or his business. Ballantine's is now part of the **Chivas Brothers** portfolio and they are keen to know more. I still have research to do, but it has been interesting to compare his life to that of **William Teacher**, who was the subject of my book **A Teacher's Tale** which was published in 2005 to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Teacher's Highland Cream. There is no doubt that the pioneering whisky blenders were a special breed.

I was thrilled to discover that my latest book **The Connoisseurs Guide to Whisky** has been translated into Portuguese for the Brazilian market where it has been very well received. I have already contributed several articles to magazines in Brazil.

My travels have taken me to India, Greece to Venice on a cruise ship and to Kenya. I was invited once again to be a guest at the East African Gentlemen's Club where we had a great whisky dinner and I tasted **Benromach Organic Single Malt** for the first time – I thought it a great dram.

I also visited one of my local racecourses – **Cheltenham** – for the **Glenfarclas Cross Country Steeplechase** as a guest of **John Grant**. Glenfarclas is represented by Pol Roger in the UK, so we had the opportunity of tasting some wonderful champagne as well as of course **Glenfarclas'** range of single malts. This is a very challenging race and always provides

good watching for race-goers. This year was no exception especially as quite a lot of horses went the wrong way and didn't complete the course.

## **This brings me on to the whiskies I have been lucky enough to taste in time for Christmas.**

**EDRINGTON - Highland Park** – the single malt that started my interest in learning more about whisky. I will never forget my first tasting of Highland Park whilst a guest of Matthew Gloag at the distillery. In November they released two new Vintages 1971 and 1976. My favourite is the **Highland Park 1971 Vintage** which is just the drink for the festive season – if you are lucky enough to find one of its 657 bottles. The nose is wonderful with lots of rich fruit aromas, dark caramel and smoke. In the mouth these aromas are translated into winter fruits, chocolate and spice. Whilst talking about Highland Park, just a word about the single malts available for Christmas in the Edrington stable. Apart from **Highland Park 50 year old** which I for one would be very happy receive, they are offering **The Macallan Fine Oak 10 and 21 years old, Glenrothes Select Reserve and The Glenrothes Vintage 1995 and 1988.**

**GLENDRONACH** has added a new **21 year old Parliament** expression to its range. I haven't received a sample to taste, but knowing this distillery from my Allied days am sure it will be a good dram.

**DIAGEO** started the tasting season by sending me a wonderful selection of single malts to taste. Well that isn't strictly true as **Port Dundas** is a single grain whisky.

**Port Dundas 57.4% 20 year old** is the colour of warm copper with the most pungent sherried caramel with hints of nutmeg nose. The taste undiluted is surprisingly smooth at first then strong hints of burnt caramel and spiced fruits follow on to give a long warm finish. The distillery closed two years ago so this is definitely a whisky worth seeking out from your local specialist.

Other samples I received were **Brora 54.7% 32 year old, Caol Ila 64% 12 year old, Knockando 43% 25 year old, Lagavulin 57.5% 12 year old, Port Ellen 53.9% 32 year old and Rosebank 53.8% 21 year old.** I won't describe them all, but here are just a couple more.

**Caol Ila 64% 12 year old** is a very pale gold and a great surprise as the nose isn't really smoky, but sweet and light. I wondered whether it was one of the distillations they make without peat, but a taste told me otherwise! Punchy smoke, honey and hints of citrus.

**Rosebank 53.8% 21 year old.** The first Helen Arthur Single Cask Collection included a Rosebank. This example reinforces my view that this is a special Lowland malt. Pale straw colour with a light honey scented nose, pear drops,

cut hay. The initial mouthfeel is syrupy with honey notes and then hints of pineapple, egg custard and light vanilla.

**CHIVAS BROTHERS**, which is the Scotch whisky and premium gin business of Pernod Ricard, launched The Glenlivet Cellar Collection 1980 in November. This is the ninth release and there will only be 500 bottles available.

**IRISH DISTILLERS**, which is the Irish business of Pernod Ricard, released four special bottlings from their Midleton Distillery in Cork. These were **Powers, Green Spot, Redbreast 12 year old and Midleton Barry Crockett Legacy**.

**Redbreast 12 year old Single Pot Still Cask Strength 57.7%**. On the nose it's a tropical fruit salad. The taste is dryer with oak and barley and hints of burnt caramel. It has a wonderfully long finish which echoes the sweetness of the nose as well as the dry elements.

If you want to learn more about Irish Distillers whiskey just log on to their new website [www.singlepotstill.com](http://www.singlepotstill.com). This includes films which explore the four whiskeys mentioned above and Midleton Distillery.

## Other whisky news

**Chivas Brothers'** Passport Scotch is now selling one million nine litre cases a year, which makes it among the top 20 Scotch whiskies in the world.

The company has sponsored a friend of mine Henry Worsley, who is leading the Scott-Admundsen Centenary Race which set off on 11 November to reach the South Pole. Henry is taking with him two bottles of **Chivas Regal** 12 year old Scotch whisky. I'm sure he and his five other team members will enjoy taking their last dram of Chivas when they reach the South Pole. For history buffs this race will follow the route taken by Captain Scott in an effort to beat Roald Amundsen in 1911.

**Diageo** celebrated the opening of their new £10 million Cambus Cooperage on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011 where start-of-the-art engineering will combine with traditional coopering skills to produce around 250,000 casks each year, which will be used to mature Scotch whisky for the company's brands.

**Whisky companies are also making a concerted effort to do their bit for the environment.** Everyone knows that the excess heat from Bowmore Distillery heats the local swimming pool. But did you know that Diageo's new Roseisle distillery boasts a bio-energy plant? Or that William Grant & Sons use gas to run their Girvan distillery produced by an anaerobic digester? These are just a few examples which have come to my attention, I am sure there are more. Maybe you can let me know?

**So whisky fans, I hope that 2011 was a good year for you all and that 2012 will be an even better one and that you enjoy health and happiness in the year ahead.**

**Slainte  
Helen**