

The GlenDronach – the ‘Allardice’ Scotch Whisky

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GlenDronach is a single malt scotch whisky, produced by *The GlenDronach Distillery Co Ltd* at its distillery in Aberdeenshire. This whisky is of particular interest to Allardices around the world because of the family connection. The Distillery was founded by James Allardice in 1826, although he is referred to on the bottle labels and company literature as James Allardice and the 18 year old GlenDronach whisky is named the ‘Allardice’. To avoid confusion, we will mostly refer to the more modern spelling in this article.

HISTORY OF THE DISTILLERY

Established in 1826 and located at Fergie, Aberdeenshire, approximately 5 miles north-east of Huntly, GlenDronach is classified as a Highland malt. The Distillery is located in an area noted for the number and quality of illicit stills which operated prior to the 1823 Excise Act. GlenDronach was one of the first distilleries licensed under the Act.

The GlenDronach Distillery was founded by James Allardice with a group of astute local farmers and businessmen. The Duke of Gordon (from nearby Huntly) liked the whisky so much that he took James with him to London, to present him to the London gentry. But the success went to Allardice’s head. He neglected his Distillery and in 1837 it was destroyed by a fire. When James was declared bankrupt in 1842, the Distillery was taken over by the remaining owners and operated by one of them, Walter Scott, who worked at the Teaninich Distillery.

The Distillery closed in 1916 and was bought in 1920 by Charles Grant, one of the sons of William Grant of Glenfiddich fame. GlenDronach remained in the Grant family until 1960 when it was sold to *William Teacher & Sons* by George Grant. Teachers doubled the GlenDronach capacity to 4 stills in 1966 but was itself acquired by *Allied Distillers Ltd*. The malt from GlenDronach was used in *Ballantines* and *Teachers Highland Cream* scotch blends.



GlenDronach Distillery



Boynsmill Manor House

The GlenDronach Distillery was put in moth balls in 1995, due to a surplus of cellared stock in barrels, but production resumed in 2002. In 2005, the then owner of GlenDronach, *Allied Domecq* was sold to French company *Pernod-Ricard* and GlenDronach was operated by its scotch whisky subsidiary *Chivas Brothers*.

In August 2008, the *GlenDronach Distillery* was purchased from *Chivas Brothers* by *The BenRiach Distillery Company*. BenRiach is a small independent distillery located in Speyside, just south of Elgin. It was purchased in 2004, also from *Chivas Brothers*, by 3 entrepreneurs, led by scotch whisky industry veteran Billy Walker. BenRiach sees the acquisition of GlenDronach, one of Scotland's oldest licensed distilleries, as complementing the BenRiach brand as a superb high-end quality product.

GlenDronach is once again an independent distillery rather than a small cog in a large conglomerate. BenRiach has already invested £250,000 to relaunch the GlenDronach brand and upgrade the GlenDronach Visitors Centre, which reopened in June 2009.

CONTACT DETAILS

The GlenDronach Distillery
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Web site: www.glendronachdistillery.com

LOCATION

The Distillery is within easy reach of most tourist routes. It is located at Fergie, about 5 miles northeast of Huntly and about 30 miles NW of Aberdeen. It is about an hour's drive from the Allardice historic sites around Inverbervie/Arbuthnot. GlenDronach 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, as shown in the following map.



DESCRIPTION

The GlenDronach 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 on the Boynsmill Estate.

Originally, all of the workers at GlenDronach lived on site, including the distillery manager, staff, excise man, brewer and all of their families. To this day many of the old houses still remain. The most famous of them is the Boynsmill manor house, which was built in 1771 by James' father William Allardes. Renamed Glen House by son James when he established the Distillery, the grand Georgian building has been home to many of the distillery's managers.

Today, Glen House (Boynsmill) is still in excellent condition, with beautifully maintained gardens. It is used for corporate entertainment and is enjoyed by guests from around the world.

The 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.

THE VISITORS CENTRE

The Distillery encourages visitors and the Visitors Centre is open 10:00 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. I can confirm that visitors get a dram to taste and particularly if you are an Allardice. The Visitors Centre stocks a range of GlenDronach souvenir items including GlenDronach tartan scarves, etched whisky glasses and pottery jugs and GlenDronach orange marmalade, not to mention the range of GlenDronach whiskies.

I visited GlenDronach with my wife and two friends in April 2009, having sent an email to

info@glendronachdistillery.co.uk advising that we hoped to visit. Frank Massie, a retired former manager of the Distillery, who acts as an advisor and tour guide, was ready and expecting us. He gave us the most informative distillery tour I have experienced, laced with a lot of information on the Allardice history in the area.

We finished with a dram all round, although I won't disclose which colour GlenDronach bottle it came from.





Copper Stills



Whisky Barrels

Frank is clearly a GlenDronach enthusiast and was excited at the new lease of life the new owners had instilled into GlenDronach and the imminent opening of the new Visitors Centre.

As described below, Frank also took us to the nearby Inverkeithny kirkyard to see the Allardes family grave. He and his wife had scrubbed the table top gravestone clean the night before (not guaranteed for every visitor). This capped off a most memorable day in our visit to the area. Frank also conducts Connoisseurs Tours at the Distillery on Mondays and Wednesdays by arrangement, for a charge of £20/head.

Arrangements for visits to the Distillery can be made by contacting the Distillery by phone or email contact details are given above.



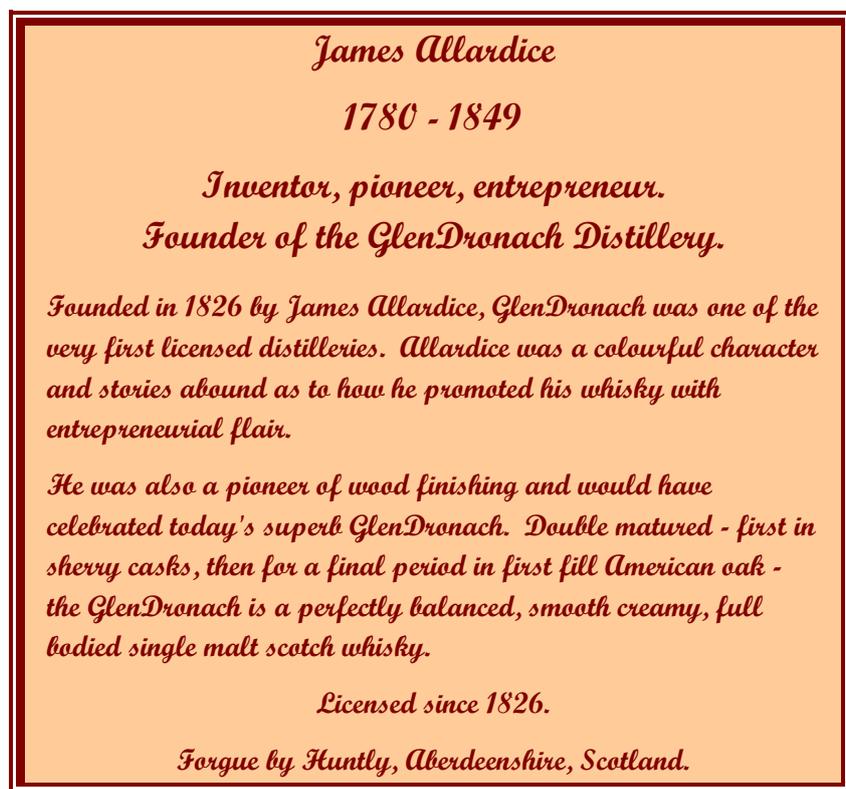
GlenDronach Spirit Safe



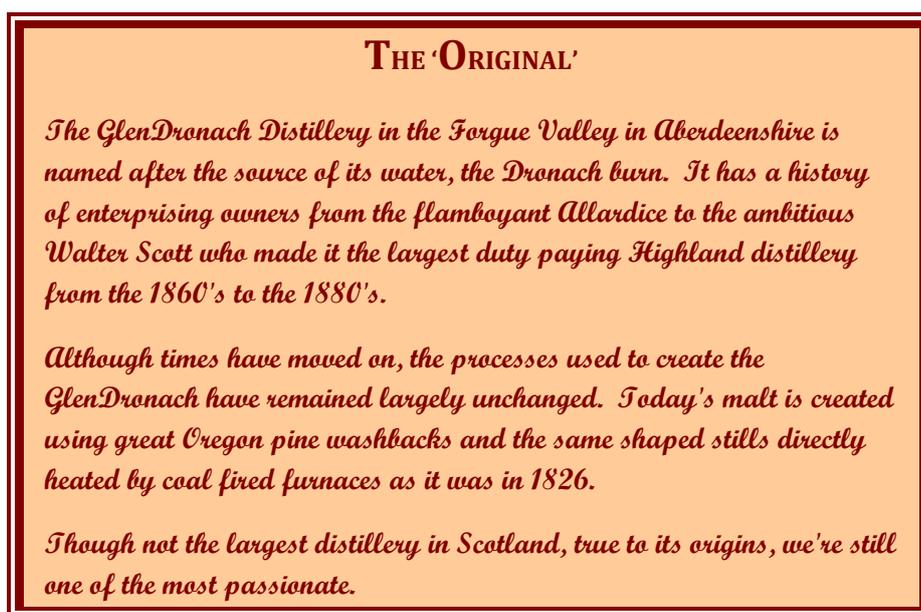
Frank Massie at the cabinet

THE ALLARDICE/GLENDRONACH STORY VIA THE WHISKY LABELS

The GlenDronach whisky packaging tells the story of James Allardice's involvement in establishing GlenDronach as a leading brand of scotch. The packaging for each of the 12, 15 and 18 year old whiskies is similar except for the colour as explained below. For example, the packaging tube for the GlenDronach "Original" has the following text on the front:



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



At the bottom of the label it says:

THE 'GUID' GLENDRONACH

We know Allardice was on to a good thing. And so did he! Indeed he called his malt (in his Aberdeenshire brogue) 'The Guid GlenDronach' and the first people he convinced of this were the ladies of the night who haunted Edinburgh's Cannongate.

Breaking into the market was proving difficult for GlenDronach in 1826, so Allardice took matters into his own hands, shipped a bottle to Edinburgh and went out himself to canvass every outlet in the city he could find.

But everyone was stocked up. Then fate dealt a hand and Allardice was canny enough to play it for all its worth. Returning downhearted to his hotel he was accosted by two young women who asked him to buy them a dram. 'Buy ye a dram?' he exclaimed, 'I'll give ye a dram.' And they liked it. And told their friends how 'guid' the GlenDronach was. Soon everyone was demanding the 'Guid GlenDronach'. And we've never looked back since.

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

Founder James Allardice called the original GlenDronach 'The Guid GlenDronach'. Something we believe is still very true today. But there is no need to imitate his marketing methods. The first converts to his malt were the 'ladies of the night' in Edinburgh's Cannongate!

THE PRODUCTS

The GlenDronach Distillery is famous for producing richly sherried single malt whiskies of inimitable and individual character. In April 2009 the company re-launched the already popular 12 year old 'Original' as well as the return on the iconic older variants - the GlenDronach 15 and 18 year olds. The 15 year old is now named the 'Revival', with a green label, and the latest release, the 18 year old 'Allardice' has a royal blue label.

The 12, 15 and 18 year old expressions come in a packing tube and both the 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 most widely available GlenDronach is the 12 year old Original. (In Australia it is available in duty free shops in 1 litre bottles, or in local bottle shops in 700 ml bottles. It retails in the normal price range for single malt scotch.)

However, if you really want to celebrate a family 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 lacquered wooden case.

A bottle of GlenDronach makes a great Allardice collector's item and a good present for a relative who likes a dram.

The following description of the current GlenDronach product range is reprinted from the company's web site.

THE GLENDRONACH 'ORIGINAL' - 12 YEAR OLD:



This superb richly sherried single malt is matured for at least 12 years in a combination of the finest Spanish Pedro Ximenez and Oloroso sherry casks. Non-chill filtered, of natural colour and bottled at 43%, the GlenDronach 12 year old 'Original' is a sweet, creamy dram.

Tasting Notes

Expression: 12 Year Old

Appearance: Deep amber-red gold.

Nose: Sweet, creamy vanilla, with hints of ginger. Spiced mulled wine and pear.

Palate: Rich, creamy, silky-smooth. Warm, rich oak and sherry sweetness, full mouth feel, raisins and soft fruits. Spicy with medium length and a dry finish.

Conclusions: Long, full and firm, slightly nutty.

THE GLENDRONACH 'REVIVAL' - 15 YEAR OLD:



Renowned amongst many whisky enthusiasts around the world, this remarkable and full bodied malt is matured for a minimum of 15 years in the finest Oloroso sherry casks. Bottled at 46%, the GlenDronach 'Revival' is non chill filtered and of natural colour. A truly excellent single malt.

Tasting Notes

Expression: Revival - 15 Year Old

Appearance: Deep gold with a lovely mahogany heart.

Nose: Incredible concentration of aromas. Treacle toffee and chocolate orange.

Palate: A very dynamic and full bodied dram for its age. Chewy with coffee chocolate and treacle scones.

Conclusions: A veritable feast to enliven the senses.

THE GLENDRONACH 'ALLARDICE' -18 YEAR OLD:



The famous GlenDronach 18 year old, now renamed the 'Allardice', is the third expression in the GlenDronach core range. This exceptional single sherried malt is non chill filtered and of natural colour. Matured in the finest Spanish Oloroso sherry casks and bottled at 46%, this sublime richly sherried malt is truly unforgettable.

Tasting Notes

Expression: Allardice - 18 Year Old

Appearance: Bright deep gold with a tawny centre.

Nose: Sweet aromatics of fudge and muscovado sugar. Fruit compote and glacier Morello cherries provide added complexity.

Palate: Rich dark and seductive. Remarkable flavours of stewed fruits and all-spice marry together with classical aged Oloroso and toasted walnut bread and chocolate orange.

Conclusions: Tremendously complex and long.

THE GLENDRONACH '33' – 33 YEAR OLD



The GlenDronach 33 year old is regarded by many as one of the distilleries greatest releases. Matured in the finest Spanish Oloroso sherry casks, this exquisite malt scored 88/100 in the 2008 Malt Maniac Awards and was described by Jim Murray as a 'Golden nugget of a dram'. This sublime whisky is not to be missed.

Tasting Notes

Expression: 33 Year Old

Appearance: Rich mahogany with a distinctive tawny heart. Viscous and syrupy.

Nose: Pronounced and sweet. Huge and aromatic with a combination of sweet stewed fruits, nuts and chocolate fondant. Alluring.

Palate: This displays real elegance and exudes class. A myriad of spiced fruits drizzled in bitter chocolate sauce. This fronts a second wave of flavours including walnut cake and mocha. Rich and unctuous to the core. An alcoholic liquid dessert.

Conclusions: A masterful dram which pleases the most jaded of palates. Fantastic stuff!

The 33 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.

The company reported 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 and the malting is done by specialist maltsters off-site.

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 one of the many variations in the family name. I have generally opted to use Allardice in these notes, to avoid confusion in the bottle shop.

However, local Scottish genealogist Cryle Shand first alerted us to the fact that the founder of the Distillery spelt his name Allardes not Allardice.

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 a 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 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 thank Cryle for his interest and contribution to setting the records straight.

When I visited the Distillery in April 2009, our tour guide, Frank Massie had located the tablet gravestone on the Allardes family plot referred to by Cryle in the Inverkeithny Kirkyard, a mile or so from the Distillery. He and his wife had scrubbed the moss off the gravestone by torch light the evening before our visit and Frank escorted us to see the stone, as shown in the photographs.



Left: David Allardice at the Inverkeithney Kirkyard gravestone

Below: One of several 'close-ups' of the Allardes tablet gravestone at Inverkeithney



The text from the Inverkeithny gravestone is transcribed below. The original inscription is a mixture of fonts. The line breaks which are shown in the transcription exactly as in the original.

IN MEMORY OF
ANN HENDERSON, SPOUSE OF
WILLIAM ALLARDES OF BOYNS
MILL, WHO DIED 7TH NOVEMBER
1768 AGED 38 YEARS
AND OF THEIR CHILDREN
JANE ALLARDES, WHO DIED 11TH
FEBRUARY 1765 AGED 1 YEAR, AND
ALEXANDER, WHO DIED 4TH MAY
AGED 10 AND HELEN WHO DIED
1ST SEPT 1787 AGED 19.
THE ABOVE NAMED
WILLIAM ALLARDES OF BOYNS
MILL WHO DIED THERE 10TH JUNE
1800 AGED 68.
KATHERINE STUART HIS
SPOUSE WHO DIED 20TH APRIL
1829 AGED 84 YEARS.
JAMES ALLARDES THEIR
ELDEST SON WHO DIED AT
BOYNSMILL 15TH APRIL 1853
AGED 81 YEARS AND
JOHN ALLARDES THEIR
YOUNGEST SON, FARMER, THE
RAICH, WHO DIED THERE 10TH
AUGUST IN 1857 AGED 70 YEARS
ALSO HERE IS INTERRED THE BODY
OF CATHERINE ALLARDES DAU
GHTER OF THE ABOVE W^M ALLARDES
WHO DIED AT BOYNSMILL DEC 18TH 1860
AGED 85 YEARS.
AND ISABELLA ALLARDYCE DIED AT
BOYNSMILL 26TH JUNE 1869 AGED 91 YEARS

It is interesting that the last entry, for Isabella, spells the family name as Allardyce. No year is given for the death of Alexander on 4th May aged 10, but one suspects it is around 1774.

The table below is the deduced family of William (and James) Allardes, based on these inscriptions and other information available through Cryle's records.

By all reports, James was a larger than life figure with many notable achievements, but following the fire at the Distillery in 1837, he and his brother John who occupied The Raich Farm up the hill from the Distillery, were bankrupted in 1842. James then fell on hard times although he continued to live at the Glen House until his death at 81 in 1853.

A more detailed account of his life, achievements and times has been provided separately by Cryle Shand as part of his family history.

Name	Relationship	Born	Died	Age
William Allardes	-	1732	1800	68
Ann Henderson	1st Spouse	1730	1768	38
Jane Allardes	Daughter	1762	1763	1
Alexander Allardes	Son	1764?	1774?	10
Elizabeth Davidson (buried elsewhere)	Daughter	1766?	?	?
Helen Allardes	Daughter	1768	1787	19
Katherine Stuart	2nd Spouse	1742	1826	84
James Allardes	Son	1772	1853	81
Catherine Allardes	Daughter	1775	1860	85
<i>Isabella Allardyce</i>	<i>Daughter(?)</i>	<i>1778(?)</i>	<i>1869</i>	<i>91(?)</i>
John Allardes	Son	1787	1857	70