

THE DRAMBUIE STORY

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Foreword

In the month of July in the year 1746, on the wild and rugged west coast of Scotland, a captain of the MacKinnon clan of Skye helped a royal prince evade his pursuers. From this encounter came a drink that, over two hundred and fifty years later, is enjoyed and respected world-wide. This is the story of that drink - Drambuie.

The romantic origins of Drambuie have always played a central part in the mystique of this famous liqueur and the stories have often been the subject of speculation and distortion. This book intends to tell the story - of the MacKinnons of Skye, of Bonnie Prince Charlie, of the legends of Drambuie - as we believe it really happened, using contemporary documents, word-of-mouth accounts and the results of the most current historical research. It will reveal the fascinating background to the consumption of whisky and liqueurs in Scotland and Europe in the 18th century and examine the most likely origins of the unique recipe that lies at the heart of Drambuie and which was passed from one hand to another, almost as a talisman of loyalty, on that dark day in July 1746.

The liqueur will be followed as it was prepared within the small enclaves of the MacKinnons of Skye, shared with neighbours and local inn-keepers, mixed and drunk on high-days and holidays and offered to travellers passing in the shadows of the Black Cuillin mountains. Gradually, the fame of the legendary 'Isle of Skye liqueur' began to spread and the name - *Drambuie* - was coined. But it was still known only to a few, and it was to take an enterprising young MacKinnon, leaving Skye to make his fortune, to offer his island's liqueur to the world.

Since Malcolm MacKinnon of Glenmore arrived in Edinburgh in the year 1900, three generations of his family have made Drambuie the world-renowned liqueur it is today. Each successive generation has built on the enterprise of their forebears, in the process creating a celebrated international brand, while still retaining the pride of a family company and a strong sense of a uniquely Scottish heritage. Progress, however, has not always been smooth and this story follows the vicissitudes of Prohibition, World Wars, imitators, changes in drinking habits and a host of other matters that have presented themselves as challenges in the quest for growth and expansion.

Over a hundred years of the manufacture of Drambuie have also seen dramatic changes in means of production and it will be seen how the best traditional processes have constantly been combined with the most cutting-edge technologies - the result is a contemporary product that would still be recognisable to those 18th century travellers on Skye.

Drambuie prides itself on its heritage and we are delighted to present our story, in its complete form, for the first time. *Cuimhnich An Tabhartas Prionnsa* as the Gaelic motto says on every bottle - *'Remember the Gift of the Prince'*.

BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE AND THE MACKINNONS OF SKYE

The story of Drambuie begins with the MacKinnon clan of the Isle of Skye which, since the 14th century, had been associated with the area to the

south of the island known as Strath. Like the other principal clans of the island - the MacLeods and the

MacDonalds - the MacKinnons eked out a simple existence and, rarely numbering more than a few hundred in number, were more like an extended family, all obedient to their father-figure, the chieftain of the clan. Their lands were the gift of a grateful King Robert the Bruce, ancestor of the Stuart dynasty of Kings who were to rule Scotland, and later England, for over three hundred years.

The fates of the MacKinnons and the Stuarts were inextricably linked over these years and the loyalty of the clan to their king was legendary in the Highlands and Islands. Time and time again the clan took up arms on their behalf: at the savage Battle of Worcester in 1651, after which over two hundred MacKinnons were slaughtered by the forces of the Duke of Argyll; during the first Jacobite Uprisings of 1715 and 1719, in the bloody, but indecisive Battles of Sheriffmuir and Glenshiel; and finally in the campaigns of 1745-6 when their loyalty was put to the greatest test.

For the MacKinnons, the cause of the Stuart kings was just. Forced into exile in the so-called 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, the Stuarts and their followers had watched as their opponents had offered the British throne first to a Dutch prince and then, in 1715, to George, Elector of Hanover, who stood 53rd in line of succession. King George I, as he became, was, however, Protestant and for the powers behind the throne, that was all that mattered. But for many in Great Britain this was a step too far and threatened the very foundations of the monarchy. Not just in the Highlands of Scotland was it believed that King James must be restored and that the Jacobite Cause (named after *Jacobus*, the Latin for 'James') would eventually succeed.

The birth of a son to King James in 1720 in Rome was greeted with delight by the Jacobites. Prince Charles Edward Louis John Casimir Silvester Severino Stuart - to give him his full name - was to be remembered in his own time and by posterity as 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'. His is a crucial role in the story of Drambaie and so it is to the 'Year of the Prince' that we must turn.



The arrival of King James's son on the far-flung Island of Eriskay on the 23rd of July 1745 signalled the beginning of an uprising which, although as ill-omened as its predecessors, came closest to achieving its aims. Against all advice, the headstrong young Prince had come to Scotland, without supplies or support, to overthrow a kingdom. Amazingly, he almost succeeded.

Sheer strength of character ensured that he won over many of the doubtful clan chiefs and on the 19th of August the Royal Standard was raised at Glenfinnan. With an almost irresistible momentum the Jacobite army advanced southwards, increasing in size all the time. Prince Charles, clad in tartan, rode at its head, the avenging hero come to claim the throne of his forefathers.

News travelled slowly and the first reports were not believed. The British government reacted with uncertainty and, to the amazement and consternation of its inhabitants, the capital city of Scotland was soon within the sights of the approaching force. Edinburgh fell ignominiously on the 17th of September and four days later a spectacular victory was achieved by the Jacobite army near the

Traditional loyalty of the MacKinnon Clan

The Raising of the Standard at Glenfinnan, August 1745

village of Prestonpans, when they swept away a hastily assembled Government force, who were no match for the terrifying and bloodthirsty Highland charge. In less than two months Prince Charles had taken Scotland and had proclaimed his

father King. But despite the entreaties of some, he was not satisfied - 'it is all or nothing' he said - and so the invasion of England was planned.

The speed of Prince Charles's advances had taken everyone by surprise and so it was not to be until some days after the Battle of Prestonpans that the chieftain of the MacKinnon clan - the 63 year-old Iain Dubh MacKinnon, veteran of Sheriffmuir and Glenshiel - completed the long march from Skye and offered his sword to the Prince. One hundred and twenty men accompanied him and their arrival on the 13th of October was recorded by the Prince's secretary, John Murray of Broughton: "really brave and honest, inured to fatigue and patient to undergo anything that tended to the Service of their Masters".

The MacKinnons join the Jacobite army

Over the next few days further members of the clan joined their Chief and, by the time the Jacobite army marched south on November 1st, it has been estimated some two hundred MacKinnons were present, possibly all the men of fighting age in the clan. Attached to the larger regiment of MacDonnell of Keppoch, the MacKinnons had as their Lieutenant Colonel their Chief, Iain Dubh, and as their Captains, Lauchlan MacKinnon of Corry, and John MacKinnon of Elgol. The clansmen, many of whose names are recorded in the papers of the Earl of Loudon, appear to have been drawn from a wide part of the Strath hinterland, with significant numbers coming from Scalpay, Harrapool, Camusunary and Heast.

The Jacobite army advanced southwards into England in worsening winter weather. The government in London continued to react with ignorance and uncertainty, barely crediting what was happening. On the 4th of December the Jacobite army entered Derby, within 120 miles of the capital. Panicked Londoners formed militias and plans were made for King George and his family to flee. But doubts had already set in amongst the Highland chiefs. Where were the Welsh and English Jacobites whose support they had been promised? Where was the French army that Charles had said would land on the south coast? To Charles's fury and life-long regret, the decision was made to turn back to Scotland and await the spring. The long march homewards began. Bewildered and with their morale slipping, many of the Highlanders, who had never wished to enter England, deserted and made their own way north. Only two clans did not lose a single man by this attrition: the MacDonalds of Glencoe and the MacKinnons of Skye. Had such loyalty and perseverance been universal, it has been argued, the Jacobite army could readily have continued its advance and been in London within days.

The retreat from Derby, December 1745

Slowly the Highland forces moved northwards through appalling weather, harried by the advanced guard of the Duke of Cumberland's army. On the 17th of December, some twenty miles south of Carlisle, the rearguard, including the MacKinnons, turned and fought three of the government cavalry regiments, inflicting several casualties in what was the last battle ever to be fought on English soil.

Back in Scotland the Jacobite army was belatedly reinforced by regiments from France and Ireland led by Lord John Drummond. Turning eastwards from Glasgow they advanced to Falkirk where, on the 17th of January 1746, they faced an army led by General Hawley. The MacKinnons were attached to the regiment of Cameron of Lochiel on the left flank in the front line. There they faced some of the stiffest opposition, notably from Ligonier's Foot Regiment and the Royal Scots. Unlike their counterparts further down the line, these regiments did not turn and flee in the face of the Highland charge, instead grimly holding

their positions. In cold driving rain the battle was over in twenty minutes, with some five hundred government troops and over fifty

Highlanders lying dead on the field.

After the Battle of Falkirk, the Jacobite army split, the intention being to secure Scotland before any further attempt was made on England. The MacKinnons accompanied the forces of the Duke of Perth, travelling north to Inverness to harry the regiments of the Earl of Loudon. A smaller number of the Clan, under Captain John MacKinnon, accompanied the Earl of Cromarty to Dornoch in an attempt to recapture Jacobite supplies and gold that had been seized by the Hanoverians from the French ship the *Prince Charles*.

In these few months preceding the final, fatal conflict at Culloden, the whereabouts of various individuals, regiments and clans is obscure. By April it seems likely the MacKinnons were still part of a small force pursuing the Government forces north of Loch Shin, forces, ironically, comprising their neighbours, the Skye MacDonalds, who had opted to support the government. Thus, when the Duke of Cumberland's army advanced from Aberdeen in mid-April, and Prince Charles made the call to arms, many of his loyal followers could not be summoned in time.

*The Battle of Culloden, April
1746*

Certainly the most recent evidence suggests that the MacKinnons were not present at the Battle of Culloden, fought in the early morning of the 16th of April. However, the Duke of Perth was present and it has been suggested that a small contingent of MacKinnons bore arms in the front line, possibly next to the MacLeods of Raasay or their old comrades, the Camerons. If this were so they would have been part of the most appalling carnage, the right wing decimated by grapeshot and then receiving the full impact of the improved bayonet skills of the Hanoverian front-line. Culloden signalled the end of all Jacobite hopes.



The survival of Chief Iain Dubh MacKinnon and his Captain, John of Elgol, is perhaps the clearest indicator that their clan avoided the bloody defeat of Culloden and it is through the action of these two individuals that the MacKinnons were to play their last, and best remembered, role in the dramatic events of 'the '45'. Their stories, and those of others who played a part, were recorded by a number of writers in the years after the Uprising, most notably the Reverend Robert Forbes, who interviewed both men in the 1750s and '60s. It is from several such word-of-mouth accounts that the following is collated

Like so many of their fellow 'rebels' it is likely the surviving MacKinnons, if they had avoided capture, would have made their way to their homes. There they would, perhaps, have waited passively for the general retribution that was to come or, in the case of the officers and chiefs, taken to the hills or the numerous caves of the coastlines. It is recorded that Neil MacKinnon of Kyle, a lieutenant in the army, spent many months evading capture in the Red Cuillins. However his kinsman, Angus MacKinnon, was less lucky, being taken prisoner, flogged and obliged to turn King's Evidence in exchange for his freedom.

It was against such a background of outlaws, treachery, burnings and pillaging that the flight of Prince Charles through the Highlands and Islands in the aftermath of Culloden took place. It involved almost daily evasion of parties of red-coated Government troops and local militia who were anxious to capture him and secure the bounty on his head which stood at £30,000 (the equivalent of over £15 million today). The Prince was constantly on the move, dependent on the goodwill of the much-punished clans, waiting for the moment when he could rendezvous with a ship from France.

By late June, his wanderings had brought him to Skye where he was cared for by the Jacobite heroine, Flora MacDonald, at Kingsburgh House.

From there he travelled to Portree on the east of the island and across to the island of Raasay, where he hoped to find succour amongst the loyal MacLeods. But the notoriously cruel Hanoverian Captain Fergusson had preceded him, burning down almost all the habitations, leaving no shelter. The Prince resolved, therefore, to return to Skye and travel south to the MacKinnons of Strath and, accompanied by Captain Malcolm MacLeod, he crossed over the narrow strait on the evening of the 3rd of July.

*The Prince arrives on Skye,
July 1746*

Landing by Nicholson's Rock at Skorrybreck, the Prince and MacLeod decided to set off immediately, the former adopting the guise of 'Lewie Caw', MacLeod's servant. Through the night they travelled south down Glen Varagill and thence east to Strath Mor, entering MacKinnon country as the sun rose. Anxious to avoid detection the Prince removed his periwig replacing it with a dirty handkerchief. But two passing MacKinnon clansmen, who had been out in the Uprising, immediately identified him and, raising their hands in despair, bewailed his fate.

MacLeod swore the pair to silence on the blade of his dirk and he and the Prince swiftly passed on heading for the home of Captain John MacKinnon of Elgol, who was married to MacLeod's sister. Having ensured that no enemy soldiers were near, they entered the house and, Captain MacKinnon being away, MacLeod asked his sister if her servant would provide water for himself and 'Lewie Caw' to wash. At first the serving girl would have nothing to do with 'Lewie' declaring he was 'nothing but a low countrywoman's son!' When she was persuaded to help him wash his feet, her vigour forced Charles to cry out 'MacLeod, would you desire the girl not to go so far up?'

Captain MacKinnon returned soon after and, meeting him outside, MacLeod asked where he thought the Prince might be. MacKinnon replied: 'I wish with all my heart we had him here, for he would be safe enough,' to which MacLeod responded, 'He is here already...' Entering he saw the Prince, in his shabby kilt, playing with his baby son, Neil. So moved was he by the sight that he turned and wept and the Prince, all pretence of disguise gone, declared, 'I hope this child may be a captain in my service yet.'

The three men decided that the best course for the Prince was to return to the mainland and MacKinnon set out to secure a boat. En route he met his aged chief, Iain Dubh, and could not resist telling him about his royal guest. Iain Dubh immediately went to pay his respects to Charles and it was agreed that the MacKinnons would arrange his conveyance to the mainland. A boat was soon prepared and Iain Dubh, Captain MacKinnon and four of their clansmen set off with Charles as evening began to fall.

*Captain MacKinnon rows the
Prince to the mainland*

Elgol lies at the southern point of the Strathaird peninsula and looks out over rough and treacherous sea. It was across this water, in pitch darkness, that the party rowed in their small boat to the Point of Sleat, then across the Sound of Sleat to Mallaig - over 15 sea miles in all - making land in the early hours of July the 5th. With daylight they discovered that a party of Government militia were camped nearby and for three nights they were forced to conceal themselves in the thick heather of the coastline. On the 8th the old chief and one of the boatmen decided to go and look for a cave as a more suitable hiding place. Rashly, the others decided to row along the south shore of Loch Nevis, to see the whereabouts of the militiamen. Inevitably they ran into a party of five almost immediately who commanded them to bring their boat into shore. At that John MacKinnon told his companions to prime their muskets and row for their lives.

The Prince hid in the bottom of the boat, covered with MacKinnon's plaid, demanding to know what was happening. The militiamen had pulled their own boat into the water and were

now rowing in pursuit. The Prince asked that John should not fire the muskets unless absolutely necessary, to which John replied that if it came to an engagement 'it was necessary that none should get off to tell tidings.' However, the superior strength of the MacKinnon oarsmen allowed them to keep well away from their pursuers and, rounding an outcrop, they landed and concealed themselves amongst thickets of birch and hazel. Some time later they saw the enemy boat slowly rowing back, the chase clearly abandoned.

Later that day John MacKinnon and the Prince slipped across the narrow mouth of Loch Nevis and MacKinnon went on to Glaschaille House, hoping to enlist the aid of old Clanranald, who had fled from his lands in Benbecula after Culloden. To MacKinnon's surprise, Clanranald refused to have anything to do with the Prince, his only anxiety being that he should leave the neighbourhood as swiftly as possible. When the Prince heard of this cowardice he responded stoically: 'Well, Mr MacKinnon, there is no help for it, we must do the best we can for ourselves.' So they returned to Mallaig and, meeting up again with Iain Dubh, the party walked the five miles south to Loch Morar. There they were received by one of Clanranald's followers, MacDonald of Morar, whose house had been burned by the Government and was living in a low bothy. His wife prepared them a simple meal of salmon and then Morar conducted them to the safety of a cave on the edge of the Loch.

The next day, the 9th, Morar went to find his kinsman, young Clanranald, but it seems the son had the same opinions as the father for when Morar returned he too had been persuaded of the need to be rid of the Prince claiming he could do nothing at all for His Royal Highness.' At this infamy, the Prince's fortitude deserted him and he cried out 'O God Almighty, look down on my circumstances and pity me; for I am in a most melancholy situation. Some of those who joined me at first, and appeared to be fast friends, now turn their backs on me in my greatest need. I hope, Mr MacKinnon, that you will not desert me too, and leave me in the lurch, but that you'll do all for my preservation you can.' Thinking it was to him that these words were addressed, Iain Dubh replied, with the tears streaming down his face, 'I will never leave Your Royal Highness; but will, under God, do all I can for you, and go with you wherever you order me.' The Prince assured Iain Dubh that he had not meant him, 'One of your age cannot well hold out with the fatigues and dangers I must undergo. It was to your friend John here, a stout young man, I was addressing myself.' 'Well then,' said John MacKinnon, 'with the help of God, I will go through the wide world with your Royal Highness, if you desire me.'

After some discussion it was decided that the best course for the Prince was to travel further south, away from the militia who were already close on their trail, and find refuge with Angus MacDonald of Borrodale who had entertained him soon after his landing in Scotland the previous year. So, under cover of darkness, Charles, John MacKinnon and a youthful guide walked the five miles across thick peat bog to the shores of the Sound of Arisaig.

To their dismay they found Borrodale House burnt to a shell, but their voices alerted old Angus MacDonald who was living in a skilfully contrived shelter close to the edge of the loch. John MacKinnon spoke to him, requesting he should take care of his Royal companion, 'I have brought him here, and will commit him to your charge. I have done my duty. Do you yours.' Borrodale replied, 'I shall lodge him so secure that all the forces in Britain shall not find him out.' John MacKinnon stayed briefly and enjoyed a warming drink. Then, with

the Prince's words of gratitude in his ears, he slipped off in the pale morning light, his loyal service now at an end.

Retribution for this loyalty came swiftly. The same day,

the 10th, Iain Dubh MacKinnon was taken prisoner near Loch Morar. John MacKinnon, however, managed to get to the boat and with his trusty oarsmen rowed back to Elgol, only to find a detachment of militia awaiting them. John was taken prisoner and his honest companions viciously flogged. With a number of other prisoners he was taken aboard the Government ship, *Furness*, commanded by the notorious Captain Fergusson. There he was brought before the Hanoverian General, John Campbell of Mamore, who interrogated him and inquired if he had not been tempted by the £30,000 reward on the Prince's head. 'To be plain with your Excellency,' MacKinnon replied, 'what a base unworthy action it would have been in me who had been in his service, had received his pay, and broke his bread, to have given him up! I would not have done it for the whole world. And had I done it, I daresay Your Excellency would have looked upon me as a monster of a wretch.' So impressed was Campbell by this spirited response that he demanded that Captain Fergusson fill a glass for himself and his prisoner, a service which Fergusson performed with undisguised bad grace and which Captain John MacKinnon remembered long after with undisguised pleasure.



Prince Charles Edward Stuart continued to evade the Government troops for almost two months after bidding farewell to Captain MacKinnon, although, ironically, it was to be almost from that very spot, in Borrodale, that he was to depart to France on the 20th of September 1746, never to return.

*MacKinnon and his chief
imprisoned*

For Captain John MacKinnon and his elderly chief Iain Dubh the worst had yet to come. Conveyed to London to face trial they spent twelve months in the harrowing conditions of a prison-ship near Tilbury. Thereafter because of their rank, they were permitted to become 'house prisoners' of a government official, living with some degree of comfort. John MacKinnon spent many hours comparing experiences with Flora MacDonald who was lodged in the same building and who was bemused at the popular reception she was receiving in London.

In 1748 Iain Dubh was prosecuted for high treason, but is reputed at his trial to have made a great impression with his spirit of chivalry and his continuing loyalty to the House of Stuart. Fortunately, because of his advancing years, he escaped the gallows and the Act of Indemnity of 1749 allowed both men, at last, to return to their homeland. But already the destruction of the clans and their lands had begun. Almost all the MacKinnon estates were forfeited, including Kyleakin, Assig, Pabbay, Breckish, Swordill, Kilbright, Borreraig, Stroloness, Kinlochsligean, Gambhoil, Harraboll and Broadford. Those members of the Clan who had not been forcibly sent into exile after the '45, may well have taken this path in the bleak years that followed or moved to another part of the Island or the mainland. Certainly, by the time Iain Dubh MacKinnon, 29th Chief, died at Kilmorie in 1756 his clan was a shadow of its former self.

Captain John MacKinnon of Elgol returned to his home, but a rheumatic affliction of his legs, possibly acquired in the unwholesome conditions of the prison-ship, obliged him to undergo many months of medical treatment in Edinburgh in the late 1750s. It was there that he was interviewed by the Reverend Forbes, who recorded details of his adventures with the Prince in his three volume work *The Lyon in Mourning*. In 1762, at the insistence of his surgeon, John MacKinnon travelled to Bath to be treated by the waters, but the journey aggravated his ailment and he died there on the 11th of May.



Thus ended the involvement of the MacKinnon clan in the ill-fated attempts of the Stuarts to regain their

Captain MacKinnon bids the Prince farewell, 10th July 1746

throne. For the last time they had offered their swords in support of a representative of the ancient dynasty and now his vainglorious words - 'all or nothing' - would haunt them. For the consequences of their loyalty had been destruction of their way of life and loss of their lands and livelihood. Unlike the other Skye clans - the MacDonalds and the MacLeods - who had backed the winning side in 1745, the MacKinnons were left with virtually nothing: no written records, no clan seat or castle. The later documentation of the history of the clan in those bleak years is equally sparse; the principal clan history devotes just one paragraph to this period, recording the final enforced sale of property in 1765. The accuracy of the family lines and descents was also thrown into doubt and a bitter battle erupted in the 19th century over the true heir to the chieftainship. Many branches of the family - even that of Captain John MacKinnon - faded into the mists, their whereabouts obscure, unrecorded and unknown.

Yet out of this period of dislocation, loss and persecution emerged the tale of a drink; of a personal recipe for a sweet liqueur given to the loyal Captain John by the Stuart Prince. The tale told how the Prince, with no possessions remaining, was anxious to reward his steadfast companion and all that he could offer was the secret of the ingredients, a recipe that was to be carefully preserved by the MacKinnons in the years to come. Oral traditions are strong in the Highlands - particularly amongst the dispossessed clans - and have always carried greater weight than the written word. From these - on Skye and in the many disparate branches of the clan - we know that this liqueur was being made by the MacKinnons of Skye to a special recipe soon after the Prince had returned 'over the Water'. So where exactly did this recipe come from? To answer this question the scope of this story must be spread wider. We must see how drinks were made and consumed in the 18th century; consider how whisky was manufactured in primitive conditions; examine the character of the Prince himself and his tastes in spirits and so weigh the evidence for the most likely origins of the famous 'Isle of Skye Liqueur'.

The legend begins

'THE ISLE OF SKYE LIQUEUR'

The story of Scotch whisky has been told many times, but what has not been given due consideration is the

complex history of the flavourings, spices and aromatics that were traditionally added to whisky, as well as many other types of spirit, until comparatively recent times. The origins and compositions of these flavourings reflected tastes and social changes in all levels of society throughout Europe and further afield.

Scotch whisky first made an appearance in the 15th century as an *aqua vitae* distillation of barley. From this Latin description came the Gaelic *Uisge beatha* and, thence, the anglicised *whisky*. Distillation of whisky increased greatly in the 17th and 18th century, although commercial production was not formalised until after 1823 when the rigorously enforced new Excise Act put the final nail in the coffin of the small scale, widespread, private distillers. Technically, distillation was a legal activity, so long as the results were not sold. However, a government enquiry of 1798 had heard that illicit distillation for sale was ‘spread over the whole face of the country and in every island from Orkney to Jura’ and, moreover, that those who practised this trade had not the slightest regret at denying the excise man his due.

The origins of Scotch whisky

It has, however, been something of a canard in most histories of whisky, that the product of these home stills was practically undrinkable, the equivalent of the volatile *potteen* of the Irish, and that it was necessary to mask the drink with flavourings to make it at all palatable. This would perhaps have been the case with much that was produced hurriedly and under the threat of discovery. An unstable still and uneven heating could well result in noxious oils and acids mingling with the alcohol as it rose from the still into the curled tube of the ‘worm’ where it was collected. The combination of the raw alcohol and almost poisonous chemicals would have resulted in a drink capable of delivering a distinctive kick and unforgiving after-effects.

But it is unlikely such production would have been typical and, indeed, early 18th century engravings of Scottish distilleries show small, efficient, indoor set-ups that appear to be operating much as any small manufactories would have done at the time. Some licensed distillers - such as John Forbes of Culloden - ran several distilleries and as early as the 1760s were making sizeable profits. It seems inconceivable that the discovery of the benefits of maturation - leaving the whisky in barrels to allow evaporation and oxidation of undesirables - was unknown until the 19th century, especially when it is considered that other spirits and wines were stored in this way as standard from the earliest days.

Just such a wooden barrel was discovered during peat cutting near the house of MacDonald of Borrodale in 1810. It was claimed, at the time, to have been part of a hoard of plate and other valuables buried in anticipation of reprisals by government militia in 1746. If so, such precaution was wise, for, as has been described, when Prince Charles arrived at Borrodale House with Captain John MacKinnon, the house was a burnt-out shell. It is fascinating to speculate if a dram of this very whisky could have been offered to the Prince and his companions by Angus MacDonald of Borrodale. Whatever its precise origins, this whisky of undoubted mid-18th century provenance was tasted in 1810 and on several occasions subsequently and found wholly palatable. It is probable that whisky of this quality was enjoyed by the higher stratas of Highland society. Many clan chiefs were renowned as men of culture and learning, as eloquent in Latin or English as in their native Gaelic. It is unlikely such individuals would have tolerated poorly prepared whisky.

Many of the presumptions about the quality of early whisky can probably be traced to the snobbery of the Lowland Scots, particularly in Edinburgh. Strong

trade and cultural links with France had resulted in the pre-eminence of brandy and claret as the preferred tipples of the well-to-do. Indeed, in Edinburgh, claret was the favoured drinks of all classes and, like the tenement lifestyle of the Old Town, acted as a bond between rich and poor. For such Scots, the Highlands were a wild and uncivilised place occupied by savages, who would occasionally pass through their midst in strange clothes, speaking an uncouth tongue. It was to be expected that their drink would be equally rough and unpalatable and as it was deemed to be an inferior, cheap product, so the examples available in the city's taverns were probably of the lowest quality.

Southern snobbery about whisky

It is worth noting however, that, outwith the pompous city bounds, whisky was, in the 18th century, being classified into a number of distinctive categories, if only as a means of enabling the authorities to attempt to tax and regulate its production the better. 'Plain malt' was just that and would have described a whisky of the better sort, to be drunk on its own, perhaps not unrecognisable today. The other principal category, however, in which there were many sub-divisions, was for flavoured whiskies and whisky cordials, often made with compounds of herbs. These were not rough spirits concealed behind glutinous flavourings, but sophisticated drinks bearing comparison with similar products being produced and consumed throughout Europe. Such mixtures had become increasingly popular over the years and were enjoyed by every rank of society. It is to them that we must turn to trace the origins of what lies at the heart of Drambuie.



In 1676 the street vendors of Paris were given a special dispensation to start selling a liqueur that had been prepared by King Louis XIV's physician as a *digestif*. It was a compound of aniseed, fennel, dill, coriander, caraway, camomile and sugar in a neutral spirit base. It enjoyed immediate popularity - not least because of its royal associations - and is indicative of the habit within aristocratic circles of preparing compounded mixtures for personal consumption.

It is easy to forget how important the art of mixing essences was in Europe in the pre-modern era. It was the age of the apothecary, when every ailment or condition could be treated with a secret mixture of roots, herbs, spices and elixirs. *Eau-de-vie* was precisely that - a 'water' of life-giving qualities - usually a strong spirit that was taken for its medicinal qualities and to which special mixtures of herbs and spices were added, often prepared, like that of the French king, to the specific directions of an individual. As trade routes opened up, these mixtures became increasingly exotic, involving elements from the Orient and the West Indies. The most assiduous experimenters were, of course, the monastic orders, particularly in France, which, since their foundation had cultivated herbs and practised medicine. From this period come the famous liqueurs of Chartreuse and of the Benedictines of Fecamp, as well as lesser known herb-flavoured liqueurs such as *Trappistine*, *La Sénancole* and *Elixer de Monbazillac*. With all of these the quantities and types of ingredients were critical and the recipes and proportions were shared only amongst a few.

European tastes for liqueurs and mixed drinks

Such experimentation was by no means restricted to France and it is to the understanding of the properties of mixing, compounding and infusing that we owe the distinctive characters of the fashionable new spirits of the time, like gin, vermouth, absinthe, kummel, as well as more localised liqueurs, such as the forerunners of the Italian *Strega*, made with the herbs from the wild mountainous region to the south of Rome. The types of spirit bases employed were equally

various. Wine and fruit-based brandies predominated in France and Italy, but elsewhere grain spirits

predominated, in the neutral form favoured for vodka, aquavit and gin, as well as in the more distinctively flavoured whiskies of Scotland and Ireland.

There can be no doubt that knowledge of whisky was not just restricted to the extremities of the British Isles in this period and it comes as no surprise to hear of it at the hedonistic court at Versailles at about the same time that King Louis was making available his health-giving liqueur. Quantities of Scotch whisky were imported to act as the base of a cordial called *Rissoly* which, amongst other ingredients, included rose, jasmine, lily, cinnamon, orange-blossom and cloves, suggestive of a sweeter, richer and, presumably less medicinal, compound than the King's personal recipe. The arrival of the exiled Stuart court in Paris, as Louis's guests, in 1688 was probably just coincidental with the appearance of this particular mixture, but there were numerous Scots amongst the Stuart entourage who may have had an opportunity to sample this interesting cordial during one of the many feasts and receptions hosted by Louis in the early years of their exile.

Whisky-based liqueurs in Paris in the 17th century

The move of the Jacobite court to Rome in 1719 would, if anything, have given access to an even more exotic range of southern spices and aromatics, many of which were used in the alcoholic punches and sweet-flavoured soft drinks, such as *capillaire*, which found favour at the balls and fêtes that were so much part of Italian life. When the excesses of these festivities became too much, the court physician would have been available, presiding over a medical cabinet filled with extracts of herbs, tinctures, ground spices and distillations of vegetable and mineral matters, from which a suitable restorative could have been mixed. Different combinations would have been used to treat the typical childhood ailments of the young Stuart princes and we are fortunate to have, perfectly preserved just such a medicine cabinet, said to have been carried throughout 1745-6 by Prince Charles's personal physician, Sir Stuart Threipland. Part of the royal baggage train captured at Culloden, it is now displayed at the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh and has an astonishing array of over a hundred different bottles containing essences, tinctures and solutions, along with hand-written recipes and tiny measuring scales.

For someone born into early 18th century Europe the mixing of various preparations, be they for health, immediate consumption or the long-term preservation of viands and drinks was a central part of day to day life. A glance at popular publications of the time, such as *Culpepper's Herbal*, first published in the 17th century, reveals how little we now know of the great range of uses and flavours available from natural substances. An understanding of such matters would have been a customary part of the education of any young aristocrat and it comes as no surprise that Prince Charles did indeed have a personal *eau-de-vie* which accompanied him during his months on the run.

In late April 1746, some two months before he met John MacKinnon, Prince Charles was in the Outer Hebrides under the protection of the Skye boatman, Donald MacLeod of Gualtergill. When MacLeod was later questioned about the state of the Prince's health at the time he replied:

The Prince dispenses his elixir

'he had a little bottle in his poutch out of which he used to take so many drops every morning and throughout the day, saying if anything should ail him he hoped he should cure himself, for that he was something of a doctor. And faith...he was indeed a bit of a doctor, for Ned Bourk happening ance to be unco ill of a cholick, the Prince said 'Let him alane, I hope to cure him of that' and accordingly he did so, for he gae him so

many drops out o' the little bottlie and Ned soon was as well as ever he had been'

Without a doubt MacLeod was seeing the Prince's personal *eau-de vie* in action and it was clearly a mixture he set great store by, not least because he was still in possession of it after the numerous travails he had already undergone in evading capture.

He would not have been alone in possessing a personal elixir. Some of the early tales of the origins of Drambuie do, indeed, specify that the recipe had been brought over not by the Prince himself, but by one of his retinue. It could be speculated that just as Louis XIV's cordial had enjoyed popular success in the streets of Paris, so an exotic foreign compound became the 'drink of the moment' amongst the ecstatic Jacobites who cheered the Highland army into Edinburgh. There were many in the court circle who might have prepared a recipe - the adventurous Irishman John William O' Sullivan, the youthful Duke of Perth who had spent many years in Rome, even the exotic French emissary, the Marquis d'Eguilles - and the passing fad of such a concoction could have resided longer in some memories than others.

*The most likely origins of
Drambuie*

But the very intimate association of the liqueur with the MacKinnons does not favour this possibility and we must return to Skye in the July of 1746 to establish, finally, the most likely set of circumstances. We have a young Prince on the run, well educated, the product of a society in which herbs, spices, compounds, tinctures and essences are a part of everyday life, carrying with him a bottle of his personal, highly concentrated *eau-de-vie*. We have a young man with an undue fondness for the bottle: '...when the Prince was about going off from Portree he tied the bottle of whiskie to his belt at one side, and the bottle of brandy..at the other side..'; so records an eye-witness as Prince Charles readied himself for the trek south across the island. Finally, we have a tradition of whisky production in the Highlands of Scotland which is producing a highly palatable product readily usable as the base for punches, liqueurs and cordials.

Of course this last factor has often been used to suggest that it is more likely that the recipe for Drambuie was already in MacKinnon hands and a sample of this may have been offered to the Prince by Captain John rather than the other way round. This opinion was most forcefully put by Marian McNeill in *The Scots Cellar* and many of the traditional Highland punches and liqueurs that she lists in this volume and her earlier, influential, *The Scots Kitchen*, share a number of attributes with Drambuie. 'Caledonian Liqueur' and traditional 'Cold Whisky Punch' both require the dissolving of loaf sugar into the whisky with the addition of, respectively, oil of cinnamon and lemon juice. The more elaborate 'Highland Bitters', which appears to date back to at least the early 19th century, involves the compounding of gentian root, orange peel, coriander seed and camomile which are then mixed with whisky and poured into an airtight container. The mixing of heather honey and whisky - usually with oatmeal to form 'Atholl Brose' - is of even greater antiquity, said to have been invented by the Eighth Duke of Atholl in 1475. However, in terms of sophistication of quantities, ingredients and mixing there is nothing on record to compare with Drambuie. This, and its enduring appeal, does suggest that the liqueur owes its distinctiveness to some outside agent, an agent that was most probably contained in the Prince's 'little bottle'.

*Other flavoured whisky
mixtures*

Although the precise ingredients and quantities that make the essence of Drambuie today are a well-guarded trade secret, we have some idea of what went into its forerunner when it was still being made for private consumption. Fragments of some of the old recipes exist (not all of which were exactly the

same) and they suggest that as well as sharing many of the ingredients of 'Highland Bitters', the MacKinnons' liqueur also included more exotic items:

linseed, fennel seed, angelica, bitter almonds and saffron hay. The last item, in particular, was a commodity of great value, prized as a colouring and flavouring amongst the well to do and hardly likely to be a staple of an ordinary Highland kitchen, particularly on the end of the remote Elgol peninsula. Prince Charles, brought up in Rome, would have known it well and would no doubt have considered its intense, slightly sweet taste a perfect match for whisky. As well as saffron his elixir may readily have contained angelica - becoming better known as a staple of Dutch genever - and, with his fashionable Parisian tastes, he would certainly have tasted the popular new concoction, *ratafia*, whose main addition was almonds. Such elements, in highly concentrated amounts, could well have been present in a health-giving elixir and could be the vital clue to Drambuie's distinctive qualities.

At the end of the day we have no clear and indisputable evidence for any theory. We can only speculate. But there is no doubt that informed speculation, combined with what we do know about the circumstances of the meeting of Prince Charles and John MacKinnon, the pleasure the Prince took in giving gifts to his most loyal followers, his possession of a personal elixir whose effects he was happy to demonstrate, and the very strong oral traditions about the origins of the liqueur, do all lead to the belief that the secrets of a recipe were passed to MacKinnon on that July day and that Drambuie is, indeed, the 'Gift of the Prince'.



James Boswell may not have been quite so appreciative of the Prince's gift. He and the inimitable Doctor Samuel Johnson visited Skye during their tour of the Western Isles in 1773 and were entertained by Lachlan MacKinnon, of the Corry branch of the MacKinnon family. Boswell rashly sat up with MacKinnon until five in the morning drinking what he described later as a whisky 'punch', suffering terrible hangovers the next morning:

I awakened at noon with a severe headache...Soon Corri (sic) and other friends assembled around my bed...and insisted I should take a dram. 'Ay' said Dr. Johnson, 'fill him up drunk again. Do it in the morning that we may laugh at him all day...'

The best preserved of the several ancient recipes that exist for the MacKinnons' liqueur is the one that was used by the Corry MacKinnons and so it is almost certain that it was their particular mixture of whisky and herbs that caused Boswell's discomfort. Interestingly, the Corry MacKinnons' recipe is described as 'the Yellow Drink' - 'dram buidhe', possibly a name that would have been attached to the liqueur from the earliest of days, particularly if expensive saffron had somehow been acquired to lend its distinctive intense golden hue to the mixture. The Corry MacKinnons may have got their recipe direct from the MacKinnons of Elgol, since a MacKinnon of Corry was John MacKinnon's fellow clan captain in the Jacobite army. However, other recipes appear to have been with other branches of the family from about this date, notably the MacKinnons of Kilbride and those of Kyle who maintained their lands throughout this period. Heather honey does not seem to have featured initially, but was such a traditional addition to whisky punches that it is not surprising that it became an integral part of the drink mixture.

Possible ingredients in the recipe

James Boswell samples the MacKinnons' punch'

Various recipes with different branches of the MacKinnons

There are few other mentions of the Isle of Skye liqueur from this period, but even as the Highlands of Scotland were being opened up to intrepid tourists from the south, few were as bold as Johnson and Boswell in

travelling to the more far flung islands. The population of the island had dwindled as the ties of the ordinary people to their chiefs lessened and rents began to rise, particularly during the poor harvests of the 1770s. The various branches of the MacKinnon clan were by no means immune to these social changes and the old geographical associations of the families were dissipated. MacKinnons from Corry, Kyle, Mishnish and Elgol dispersed to other areas of the island - Portree, Glenmore, Bracadale - or moved to the mainland, or even boarded the ships moored in Portree Bay for the long exodus to North America. As has been described the chief's estate was sold in 1765, effectively ending a clan system that had been in existence for hundreds of years.

The early 1800s saw further depopulation of the island as the introduction of the profitable Cheviot sheep led to widespread clearances and evictions of crofters. The conditions of the time were harsh and even the well-to-do lived in circumstances that would be considered extremely primitive today. But despite this the people of Skye were renowned for their generosity and hospitality. One visitor commented: 'Here we seemed suddenly to have become the near relatives, or intimate friends, of every individual we saw.' Drink, to the despair of the Presbyterian clergymen, remained the favoured way of welcoming strangers and, as an historian of the island has noted, 'the punchbowl was much in favour.'

Mention of the MacKinnons' liqueur next occurs in the 1870s, at a time when cruel evictions from the south of the island were still underway. John Ross, the proprietor of the inn at Broadford, persuaded one of the MacKinnons (probably those of Corry, which is next to Broadford) to let him try making up and selling the liqueur in the inn. The MacKinnons were happy to share the recipe and quantities were duly mixed up. It has been suggested that Ross used Talisker whisky as the base, although the strong sea-weed and iodine tastes of the Skye whisky would seem at odds with the subtle herbs and spices of the liqueur. Traditionally the whisky drunk on Skye (at least legally) had been imported from the Ferintosh distillery in Ross-shire and it seems more likely that this was the accepted medium; certainly it was Speyside and Highland whiskies, rather than island malts, that formed the base when the liqueur was first commercially manufactured in Edinburgh and continue to do so to this day. Whatever the result it seems to have been appreciated amongst the local populace and a story is told of two of the regulars to the inn sampling the liqueur and declaring it to be *an dram buidheach* - 'the drink that satisfies.'

The precise origins of the name are unclear. 'Buie' is a phonetic spelling of 'buidhe', meaning 'yellow', but could also be an abbreviation of 'buidheach' (pronounced 'booyuch') which translates as 'satisfying' or 'contented'; either interpretation is possible. Drambuie had probably always been the 'yellow dram' to the MacKinnons, but the addition of the concept of the 'satisfying' drink was an entirely fitting tribute to the smooth warmth that is the hallmark of its distinctive taste. Drambuie seemed to enjoy a degree of popularity as the house special of the Broadford Inn and was no doubt drunk by some of the many travellers who passed by on their way to or from the Kyle ferry to the mainland. In 1893, John Ross's son, James, put forward a patent for the trademark of the name 'Drambuie' which was duly recorded in the Patent Office's records. Whether he was protecting the name against a poor local imitator, or hoped to sell the liqueur commercially, is unclear. There is no record of any attempted commercial exploitation - no excise duty payments, wholesale listings or even surviving bottles - so the former may be the more likely explanation. Whatever

The MacKinnons' liqueur served at the Broadford Inn

The origins of the name

The name 'Drambuie' is patented, 1893

the case, James Ross died prematurely in 1902, and the inn passed from the family's hands.

So the first appearance of Drambuie behind a bar

might have been its last. It could today just be an old folk recipe, remembered by a few on the Isle of Skye, but forgotten by most. Instead it has been enjoyed by millions of people over the last hundred years and a bottle of Drambuie is to be seen behind almost every bar in the world. To find out how this happened we must follow the footsteps of young Malcolm MacKinnon of Glenmore, travelling south through Skye in the spring of the year 1900, heading for Edinburgh to make his fortune. He pauses, perhaps, at the Broadford Inn, and tries a dram of the old MacKinnon liqueur and, re-invigorated, heads on for the Kyle ferry, a thoughtful look on his face.

THE MACKINNONS AND THE MAKING OF A BRAND

The MacKinnons of Glenmore farmed the rolling hillsides of Glen Varagill and Glenmore which lie in the very heart of Skye. Originally from Kyle in

the south, their ancestors had been part of the post 1745 diaspora that had forced families from their ancestral lands. As the sixth son in the family, Malcolm had few options on Skye and like many of his family might have considered emigrating abroad. Instead he set his sights on Scotland's capital and, arriving there at the dawn of the new century, joined the established wholesale wine and spirit merchant, W. MacBeth and Son.

Malcolm MacKinnon arrives in Edinburgh, 1900

Based in Union Street in Edinburgh's Georgian New Town, the firm supplied wholesale to hotels, pubs and restaurants, as well as operating a retail list for private buyers. Their speciality was Scotch whisky, the production and consumption of which was at the time undergoing something of a transformation. The smaller distilleries producing single malt whiskies, known as 'selfs', were under attack by the bigger distilleries who were championing blended whiskies. Gradually the latter began to predominate, a situation that would remain largely unchanged until the 1980s. Malcolm MacKinnon seems to have thrived in the business and, in 1907, leapt at the chance to join forces with another member of the MacBeth family - James Hunter MacBeth - and become sole partners in the company. From this position, Malcolm began to consider how they might expand their business and possibly lessen their reliance on the vagaries of the whisky market.

Along with other expatriates from the Highlands, Malcolm was a regular attendee at St. Oran's Highland Church and here he came into contact with James Ross's widow, Eleanor, who had moved to Edinburgh after the death of her husband. Eleanor Ross had kept the recipe that had been given to her husband by the MacKinnons and used at the Broadford Inn and it occurred to Malcolm that the old Isle of Skye liqueur might be just the thing to revitalise MacBeth's. His partner agreed and in 1909 they signed an agreement with Mrs Ross to manufacture and sell Drambuie and have Macbeth's assigned as the proprietors of the trade-mark.

Commercial production of an entirely new product was not going to be easy. Fortunately MacBeth's had ready access to a wide range of both blended whiskies and 'selfs' and so there was plenty of opportunity to perfect the ideal base of aged blends and the smoother Highland and Speyside malts. The mixing was more difficult, involving numerous copper pans and jelly bags, mixing vessels and gas rings to heat the honey, all squeezed in amongst the oak whisky casks in the basement of Union Street. But with the help of the redoubtable cellarman, Sandy Cameron, Malcolm succeeded, after two weeks, in filling a dozen bottles. These were sealed with cork and lead capsules, labels were applied to the front and the neck and they were taken up to the shop floor of MacBeth's and put on display. Drambuie Liqueur had arrived.

First bottles of Drambuie go on sale, 1909

It was not, however, a propitious moment to launch a new drink. Prime Minister Lloyd George, a confirmed teetotaler, had never hidden his belief that spirits had a pernicious influence on the productivity of the worker and in his 1909 budget took the opportunity of increasing whisky excise duty by a third and taxing distilleries direct for the amount of whisky they produced. On hearing this news, one of MacBeth's Glasgow competitors declared that his firm might as well just stop trading. Whisky prices shot up, sales plummeted and for MacBeth's things must have looked grim indeed. It is said that just twelve cases of Drambuie were sold in the first twelve months of production and Malcolm

must have feared that his great plans to revive the fortunes of the company would come to nought.

However, he was determined to persevere and had sufficient faith in the innate quality of the family liqueur to continue manufacture

and, in October 1912, recommend that MacBeth's buy out Eleanor Ross's interest in Drambuie. It was a bold move. The whisky market was slowly recovering but was still susceptible to volatile booms and depressions and with an unsympathetic government in power it was impossible to predict market patterns. Storm clouds were gathering in Europe and on all fronts the future looked uncertain. But Malcolm retained his conviction that there was a commercial future in Drambuie and when MacBeth's stood on the verge of collapse, he offered to buy out the company. On July 14th 1914 Malcolm MacKinnon became sole proprietor. Three weeks later Britain declared war on Germany.



Malcolm had no doubt been encouraged in this audacious move by a young lady, a native of Wick in Caithness, who is to feature large in the story of Drambuie. Georgina Davidson, or Gina as she preferred to be known, had come to Edinburgh as a schoolteacher and had met Malcolm amongst the circle of expatriate Highlanders who met socially in the capital. Gina took an interest in Drambuie from the very beginning and was to become one of its most tireless champions and her encouragement would have been crucial in persuading Malcolm to stake his future on this hitherto untested new product. Malcolm MacKinnon and Gina Davidson married in 1915, thus heralding a new era for the Isle of Skye liqueur.

Working from the MacBeth offices in Union Street, Malcolm and his clerk, Harry Ness, began to set in place a regular production of Drambuie, making this the main focus of the business. Malcolm had officially established 'The Drambuie Liqueur Company Limited' as a separate entity from MacBeth's when he took over the latter in 1914 and so it is from this date that the company history really begins. From the start it was a family enterprise. Gina collected the requisite herbs, spices and oils and mixed them to the correct proportions, thereby setting in place a tradition whereby the guarding and preparation of the essence would be retained and passed down the female side of the family.

Malcolm realised that to market successfully such an entirely new product he had to invest heavily in advertising. However, he also realised that for this to be effective it would be necessary to place great emphasis on the age and distinction of Drambuie, as well as the romantic story of the origins of liqueur which had been passed down the generations of the Skye MacKinnons. It was this that would make Drambuie notable and remembered. Advertisements appeared in *The Tatler*, *The Times*, *Punch*, *London Opinion*, *The Sketch*, *The Bystander* and in numerous trade papers. With images of Bonnie Prince Charlie and Highland mountains, the advertisements emphasised how Drambuie had been known in the Highlands for a hundred and sixty years and was only now being offered to a wider public. It was described as a 'delightful liqueur, rich and mellow in flavour' and the by-lines were 'The Isle of Skye Liqueur' and 'A Link with the '45', below which was the sentence: 'This Ancient and delicate Liqueur has been prepared in Skye since 1745 when the recipe was first brought to Scotland.' The unique squat bottle appears, as does the lozenge shape containing the word 'Drambuie.' The design was intended to make Drambuie stand out on a shelf of more traditionally shaped whisky bottles and was so inspired and so effective that it remains barely altered today, making the Drambuie bottle immediately discernible behind any bar in the world.

*The Drambuie Liqueur
Company established, 1914*

The first advertisements

Although Malcolm concentrated his attention on building up Drambuie, he was aware that the existing parts of the MacBeth business should not be

ignored and could, indeed, provide ideal openings for the marketing of Drambuie. MacBeth's had for many years had a number of its own blends of whisky - notably John O'Groats, MacBeth and Fulstrength - which had their own devoted followers and Malcolm began suggesting to MacBeth's regular customers for these whiskies that they add a few bottles of Drambuie to their order. The most spectacular success of this strategy was the House of Lords, who had a monthly order for MacBeth whisky. The Drambuie was appreciated and an order was placed to add it to the monthly consignment. A personal letter arrived from the Lords' secretary in March 1916 applauding both the whisky and the liqueur which 'are of excellent quality and much appreciated.' Never one to ignore such a marketing coup, Malcolm immediately re-designed the Drambuie neck label to include the words 'As supplied to the House of Lords' on either side of the House of Lords emblem, the portcullis. The following year, a case was ordered for the cellars of Buckingham Palace: Drambuie had swiftly entered the highest levels of society.

Drambuie ordered for the House of Lords, 1916

The outbreak of war had had a mixed impact on the fortunes of the whisky trade. Inevitably, throughout the war, duties were increased along with all other taxes. The government also attempted to regulate the strength of whisky which was traditionally around 60 percent of alcohol by volume. An attempt to reduce it to 30 per cent was resisted and eventually a compromise figure of 40 per cent was achieved. This has been the standard ever since and is the strength at which Drambuie has always been made. These impositions of government would probably have been worse had the country not been reliant on one of whisky's principal by-products, baker's yeast, and so production was allowed to continue at almost pre-war levels with consequent benefits throughout the industry.

Effects of the First World War on trade

The closure of trade routes to the continent also, quite suddenly, made Drambuie the only liqueur available in the country. Those accustomed to drinking Chartreuse, Benedictine or any of the fruit-flavoured *eaux-de-vie* that had grown in popularity through the reign of Edward VII, as well as those who favoured fine cognacs, were obliged to turn to either whisky or Drambuie and many converts were made to the liqueur's smooth honeyed sweetness. Supplies were also shipped to the officers' messes of Highland Regiments serving overseas and swiftly became a firm favourite at the regimental tables. Mess nights, at which officers from colonial regiments dined, gave the liqueur a wider currency and began to set the stage for future overseas demand, particularly from those with Scottish connections.

A foothold had been established in the markets, but no more. The prolonging of the war eventually led to a shortage of grain and many whisky distilleries were mothballed, some never to re-open. All export was banned, duty was doubled and the sale of whisky that had been in bond for less than two years was forbidden. Shortages ensued and by the end of the war the price of a bottle of Drambuie had more than doubled from 7 to 16 shillings. Although Edinburgh was distant from the Western Front, panic ensued when, in 1916, Zeppelins bombed the capital. One bomb destroyed the Leith warehouse of the whisky company Innes and Grieve, later to be acquired by Drambuie, and a piece of the bomb casing is displayed in the company boardroom to this day.

Fortunately the menace of the Zeppelins was overestimated and the end of hostilities was greeted with relief by all in the industry. Malcolm was anxious to exploit the inevitable demand for luxury products after so much austerity and a London agent - Vincent Brook - was appointed to market the liqueur in England. A second major advertising campaign was launched, focusing on the history of

the 1745, and proclaiming in bold type 'We can now satisfy all demands.' Export agents were appointed in India, New

Zealand, South Africa and, more exotically, Honduras, Mesopotamia and Persia. Attention was being turned to the most lucrative potential market, the United States, when news came through of the passing before the American Senate of the Eighteenth Amendment and then the Volstead Act. What these innocuous-sounding measures meant in real terms was a total ban on alcohol throughout the entire USA. Prohibition had arrived.



Prohibition in the USA

Recent research has revealed just how extraordinary the phenomenon of prohibition (and the attempts to subvert it) really were. One commentator has written ‘Scotland’s *sub rosa* campaign against the United States prohibition agencies is one of the untold tales of the 20th century.’ In effect, everyone with an interest in drink united against prohibition and the bootleggers and ‘liquor pirates’, who set out to breach it, were largely financed by syndicates of distillers and drink producers. The Scotch whisky industry was involved from the beginning and there is no doubt that Malcolm MacKinnon gladly joined in the attempts to get drink through to the Americans. His agency in the Honduras was perhaps not so exotic, for the tiny country swiftly became one of the main staging posts, along with the Bahamas, Bermuda and Cuba, for running liquor into the southern states. The British government in these locations happily helped out by storing the spirits in their own bonded warehouses and then turning a blind eye as the cases were loaded onto small schooners and tramp steamers. These sailed to international waters where they were met by the faster speed boats and launches of the bootleggers, who would offload the cases and prepare for the daring night time runs to the American coast.

Canada was the other favoured entry port for alcohol; its huge border was effectively unpoliceable. The magazine *World’s Work* ran a feature on ‘Ontario’s Wet Prosperity’ in March 1931 and illustrated it with a photograph of a US customs officer in front of crates of seized drink. Right in the middle is a case of Drambuie, the contents of which were presumably destined for the gutter shortly after the photographer had departed. Despite the US government’s best attempts, America could not be kept dry. Finally, in 1933, prohibition was repealed.

It could be argued that the near fourteen years of prohibition had severely hindered the growth of Drambuie at a vital moment in its history and the company certainly appears to have had a few moments of financial jitters during the 1920s. But on the positive side, Malcolm MacKinnon had forged links of common adversity with some of the biggest players in the whisky industry and had managed to ensure, through his network of foreign agents, that Drambuie was a full participant in all the struggles to beat the ban. And when the ban was lifted the USA revelled in its new found freedom. Sick of raw illicit whisky, the Americans welcomed the opportunity to buy the best spirits they could and the smooth whisky-honey tastes of Drambuie were one of the finest antidotes they could find. America was about to be won over.

The company was well placed to take advantage of the new conditions. The home market had certainly not been neglected during these years and an efficient supply network was in place, overseen by the London firm of Atkinson Baldwin, who were to be the principal distributors in the UK for many years. Nor had Malcolm forgotten his roots. At least once a year he returned to Skye and neighbours of the family in Glenmore recall how bottles of the liqueur were given freely to every family in the close-knit valley community to enhance the

celebrations of
Christmas and welcome
in the New Year.
Anxious to maintain the

family spirit of the company, Malcolm invited his older brother, John, to join him as a Director in 1927. The following year James Davidson, Gina's brother, was appointed to be the company's first Export Manager and shortly afterwards her other brother, William, became Advertising Manager. Both became directors in the 1930s and William, in particular, was to play a long role in guiding the company. To complete the family picture Malcolm and Gina had had two children: Margaret (who was later to become a successful doctor) and Norman, born in 1923 and destined, if not groomed, to lead Drambuie into the second half of the 20th century. With the repeal of prohibition and the growth of the home market, Drambuie seemed set to flourish. To mark his achievements, Malcolm negotiated the purchase of an impressive baronial mansion called Hillwood House, which stood high on Corstorphine Hill on the outskirts of Edinburgh. The young man who had come to Edinburgh thirty years earlier to make his fortune could finally say he had achieved his goal.

*A growing family concern –
birth of Norman MacKinnon,
1923*

But never one to rest on his laurels, Malcolm began making the first of a series of arduous overseas sales trips to promote the product, trips that were to become characteristic of the personal way the MacKinnons were to promote Drambuie in the years to come. Always believing that word of mouth was the best form of advertising, these trips gave the opportunity to enthuse the sales forces of the various Drambuie agencies with the unique qualities and history of the liqueur.

Sales in America began to grow at an appreciable rate and it became clear that new production facilities were required. It is incredible that for almost twenty-eight years Drambuie had continued to be produced in the same location where Malcolm MacKinnon blended the first twelve bottles in the dank cellar. Since then MacBeth's old office at Union Street had expanded to incorporate another property and much of the land to the rear, but for some years it had been clear that space was insufficient. In the mid-1930s, after the death of its partners, Malcolm had taken over the old established whisky blender Innes and Grieve and in 1937 the company moved into their former offices at 12 York Place, an address which was to remain at the top of the letterhead for the next sixty years. The property was actually an elegant Georgian town house, on five floors, in the heart of Edinburgh's 18th century New Town. For many years the New Town had ceased to be exclusively residential and many of the grander properties were given over to banks, solicitors and financial houses. Malcolm was anxious to emphasise the growing prestige of the company and with its elegant wrought ironwork, wooden panelling, plaster cornices and ornate fireplaces, the offices at 12 York Place impressed visitors from home and overseas with a sense of taste and wealth.

*The company moves to 12
York Place*

But behind this luxurious façade, operated an up-to-date business. In the 1890s, Innes and Grieve had built a bottling hall that stretched out the back as far as the old stable building in the lane behind. This stable now became the chief storage depot for the whisky brought up from the bonded store in Leith and the bottling hall was given over to production of Drambuie. The export department, hidden behind the polished mahogany screens of the reception area, processed the orders that chattered from the telegraph machine and oversaw the characteristic wooden Drambuie cases as they were sealed for shipment to domestic and overseas markets. Meanwhile, Malcolm MacKinnon and his fellow directors in the boardroom were concentrating on a matter that was of crucial concern - the very lifeblood of their product - the availability of whisky. All were aware of the boom/bust nature of the whisky trade and knew it was vital for the company's future to have a stockpile of bonded whiskies to act as a 'cushion' against times

of dearth. Fortunately Malcolm's relations with the whisky producers - forged during prohibition -

were good and slowly the company began to use its profits to buy whisky, the aim being to always have at least a year's supply in reserve. Their timing was good. For, two years after the move to York Place, the country was at war again.



1939 – 'the best year yet'

1939 had been the best year ever and in a memo to staff Malcolm thanked them for their conscientious hard work and awarded a 10% bonus. But he pointed out that this was unlikely to happen again for many years. The impact of the war on Drambuie and the whisky trade was much like the effects of the first war: a virtual cessation of exports, high taxation and a diminishing home market, but continuation of production thanks to the important by-products. For Drambuie, the war also brought an almost overnight monopoly of the liqueur market in Britain as the traditional liqueur producers of the continent fell rapidly to the Nazis. Edinburgh was fortunate, too, to escape the ravages of the Blitz, although one bomb, in September 1940, fell on the Caledonian distillery near the West End and 1,200,000 gallons of whisky went up in flames.

Edinburgh's reputation as a place of safety soon made it a popular 'leave' city with soldiers, particularly after the USA entered the war. The American Red Cross organised schemes to send its officers and GIs to Edinburgh and, it hoped, offer them a chance to see the sights and take in the culture of the northern capital. However, as one writer has put it, 'the Americans preferred elbow-lifting to brain elevation' and the city's hostelrys became the only points of interest for these single-minded tourists. Malcolm ensured that Drambuie was widely available in all the pubs and hotels and it was soon established as a firm favourite, alongside whisky brands such as Johnnie Walker and Chivas Regal, that were to become dominant in the US market in the post-war years.

Drambuie appeals to American soldiers

Supplies continued to be sent to the regimental messes as well. As the Allied forces gathered in the south of England in 1944, Malcolm made sure that his London agents were fully furnished to supply sufficient Drambuie to the troops. By this time, however, Malcolm was seriously ill. He lived long enough to hear of the German surrender on May 7th 1945 but three weeks later, at Hillwood House at the age of 62, he died.

Death of Malcolm MacKinnon, 1945

His early death deprived the company not only of its founder, but of the chief inspiration in the years of struggle to establish a foothold in competitive markets. Eulogies poured in from many business associates, at home and abroad, and the family realised how hard it was going to be to follow his example. With Norman Mackinnon having just reached his majority and James Davidson still in the army, the onus fell on William Davidson to continue the company's progress in the austere post-war climate. An accomplished businessman, he guided Drambuie expertly, but was perhaps lacking the fiery personal commitment of his late brother-in-law. The gap, however, was soon to be filled, by none other than his sister, Gina.

In the meantime there were pressing problems to address. Death duties had resulted in the sale of Hillwood House and there were extended complications over the provisions of Malcolm's will. Meantime plans to increase Drambuie production from 6,000 to 11,000 cases a year had been hit by a reduction in the whisky reserves built up before the war. Innes and Grieve had brought with them a number of whisky brands which, along with the old MacBeth's favourites, were still being blended and bottled by Drambuie and distributed under the Innes and Grieve name. This was proving a significant drain on supplies for the principal brand. The situation was resolved, but again it made clear how risky it would be

to rely on outside suppliers for such a crucial ingredient. New plans were made to buy up supplies of whisky, which eventually became

so huge that the company, at one point, had the theoretical potential to be totally independent of outside supplies for up to three years.

The other priority was to renew links with North America and in 1946 an agreement was reached with S.E. Somers and Co. and W.A. Taylor and Co. to distribute Drambuie in the USA. In the end 12,500 cases were produced that year, with nearly all the increase accounted for by exports. Imposed quotas prevented larger supplies to the domestic market although the directors reported that in spite of importation of over 30,000 cases of French and Dutch liqueurs, the home market was buoyant and would take anything the quota system allowed.

Gina MacKinnon was resolved to build on the opportunities that the post war period offered. Both she and Norman had become Directors of the company in 1947 (as had Norman's medical sister, Margo) and had the opportunity to explore new avenues of growth, leaving the day to day running of the company in William Davidson's highly competent hands. Once again, advertising was seen as a crucial medium for building the brand but, for the first time, two very different campaigns were organised. For the British market nothing much was changed from the successful formula used before the war: images of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Highlands, with emphasis on the age and venerability of the liqueur. Upmarket publications were targeted: *The Tatler*, *Esquire*, *The Field*, even *The Stock Exchange Gazette* and an image of quality was constantly emphasised. British sales increased steadily and the phenomenon of massive pre-Christmas sales made it clear how highly Drambuie was regarded as a special occasion liqueur and as a gift liqueur.

New post-war advertising strategies

In America a very different campaign was used. Emphasis on a relatively obscure historical character (however romantic) in the vast cultural melting pot of America was a risky step and so humour was decided to be the best common language. Enter two extraordinary bug-eyed cartoon characters who, in a series of ads from 1952 onwards, were shown drinking Drambuie in every conceivable geographical location from the arctic to the jungle to the wild west. The slogan reads 'No matter where you are - after dinner there's nothing like a dram of Drambuie' and one makes a somewhat obscure gesture with his fingers while a waiter runs along with a tray of Drambuie and glasses. That the local waiters who proffer the amiable pair their Drambuie adhere to every cultural and racial stereotype conceivable may not have endeared the campaign to America's ethnic minorities, yet they are amusing and addictive advertisements that sum up the style and outlook of those optimistic years.

A snapshot of the year 1959

The growth that Drambuie enjoyed in the 1950s can be appreciated by taking a snapshot of the company in the year 1959. Total sales for that year were 178,114 cases, an increase of 17,982 on the previous years figure. This was fourteen times the figure for 1946. As a progress report points out the *increase alone* represented more cases than had been sold in *total* in any whole year between 1909 and 1947. For the first time the USA became Drambuie's biggest customer, accounting for over a third of sales, with the UK market close behind. Other areas of growth for the year were identified as Holland, Rhodesia and Australia, although a speculative tour of South America made by an agent was deemed not to have been worth the effort. The agent in Greece was fired after only managing to sell 20 cases; he then promptly offered to buy another 20, but this attempted ingratiation fell on deaf ears. A new agent Karoulias Kalligas was appointed, but with few expectations - happily proved wrong as things turned out. The world-wide advertising strategy was deemed to have been successful and it was observed with optimism that in the USA women were now

allowed to appear in spirit advertisements - but with the provision that they do not hold the glass in their hand and that it must be a

distance of three feet from them.

The Drambuie sponsored film, 'A Song for Prince Charlie', was widely shown throughout the year and was part of cinema packages in South Africa, Canada and the USA. It was also shown to a thousand prisoners in Wandsworth jail, although this was not anticipated to lead to a noticeable increase in sales. Finally, in 1959, the new Drambuie production facility at Easter Road began operation. With state of the art bottling machinery, stores and production lines, this plant offered the opportunity to match the expected increases in demand with no difficulty and concentrate all production (which had been divided over an increasing number of smaller sites) in one place. Although technologically advanced, the operation was, at this stage, never fully automated. The unique qualities of Drambuie were deemed to stem from the essential hand crafting that had informed its earliest manufacture. The herbs and spices were still gathered and compounded by one individual and this personal attention to detail was incorporated into every aspect of the ongoing blending process, with constant checking and re-checking of each stage by practised eyes (and noses) to ensure that every bottle and every drop of Drambuie met the highest criteria.

New production facility at Easter Road, 1959

Such ongoing pursuit of excellence was especially critical for Drambuie now had a rival. 'Glayva' was produced by a rival whisky firm in the mid-1950s and was the first of many attempts to imitate Drambuie's distinctive taste. In a way it is surprising that it had not happened earlier in market conditions in which a sweetish whisky liqueur was clearly flourishing. Drambuie launched a robust defence against the upstart, bringing in the city analyst to examine its composition. His conclusion, that it was based on grain whisky and in his opinion contained no single malt, confirmed suspicions and when Glayva's foreign agents had the nerve to suggest in their price lists that it was 'similar to Drambuie', the company lawyers were quick to act and this claim was swiftly retracted. In fact, Drambuie had gained such a foothold in the markets and such a popular following, that it was never going to be knocked from its perch and the next decade was to see yet more growth as Gina MacKinnon became its brand ambassador *extraordinaire*.

The first rivals



Gina was now chairman of the company. Her brother, as vice-chairman, had lessened his workload and the day to day running of the company was in Norman MacKinnon's hands as Managing Director. Since the death of her husband, Gina had lived at 'The Craigs' an extensive estate some twenty miles west of Edinburgh, where she enjoyed a successful second career as a prize-winning breeder of Jersey cattle. From here she spread the mystique of Drambuie, always aware that a good editorial story is worth a hundred advertisements. Apparently inexhaustible, she travelled constantly, speaking at dinners, on radio, even television. Inevitably, she went down a storm in North America. With her snow white hair and sharp bright eyes she was the 'canny Scots granny' with the \$2 million secret. Breathless reporters revealed how she travelled throughout the countryside in her chauffeur driven car, stopping to gather or buy herbs and spices from local farms (sometimes in spurious quantities to fool any pursuers). These would be mixed to the old recipe in a laboratory high in her castellated 300-year old mansion and then driven under lock and key to Easter Road where, in their highly concentrated form, they would be introduced to the blend, imparting the flavours that make Drambuie special. Only one copy of the recipe existed, she would reveal, and that was in a locked

Gina MacKinnon – brand ambassador extraordinaire

safety deposit box in an Edinburgh bank. And the reason she, rather than her son, was the guardian of the recipe was simple -

women are better at keeping secrets than men.

She travelled in style, often crossing the Atlantic on the Queen Elizabeth and staying in the finest hotels. On a visit to Canada in 1963 she took two bagpipers along and this guaranteed her cover status in the principal trade publication. Although one cynical journalist commented that the whole story was 'like Disneyland', her stately progress and self-publicity were a brilliant marketing exercise that resulted in thousands of words of copy, from the New York Herald Tribune to the Los Angeles Examiner and from the Daily Express to the humble Linlithgowshire Journal and Gazette. It was this last paper that reported, in June 1964, that the local businesswoman, Georgina MacKinnon, had been awarded the OBE by the Queen for her service to British exports.

*Gina MacKinnon awarded
OBE for export
achievements, 1964*

Drambuie flourished as it had never done before. With the passing away of William Davidson in 1963 and the (gradual) retirement of Gina from the limelight, the direction of the company passed to Norman who, while realising he could perhaps never quite match his mother's flamboyance, was as devoted to the continuing success of the family's liqueur. His thoughts may even have been turning to the next generation. He had married Mary Geddes in 1957 and their first son, Malcolm (who, like his grandfather, was to be familiarly known as Calum) had been born in 1959. A second son, Duncan, followed in 1963.

*Birth of the third generation
– Calum and Duncan
MacKinnon*

Culturally, the 1960s was a momentous decade and Norman was faced with the problem of positioning the Drambuie brand in a period when all the previous certainties of life were being unceremoniously dumped. This was to be a constant challenge over the years to come and is still an issue that is addressed today: how to continue to emphasise Drambuie's history and heritage, while making it contemporary and alive to changing social trends. The two needed to co-exist, so that Drambuie continued to attract new drinkers without alienating those from an earlier generation.

The strategy he adopted, which in essence continues to this day, was threefold. First never lose any of the traditional facets that make the product unique and which have played such a central part in ensuring its success over the years. The idea that Drambuie was a traditional crafted product with a remarkable heritage - with an audience that applauded those aspects of its character - should never be lost out to short term populist strategies. Secondly, however, the *association* of Drambuie with events and ideas that were contemporary and exciting offered opportunities to bring the product before new audiences. And finally, the crucial ingredient was to encourage *tasting* of the product which, it was hoped, would overcome any uncertainties or prejudices amongst those who had never tried it.

These were subtle and long-term goals that would become more important as the century advanced and more dramatic social changes led to significant changes in drinking habits. For the meantime, Drambuie was building itself with little need for nudges in any direction. Distribution continued to increase until it could be reported that Drambuie was now more widely available than any other liqueur and could be found in over two hundred countries world-wide. It was also welcomed aboard many airlines and the association of Drambuie with the new popular image of the 'jetsetter' was a welcome one. A series of brilliant advertising campaigns resulted in some truly iconic images, culminating in the hummingbird hovering to capture the elusive drop of Drambuie, with the single word below: 'Nectar'.



From the late 1960s into the early '70s, Norman MacKinnon was preoccupied with a major new production development. Just as the Easter Road plant had

been built in the 1950s to accommodate increasing world-wide demand, so the demands of the late '60s made it clear that it was no longer up to the job and that a far more substantial production facility was needed. Norman was determined that it would be the finest of its kind if it was to meet anticipated production of up to 500,000 cases per annum. A brand new site was found outside the West Lothian village of Kirkliston and in 1969 work commenced on what was to become, for its time, the most advanced and sophisticated liqueur processing plant in the world.

'State of the art' production plant at Kirkliston, 1969

The best of the traditional methods were retained at the plant. The creation of the special blended whisky was dependent on the manual disgorging of the oak casks of malt whiskies - Aberlour, Balvenie, Glenlivet, Glenfarclas, Macallan and Highland Park to name a few - that had been purchased up to seventeen years previously and maturing in cask ever since. The blender checked every cask individually and constantly 'nosed' the mixture as it continued on its progress. The syrup which is added to the blend was mixed on site and combined pure cane sugar with honey sourced from local farms. Finally the essence was still mixed personally by Mrs MacKinnon and transported in a padlocked container to be drawn by hand for final compounding with the mixture. Each Drambuie bottle was washed with a stream of pure whisky before filling and then was constantly quality checked until finally, sealed and labelled, it was boxed for transport.

Combining with this tradition, however, was an expensive array of modern technology which was gradually introduced over the years and which, along with the well-established traditional methods, continues to play an important part in the production process today. The stringent requirements of Customs and Excise were met with a sophisticated computer system which, using ultrasonics, traced every movement of alcohol within the production process. Thereafter alcohol in the Drambuie mix was measured with infra-red light, the honey syrup tested with a refractometer and the colour checked by absorptionmeter. A sensory panel allowed a secondary mechanical check of 'nose' for the blender. Finally the Drambuie was passed on to the bottling lines, some of which were now fully automated to deal with standard sizes. The watchword was always quality, with the use of technology restricted to areas where a real benefit could be reaped.

Advanced technology in Drambuie manufacture

Drambuie was now well placed in production terms to face anything the future might hold, but it was going to be a constant challenge to maintain the brand's markets in a changing and highly competitive world. The death of Gina MacKinnon in 1973 marked the end of an era that was already in flux anyway. Drinking habits were changing. Lighter spirits were more favoured and the traditions of post-dinner liqueurs was seen as belonging to an earlier age. Moreover, the Scotch whisky industry was in turmoil. The success and confidence of the post war era had attracted corporate predators and during the 1960s and '70s no fewer than 77 distilleries were sold, most to companies outwith Scotland. This process was to culminate in the 1980s with the sale of Scotland's most successful distiller, Arthur Bell & Sons, and then the notorious acquisition of the giant Distillers Company Ltd by Guinness.

Whisky industry in turmoil in the 1970s

A successful brand like Drambuie was faced with risks on two quite contradictory fronts. Maintaining sales in the face of changing demand, while at the same time resisting predators, attracted by both apparent strengths and weaknesses, anxious to add such a premium brand to their portfolio. Fortunately the MacKinnon family had always kept a tight hold on ownership of their company and selling-out was never part of their agenda. But sustaining and continuing a pattern of growth was going to be an uphill fight. As ever marketing

and promotion was the key. Niche advertising - the successful 'Nectar' adverts, as well as a stylish series of

luxurious art deco-style adverts with the by-line 'it travels well' - were placed in key magazines, in particular the new Sunday newspaper colour supplements which emerged in the 1970s. The bottle retained its original design, but was to be presented in much more contemporary locations. The identifiable lozenge became the company logo and sponsorship of ski-ing and motor-racing ensured its appearance in new settings, far removed from the heather-clad mountains that had been its former natural habitat. Tastings, incentives, branded products and all the other mechanisms of modern commercial promotion became central to the way the brand was presented to the world. The old, more gentlemanly agreements with agents and distributors were ruthlessly analysed by Norman and his board and, if they were underperforming, alternatives were sought.

Diversification was always an option on the table and one that is often considered by one product companies. Norman's approach to this was careful and calculated and began with an expansion of the company's wine interests. The long-established London wine shipper and distributor, Atkinson Baldwin, which had distributed Drambuie for many years, had been acquired outright some years previously. As well as being one of the most highly respected firms of its sort, 'AB' brought with it interests in many prestigious drinks brands and companies. These included the vermouth firm, Dolin et cie, the burgundy producers, Bouchard Ainé et fils, the fifth growth claret, Chateau Cantemerle, and the original Bordeaux negotiant, Beyerman. Further interests in Portuguese wines enhanced an impressive list which found favour with many leading hotels and restaurants. Norman perceived the benefits of marketing Drambuie alongside the finest wines, emphasising its role as the perfect complement to dinner. In a way this approach was not much different to that employed by his father in the early days of Drambuie, when the established MacBeth list offered opportunities for introducing the liqueur to connoisseurs of fine wines and spirits.

Atkinson Baldwin moved from its old narrow offices in Glasshouse Street to an historic Georgian building, St Mary's House, in Battersea and began to build on its leading position within the market. In a bid to enhance this strategy north of the border, Norman made a further acquisition of the venerable Leith wine merchant, Cockburn and Co., which had been trading since the 18th century. Their traditional wine lists were allied with the established whisky interests of Innes and Grieve to form a flourishing wine and spirits business which continues - under the Innes and Grieve name - to operate to this day. The development of these companies offered a significant opportunity for building commercial interests that were not wholly dependant on a single product.

This approach was given further impetus in the 1980s with the launch of a new liqueur, Scotch Apple. Intended to address market trends for lighter and more mixable spirits, 'Mrs McGillivray's Scotch Apple' (to give the full name) still retained a distinctive Scottishness while endeavouring to emulate the appeal of Calvados and other traditional continental apple-based liqueurs. The brand was warmly received within the UK market, but was never distributed overseas. It suffered, perhaps, in having to compete directly with the parent-brand and was never aggressively marketed. If so, it was a salient lesson, suggesting that while complementary products - such as the more recent Drambuie Cream or Drambuie Black Ribbon - can only enhance awareness of the principal brand, it is very difficult to promote an entirely different liqueur product without, in the end, competing against oneself.

Such lessons were a useful initiation for Calum and Duncan MacKinnon who now entered the business as the third generation of the family. Their

*Diversification into wines
and spirits*

contemporary,
technologically-aware
outlook has informed
most of the strategic
developments in the
company over the last
two decades, although

they have inherited the fierce possessiveness of the company heritage from the preceding generations. It was their inspiration to move the company into sponsorship of hi-tech sporting events such as speed ski-ing, motor-racing and boat-racing during the 1980s. As well as close participation in the management of the company's wine interests, the two brothers also became enthusiastically involved in a car dealership that had been established in 1966 by their father and named 'Glenvarigill', derived from the name of the valley which the family had farmed on Skye. As with all their business interests, the emphasis for the family was to be on quality, and this meant dealing in the finest cars available. In 1991 dealerships were opened in Edinburgh and Glasgow specialising in Porsche and Ferrari, immediately establishing Glenvarigill at the top end of the market. At the same time a collection of classic sporting cars began to be acquired and the appearance of these at rallies and motorshows alongside their most current counterparts, was a new take on the theme of continuity between old and new that has always characterised the company's approach.

The Glenvarigill car dealership

An aggressive policy of expansion resulted in franchises for other major car marques, notably Chrysler in 1993 and Maserati in 1996. The ongoing acquisition of existing motor businesses and the development of entirely new dealerships has resulted in the Glenvarigill Group having a presence throughout Scotland and it now incorporates no less than twenty-five different businesses spread from Aberdeen in the north to Selkirk in the south and from Glasgow in the west to St Andrews in the east. The business represents fourteen different marques including Rolls Royce, Bentley, Porsche Audi, Volkswagen, Jeep, Peugeot, Honda, Renault and SEAT, as well as Ferrari, Maserati and Jensen for whom Glenvarigill are the exclusive concessionaires. The company, which continues to expand has proved an ideal complement to the core Drambuie business and, perhaps because they are not competing for the same resources, the two have worked well in tandem.

Death of Norman MacKinnon, 1989

These successful developments were, however, still some years off and the initiation of the two brothers into the management of Drambuie threatened to become a potential baptism of fire as the 1980s moved into the 1990s. Norman MacKinnon died in 1989, having successfully led the company for over forty years. Calum and Duncan took charge at a volatile time. In Scotland, the DCL take-over was still sending shockwaves through the whisky industry and a report that year established that only 25% of Scotch whisky now remained in Scottish hands. The old whisky dynasties had all been swept away and the demise of the few family held companies that remained was considered only a matter of time. Worst of all, the deepest world recession since the war was looming on the horizon. There were many who watched closely to see whether the youth and relative inexperience of the two brothers would start to show in these trying conditions.

Fortunately they kept their nerve - the legendary perseverance of the MacKinnons showing through - and the company was guided through the recession. As ever, the abiding qualities of Drambuie were never compromised or cheapened. Mary MacKinnon was now chairman of the company and every month the essence was mixed as always and transported under lock and key. She in turn was to pass on the recipe to Calum's wife, Pamela. No economies were made in the production process or in the packaging and presentation. A reduction in alcohol content was not even contemplated. Commitment was always to producing a premium product and in the end this approach could never fail. As the consumption of blended whiskies continued to decline, so a reverse

phenomenon occurred in the field of malt whisky, the 'selfs' that had always lain at the heart of Drambuie. Connoisseurial appreciation of malt whiskies became the

Calum and Duncan MacKinnon enter the business

one growth area for Scotch and Drambuie was well-placed to benefit from this renewed interest, a process that was to culminate in the production, in 1999, of a special Drambuie, with a pure malt whisky base, which was christened 'Black Ribbon.'

Notwithstanding the recession, the 1990s saw all sorts of 'firsts'. Most notably was the appearance of the first television advertisement. As with the bug-eyed cartoon characters of the 1950s, humour was deemed the best approach. The clumsy butler who drops the Drambuie, sets in train a dramatic inter-continental despatch of a replacement, which he promptly drops again, to the exasperation of actor Robert Hardy. A later sequel, used to promote the 'On Ice' consumption of Drambuie cleverly borrows from the first advert, except that this time it is ice that is summoned from the highest Alp to add to the Drambuie. Speed skiers and powerboats whizz the ice to Robert Powell's Venetian dinner party where, with a great flourish, the hapless butler pours it into a glass ice bucket, which is promptly shattered by the cold.

Television adverts in the 1990s

The powerboats that featured so prominently in the second advertisement provided some more notable firsts. Presenting an ideal sponsorship opportunity for Drambuie, power boat racing is a sport that enjoys huge popularity in Drambuie's premier markets in the USA. The three Drambuie boats - *Tantalus*, *Challenger* and *Drambuie On Ice* - set a slew of new world records in the 1990s, notably the Round Britain record (for which the Norman MacKinnon trophy was inaugurated); the Great Lakes record and, in 1999, a new world speed record, recorded in competition on the Gulf of Mexico.

Sponsorship – power boats and cinema

Sponsorship of the Edinburgh International Film Festival, during a period in which it emerged as one of the world's leading film festivals, was seen as an excellent opportunity to attract a younger, cultured generation to Drambuie. The decision too, at this time, to promote the brand as 'Drambuie On Ice', was a decisive commitment to break with the traditions of the 'after dinner liqueur' and emphasise Drambuie's appeal as a high quality spirit, to be savoured at all times. This process culminated in the most radical change of the bottle design for over fifty years, although it was a very conservative sort of radicalism that resulted in a slight tweaking of shape, cap and label.

Competing against the corporate behemoths, whose dubious charms had been so successfully resisted in the early 1990s, required Drambuie to reinforce its international presence and so in the late 1990s the first office was opened in the USA, operating under the company name '1745 Inc.'. A location in Miami enabled a close contact to be kept with the main areas of sponsorship as well as easing access to potential markets in South America. The success of the venture was confirmed in late 1999 with the signing of an agreement with family-owned, Miami-based, Bacardi to become principal distributors in North America. The American office was soon followed by the first London office, based in a striking modern building in St James's Street, the heart of London's old wine and spirits trade.

New offices in the 1990s: Miami and London

The beginning of the 21st century also heralded a momentous change in production. For some time the company had been aware that the Kirkliston plant - now over thirty years old - was beginning to show its age. After a thorough evaluation of market conditions and new technologies, it was decided that Drambuie's continuing growth and development would best be served by forming a supply chain partnership with West Lothian neighbours, Glenmorangie. Early in 2001 it was announced that a new company was to be established - Glenaird Ltd - which would handle all of Glenmorangie's and Drambuie's supply chain

requirements, from whisky sourcing, to bottling, warehousing and logistics. The link with Glenmorangie - distiller of some of the most popular premium

malt whiskies - offered a welcome association with a company that shares Drambuie's corporate values and the arrangement promised significant benefits for both companies in terms of cost savings and more efficient utilisation of Glenmorangie's state of the art bottling plant. Although distilled in the Highlands, Glenmorangie's whiskies are bottled at a plant in Broxburn, just a few miles distant from Kirkliston, and so the transfer of Drambuie's operations to this plant in the summer of 2001 offered few geographical problems. It was emphasised that no compromises would be allowed in production and Drambuie and its associate brands continue to be made with the precise attention to quality and excellence that have always characterised its manufacture. A major alliance of this sort often raises queries about further merging of operations, but throughout the process it was robustly emphasised that both companies fully intended to retain their independence. Indeed, Drambuie made it clear that it saw this development as offering further opportunities to focus the company strategy on international sales and marketing and use the unique strength of a family-led company to continue building the brand worldwide.

*New production –
partnership with
Glenmorangie*

Yet in spite of this necessary embrace of the most modern corporate strategies, technological developments, and brand-building during the 1990s and 2000s, Drambuie has, as ever, remained true to its unique history and heritage. It has been with pride that the company has supported the Drambuie Pipe Band, whose 1995 CD, *A Link with the '45*, became the world's biggest selling pipe band recording. The appearance of the band on the Florida Keys, serenading the fastest power boat in the world, is exactly the mixture of the traditional and the contemporary that sums up what Drambuie stands for today.

*A link with the past – the pipe
band and the art collection*

The proposal, by Calum MacKinnon, that the company assemble a collection of historic Scottish art was further proof of an awareness of the debt Drambuie owes to the past. It shows too a confidence in the future, a tangible asset that will be passed on to the next generation as a reminder of a unique and inviolable heritage. The collection, which includes paintings, as well as important examples of furniture, sculpture, ceramics and glass is displayed in the company's offices, both in Scotland and further afield. Over three hundred pictures are in the collection - works on both canvas and paper - mostly dating from the 1780-1950 period and include early 19th century landscapes by the Nasmyth family of painters, a large group of works by the pupils of Robert Scott Lauder - including major paintings by William McTaggart, Peter Graham and William Quiller Orchardson - , fine examples of the avant-garde 'Glasgow Boys', notably John Lavery and E.A. Hornel, as well a selection of the work of other leading painters of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Joseph Farquharson, Robert Gemmill Hutchison, Stanley Cursiter and 'Scottish Colourists', S.J. Peplow, F.C.B. Cadell and G.L. Hunter.

In addition, the collection contains the finest group of engraved Jacobite glasses known to exist. These unparalleled works of craftsmanship were produced by the supporters of Prince Charles and speak eloquently of the loyalty and convictions of those who commissioned them, as well as recalling the conviviality of our forebears who would first have tasted Drambuie from glasses such as these. Other 18th century works of art have joined the glasses and this group now forms an important historic and academic resource which continues to be exhibited and toured at home and overseas, bringing the story behind Drambuie alive in a vibrant and powerful way.

Much of the collection is housed in the company head office which is now, fittingly enough, Hillwood House. Malcolm MacKinnon's old home was bought

back by his grand-sons and in 1998 became the new home of the Drambuie Liqueur Company. The Drambuie coat of arms and the Scottish saltire fly proudly from the

tower of this imposing 1870s mansion which enjoys impressive views out to the Pentland Hills and the Forth Valley. Although the first impression is of grace and refinement, the elegant interiors and fine works of art conceal a busy office, now co-ordinating the export of Drambuie to over two hundred countries worldwide. It is here too that the ancient recipe that lies at the heart of every bottle of Drambuie is preserved and mixed. Using the same exacting standards that exercised Malcolm MacKinnon in the gloomy cellar at Union Street a hundred year earlier, the carefully graded constituents are prepared to the same specifications by two of the female representatives of the family, Norman's widow, Mary, and Calum's wife, Pamela. In a small, locked private laboratory the essence is prepared to the precise instructions that were handed over by an outlaw Prince to a trusted friend in the Western Highlands of Scotland so long ago. This essence is then conveyed onwards to form a small, but crucial part, in the modern technological process that will produce the Drambuie that we enjoy today. It is an extraordinary tale, but one that is very much kept alive, and which will continue to be kept alive as the recipe is passed on to yet another generation, ensuring that the Gift of the Prince will not be forgotten.

Sources and acknowledgements

The principal source for the preparation of this account has been material in the Drambuie archive, including press cuttings, advertising material, Jacobite manuscripts, family papers, minute books, company reports and unpublished genealogical research undertaken by the Reverend Donald MacKinnon of Portree in the 1930s. The Clan Donald archive on Skye was a useful resource for unpublished material on the history of the MacKinnon clan. Chapter Two includes elements of research undertaken by Charles MacLean, to whom thanks are extended, and the author is also indebted to Major John MacKinnon for further information on the family history and to Donald Stewart of Dunvegan Castle for sharing his knowledge of Skye history. Otherwise the principal published sources are listed below:

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