



## *Travelexonline* Scottish Whisky Tour

### **Glenkinchie**

East Lothian has been something of a punch bag over the centuries; it lies on the route that the invading English armies tended to favour and the open rolling countryside made it useful for battle when the Scottish forces rallied in defence. Places like Haddington have been burned many times by visiting generals and Berwick changed hands between the two countries so often that today the town is in England while the county is in Scotland.

There is just a tremor of an impression that you have gone back a little in time when you drop into the green dell that contains Glenkinchie. The baize-smooth bowling green and inviting little pavilion are just as they would have been years ago when they formed the social centre for the families of the distilling community hidden in the gentle hills behind Edinburgh. The 'kinchie' element of the name derives from the de Quincey family, who owned the land hereabouts in the 14th century and the Kinchie Burn still flows through the distillery.

The top-grade barley grown in the Lothian's is the direct legacy of the Society of Improvers of Knowledge of Agriculture, a revolutionary 18th-century body that put Scotland in the forefront of the European farming scene at the time. The society was founded by John Cockburn of the village of Ormiston just across the fields from Glenkinchie, whose whisky production began as a part-time operation on the Rate brothers' farm near Pencaitland. From 1825 the distillery was called Milton and in 1837 the name was changed to Glenkinchie. The next owner of the farm did not distil and the buildings became a saw mill, but whisky production began again in 1881. In the 1890s the distillery was rebuilt and became a founder company of the DCL, forerunners of today's owners, United Distillers.

The old maltings is now the Museum of Malt Whisky Production, with an excellent collection of old and traditional implements and tools that were used in Scottish distilleries. There are barley-scoops on wheels that look like dolls' prams; espadrille-like canvas boots that maltmen wore to walk about without damaging the malt on the floor; and many other fascinating artefacts. Many were ingeniously thought out, like the copper 'dogs' – containers that were used to smuggle stolen spirit out of the distillery. Some were simple tubes slim enough to be dipped and filled through the bung-hole of a cask and then hung by a piece of string inside a trouser-leg on the way out from work; others were more elaborate, such as the breastplate shaped to the curve of a torso and double-skinned like a hot-water bottle, which could be hung under a shirt with string tied around the carrier's neck.

### **Tullibardine**

Tullibardine distillery is situated in the village of Blackford in Perthshire and lies on the site of Scotland's oldest brewery dating back to the twelfth century. The village of Blackford was given the name as far back as the 10th century when the wife of the Nordic King Magnus, reputedly fell off her horse and drowned while crossing a 'ford' in the area. The tragedy was said to have deeply affected the king and the area was referred to hereafter as 'black ford' or as it is now known Blackford. A mound, which can be seen from the grounds of the distillery, reputedly depicts where Queen Helen was buried and is known locally within the village as 'deaf knowe' due to the fact that

if someone shouts from one side of the hill they cannot be heard on the other side.

### **12th Century – The brewing of beer begins**

Fortunately for the village, its reputation was not blighted for ever more. As Queen Helen experienced, the village accessed a pure and plentiful supply of spring water which streamed off the nearby Ochil Hills. This water, recognised for its purity and quality was to put Blackford on the map for a different reason. It was to become associated with the making of beer and was the site of the first public brewery in Scotland. The importance of this supply was widely recognised and was the principle reason that the village could boast of having no less than 3 breweries operating at one time, all drawing water from the same source.

### **15th Century – A Coronation beer**

Yet more recognition was to be bestowed on the village when in year 1488, King James IV purchased beer from the brewery which stood on the site of the now Tullibardine Distillery following his coronation at Scone. James IV was to become one of the best known late medieval Scottish rulers and ruled for 25 years eventually being slain at the battle of Flodden on the 9th September 1513.

### **20th Century – Tullibardine becomes first distillery in 20th century**

During the early part of the 20th century, the brewery on site of the distillery fell upon hard times and was used for a variety of purposes. What had not changed, and to this day remains the same, was the plentiful supply of crystal pure spring water which continually flowed past the brewery from the Ochil hills above.

In 1947, a Welshman by the name of William Delme Evans purchased the brewery with a view to converting it to a distillery with the original capital being supplied by friends and relatives. Delme Evans was an engineer to trade and designed the distillery to maximise efficiency initially using nature, and latterly science, where necessary. The distillery was built under very difficult circumstances as material was under licence and building and construction work at that time was subject to severe building controls. However, in 1949, Tullibardine distillery produced spirit for the first time and ran under Delme Evans ownership until 1953 where failing health forced him to sell it to the company of Brodie Hepburn. Throughout his time at Tullibardine he was assisted in the project by Mr C I Barrett, a retired Excise Officer who had considerable experience of Highland Malt Distilleries. Mr Barrett was subsequently manager of Tullibardine Distillery until 1958.

To this day, examples of Delme Evans design are still in use at the distillery. Cooling water for the distillery still continues to flow over the top of the condensers using only gravitational force and the heat generated within the distillery is extracted using two condensers as opposed to the traditional one to maximise heat exchange and reduce unnecessary waste. Delme Evan was never really given the credit he deserved for his ground breaking and influential work at Tullibardine and despite going on to help design Jura and Glenallachie distillery, his true passion till his death in 2003 remained Tullibardine.

### **21st Century**

The distillery lay dormant until the June of 2003 when it was bought along with the existing stock of Tullibardine whisky. This was a long and difficult purchase involving many different parties all coming together to enable the distillery to be reopened. In the December of 2003, Tullibardine distillery once again fired up the boiler and spirit flowed from the stills for the first time in nearly nine years. Throughout the re-commissioning process, care was taken to maintain as many of the traditional methods of production as possible and utilise the skills of the distillery manager and operators in producing the Tullibardine spirit. The care, attention to detail and passion which is instilled by the team at Tullibardine has resulted in the production of a superb spirit which is laid to rest in the finest casks available. Now that we are up and running, we will produce enough spirit for

our future needs and those of our customers. This is not an easy projection to make as we do not know how popular Tullibardine will be in years to come but what we can ensure is that it is as good as we can make it.

In November 2004, Tullibardine opened the doors of the distillery and new visitor centre to the public. This is a small part of one of the best out-of-town retail locations in Scotland, the other retail units are due to open throughout 2005 offering visitors a unique Scottish experience.

The new centre offers unforgettable tours of the distillery by experienced guides as well as connoisseur tours with the vastly experienced Distillery Manager.

The new retail shop has a distinctively Scottish influence, providing a range of unique gifts, accessories and seasonal products, such as glassware, pottery, fabrics, hand-made wood products and luxurious soaps and cosmetics. The licensed restaurant, Cafe 1488 also has a strong Scottish influence, using only the freshest local ingredients to create a delicious range of traditional hot and cold meals with a contemporary twist. Home-made soup, sandwiches and bakery products are available along with a range of fine quality tea, coffee, wine and soft drinks.

The name 1488 was chosen in remembrance of the year King James IV celebrated his coronation and purchased beer from the brewery which was situated where the Tullibardine Distillery is today.

### **Blair Atholl**

Blair Atholl, the village, is not where you find Blair Athol, the distillery (note the spellings), which in fact is on the main road that runs through the town of Pitlochry about seven miles or so to the south. Pitlochry is a comfortable little resort, always busy and popular both for overnight stops and longer stays. Birnam Wood, with King Duncan's castle and other Macbeth associations, is just to the north. During a stay at Kinnaird Cottage near Moulin, Robert Louis Stevenson wrote some of his short stories, including *The Merry Men* and *Thrawn Janet*.

Blair Athol is another of the handful of distilleries that were founded in the 18th century, albeit in the final few years. The works set up in 1798 either did not last very long or it was an illicit operation left undocumented. Thus it was either revived or first licensed in 1825, when the new licensing laws had been passed. Blair Athol was bought, along with Dufftown distillery, by blenders Arthur Bell in 1933 but stayed out of production until 1949, when it was rebuilt.

Blair Athol has its own burn, the Allt na Dour, which runs through the distillery. Peat used to be brought from as far a field as Orkney but the malted barley is now lightly peat-smoked to Blair Athol's specification by the group's own central malting operations. Storage space is limited at the distillery and malt is usually delivered twice daily.

The original pair of stills was supplemented by a second pair in 1973. The standard milling machine used in distilleries is a Porteous – look out for its rich Burgundy-coloured paint as you see round – and the belt-driven model at Blair Athol was used from 1934 until recently. The distillery is highly energy-efficient, carrying out production at only 60 per cent of the power-consumption levels typical in the industry.

Spirit intended for sale as a single malt is matured in Blair Athol's old traditional-style warehouses; spirit for blending in Bell's blends is also matured in the other distillery warehouses; and the spirit that is sold into the open whisky market (about half) is filled into wood and tankered off to destination when required.

## **Dalwhinnie**

In many ways Dalwhinnie is more like a fort guarding the Khyber Pass than a distillery on one of the country's main roads. It is the highest distillery in Scotland, sitting at over a 1000 feet (350m) above sea level yet at the very bottom of an enormous exposed bowl of encircling mountains. In winter the wind scours the slopes unchecked and snow drifts so deeply that distillery workers have on occasion had to go to work leaving from the first-floor windows of their cottages.

The distillery is also an official meteorological station and the manager must take daily data from the Stevenson screen in the grounds no matter the weather. Sometimes it can be quite a fight.

'Dalwhinnie' means 'meeting place' and it was the junction of the main cattle droving routes from the north and west of the Highlands. Herds and herdsmen would rest here before tackling the final surge to the great cattle trysts in the Lowlands. Here too General Wade's military road divided to follow similar directions and the line of the road actually runs through the grounds of the distillery.

Many battles were fought in this very amphitheatre, the advantage of the home-fixture very much with the clansmen. Cromwell's Ironsides were sent packing from here and Bonnie Prince Charlie and his men camped on the moors behind the distillery on the way south after his Standard was raised at Glenfinnan.

The distillery buildings are a visual pun, their black roofs and white walls referring to the Black & White blended whisky brand for which licensees, Buchanan's, are well known. The original name was the Strathspey distillery, built this high at 1073 feet (327m) in 1898 to have the closest access to the uncontaminated, cold water of Lochan an Doire-uaine. Of course this was the worst possible time to be building a distillery and the company went into liquidation almost immediately. The name was changed to Dalwhinnie by the following owners and specialist distillery architect, Charles Doig of Elgin, was brought in to upgrade the buildings and layout. Dalwhinnie closed for several years after a serious fire in 1934, a time when there was still no electricity in the distillery or the village and paraffin lamps were still in use.

The distillery is surrounded by vast peat deposits, an important amenity in the early days, but its malt comes pre-peated from central maltsters now and has light-to-medium reek. Most of the storage capacities for raw materials are large making it possible for the distillery to produce for over a month if need be when it is snowed in. There is a single pair of stills and the original worm-tubs were from an old distillery at Kingussie.

## **Tomatin**

We'd love to see you at Tomatin's Visitor Centre, to share our passion for and secrets of whisky distilling here in the heart of the Scottish Highlands. This four star visitor attraction takes you to the very heart of whisky making.

Our friendly guides will welcome you and talk you through the whole distilling process. You'll meet Albert the Excise Man and hear about whisky-loving angels. Best of all, you'll be given a free taste of Tomatin 12 year old single Highland malt and have the opportunity for some retail therapy afterwards.

Illicit stills are part of the history of whisky distilling in Scotland, and were widely used in the local hills around Tomatin. As a distilling site, illicit or otherwise, Tomatin goes back to the 15th Century when drovers – men who 'drove' their cattle to market over high mountain passes – would fill up their whisky flasks from a still alongside the Old Laird's House.

A formal distillery for the making of fine Scotch malt was first built on the site in 1897 by the Tomatin Spey District Distillery Co Ltd, and revived in 1909 by the new Tomatin Distillers Co Ltd.

A 20-year expansion programme started in the 1950s saw production rise to some 12 million litres a year by 1974, making Tomatin the largest capacity Scotch whisky distillery in the world at the time. The distillery was acquired by Japanese shareholders in 1986, who established the current Tomatin Distillery Company Limited, and launched the modern era of whisky distilling in the Monadhliath Mountains.