

The GlenDronach – the ‘Allardice’ Scotch Whisky

The GlenDronach is a single malt scotch whisky widely available, and produced by The GlenDronach Distillery Co Ltd at its distillery in Aberdeenshire, reported by the company to have been founded by James Allardice in 1826 although there are grounds to believe his name was James Allardes (see below).

The Products

The most widely available GlenDronach product at present is "The Original" in 700 ml bottles (1 litre bottles are available duty free). It is a 12 year old single malt scotch, which comes packed in a cylinder with end caps like a mailing tube. This appears to supplement or replace the previously available 15 year old GlenDronach and the 12 year old 'Traditional'. They retail in the normal price range for single malt scotch.

However, if you really want to celebrate an occasion, the company released in 2005 'The 33' a limited edition 33 year old bottling, which retails for £200/bottle, and comes specially packaged in a hand made laquered wooden case. The 33 is not widely available but can be purchased on line at www.theglendronach.com (except for the USA and Canada).

With the 'Original', both the packaging tube and the bottle label feature James Allardice's 'signature' at the top (in the same computerised font as the text) plus some background history (reproduced below). The '15 year old' came in a box as illustrated below which has less of a story and no reference to James Allardice.

A bottle of GlenDronach makes a novel Allardice collectors item and a good present for a relative.



*The GlenDronach 'Original'
12 year old.*



*The GlenDronach
15 year old.*



*The GlenDronach
Aged 33 years*

Tasting Notes from the internet:

The GlenDronach 'Original' 12 year old:

The nose is exceptionally sweet. The first nosing is very discrete, but later a kind of diluted sherry smell becomes obvious. This comes from the special maturation process this bottle has had: long years in sherry casks, and bourbon as a finishing cask. The exact contrary to most of the sherry finish whiskies. The palate is discrete too, with a kind of bitter vanilla which is rather unique. A relatively short finish, with honey hints. In a very interesting bottle.

The GlenDronach 15 year old:

A whisky characterized by its deep dark colour, probably due to its long stay in sherry casks. A nice whisky full of fragrances and aromas. The sporadic production of the distillery makes this whisky sometimes difficult to find.

A very pleasant smell, marked by sherry and very nice aromas of sweet citrus fruits (tangerine?) and nut. The taste is very fresh, refined, and the sweet notes dominate, while some slightly acid hints are perceptible. However, the whisky is not very complex, as the diversity of tastes is rather limited. A very warm and pleasant finish.

The GlenDronach 33 year old:

The company reports this was a unique batch of Glendronach, distilled in 1971 and set aside for special aging to produce 'the finest expression of GlenDronach ever made'. The sherry butts have imparted their luscious flavour, which is perfectly counter-balanced by the classic fruitiness of the GlenDronach spirit. The finish is long as would be expected, with the hint of smoke the peat kilns imparted so long ago. The colour has a deep red hue.

While this is not an independent assessment, I would be happy to provide an amateur's view if I had a sample.

The company publicity reports that 'sadly never again will we see the likes of this hand-made local Glendronach' as today it has to source the barley from a wider area.

The Distillery

The Glendronach distillery was founded in 1826 and acquired by Teacher's in 1960. Teacher's later became part of Allied Distillers. As well as being sold as a single malt scotch, GlenDronach is also used in Ballantynes and Teachers Highland Cream blended scotch whiskies. Production has been intermittent and the single malt is not always easy to get. Apparently the distillery was put in moth balls in 1995, but re-opened in 2004.

The distillery straddles the Dronach Burn and is surrounded by tall trees with an established colony of rooks which were thought to bring luck. It is built in the shape of a square and occupies 4 acres. It is one of the few distilleries where barley is still malted on a malting floor.

Glendronach distillery has traditional onion shaped copper stills which until recently were heated by coal-fired furnaces, the last distillery to use coal for this purpose. However, EU environmental regulations have forced the conversion of the stills to steam heating.



Glendronach Distillery – Forgue by Huntly

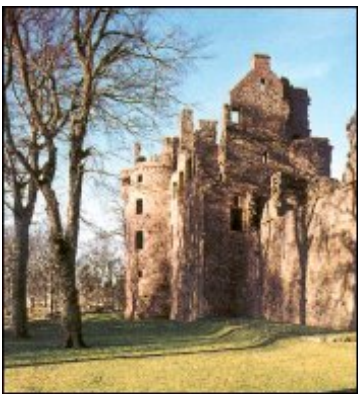
The distillery is within easy reach of most tourist routes. It is located at Forgue, east of Huntly and about 30 miles NW of Aberdeen and south of the river Deveron. It is on the edge of the Speyside whisky area serviced by the 'Whisky Trail' and is situated on the B9001 road off the A97 from Huntly to Banff.

An internet search on Glendronach reveals several sites, some with interesting photographs and history of what looks a very interesting distillery to visit. For example try:

<http://www.scotchwhisky.net/distilleries/glendronach.htm> or
http://www.whisky-distilleries.info/Glendronach_EN.shtml or
<http://www.uisge.com/ud/glendronach.html>.

The distillery allows visits and we hear visitors get a free dram (particularly if you say you are an Allardice). The Distillery Shop is open 9:00 am to 4:00 pm Monday to Friday and tours are provided at 10:00 am and 2:00 pm although special tours can be arranged in advance for large groups. The contact phone number is:

+44 (0)1466 730245.



Huntly Castle



The old coal-fired furnaces in distillery



GlenDronach Spirit Safe

The Story via the Labels

The packaging tube for the GlenDronach "Original" has the following text on the front:

James Allardice

1780 - 1849

*Inventor, pioneer, entrepreneur.
Founder of the GlenDronach Distillery.*

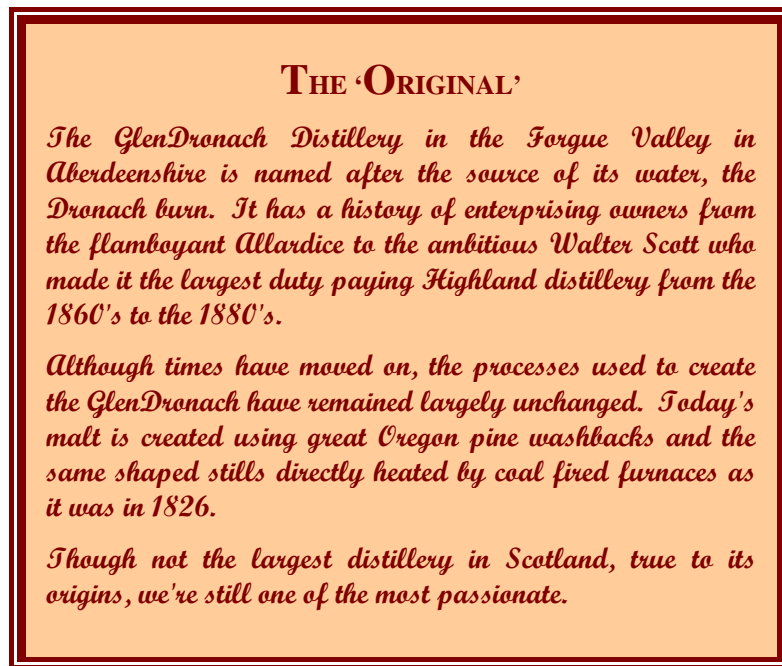
Founded in 1826 by James Allardice, GlenDronach was one of the very first licensed distilleries. Allardice was a colourful character and stories abound as to how he promoted his whisky with entrepreneurial flair.

He was also a pioneer of wood finishing and would have celebrated today's superb GlenDronach. Double matured - first in sherry casks, then for a final period in first fill American oak - the GlenDronach is a perfectly balanced, smooth creamy, full bodied single malt scotch whisky.

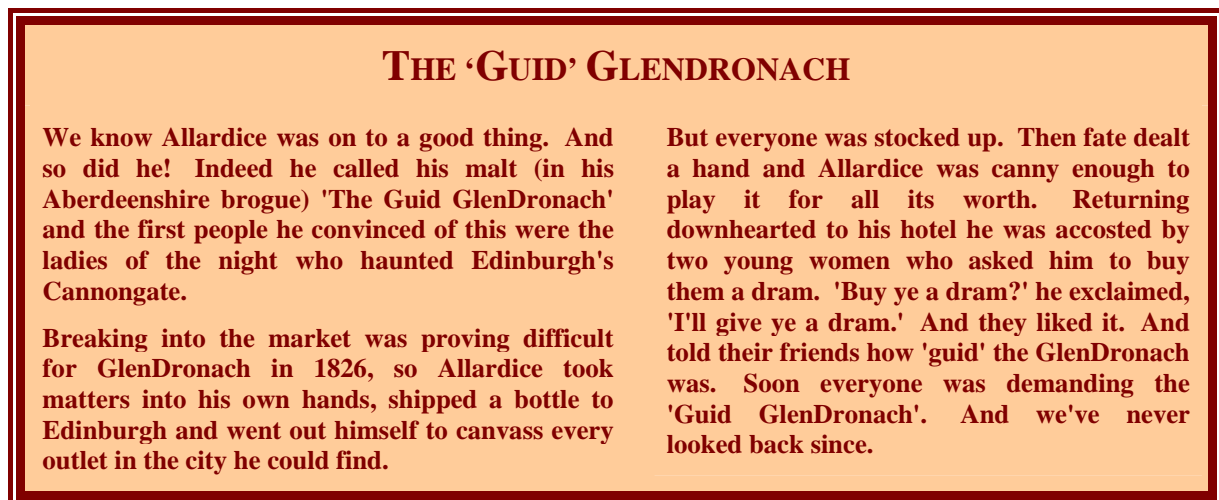
Licensed since 1826.

Forged by Huntly, Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

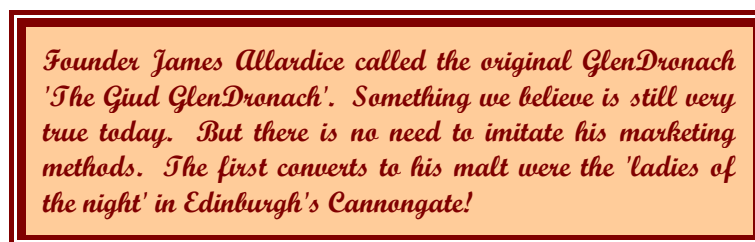
On the back of the packaging tube at the top it says:



At the bottom of the label it says:



The bottle itself also has the James Allardice signature on the front and an abbreviated version of the above story on the back:



The Founder

While the company literature and labels report the founder of the distillery was James Allardice, his name is variously given in whisky guide books and web sites as Allardice, Allardes, and Allardyce, a not unfamiliar situation for those of us bearing the variations in the family name. I have opted to use Allardice in these notes, to avoid arguments in the bottle shop.

However, recent correspondence from Cryle Shand disputes the claims of the company and says he has documentary evidence that the founder was James Allardes. According to Cryle, in an email sent in September 2007:

"I happened to acquire a bottle of the original 12 years old from my cousin Euan Shand of Duncan Taylor & Co, whisky merchants, for using to toast the memory of Alexander Shand on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of his birth this September 2007. I noticed that the signature is shown as "James Allardice" 1780-1849. None of these particulars are correct. His name was James Allardes and he was born in 1772 the eldest son of William Allardes of Boynsmill (1732-1800) from his second marriage, to Katharine Stuart in Parkdargue and Little Fergie. He died on 15th April 1853 at Boynsmill and is buried in the Kirkyard of Inverkeithny little over a mile from the distillery. As for the signature on the bottle, it is a fabrication and bears no resemblance to the several James Allardes signatures which I have ever seen. Indeed, I have several original signatures in my possession. It is unfortunate that a company which produces such an exceptional product should resort to creating an ersatz history when a small amount of research would have produced the correct information.

The reason that the toast was in The Glendronach was that Alexander Shand and James Allardes were great drinking friends and near neighbours of each other and mixed in the same social circles which included the 5th Duke of Gordon. Alexander Shand's cousin, James Crookshank was also for some years in the 1850s a partner in the Glendronach company."

We welcome Cryles contribution and wish him luck in convincing the company to change its version. We have of course requested a scan of the documents he refers to. We are glad that the inaccuracies have not put him off consuming the product.

The material here has primarily assembled from afar using the internet and the labels on the bottles. If you have any further information you would like to add, such as tasting notes on The 33, please forward it to me at the address below.

In the mean time enjoy a dram with a family connection, whatever your spelling.

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