

THE HEART OF THE RUN

VOL. #

2

 Irish
Whiskey
Society™

Spirits of the South

“Continuing our Distillery pilgrimage, we duly arrived at Cork, surnamed the “Beautiful City”, the capital of the county, and charmingly situated on the River Lee. The poet Spenser thus describes the river: “The spreading Lee, that like an island fayre, encloseth Corke with his divided flood.”

— The Whisky Distilleries of the United Kingdom, 1886

So sang the watery-eyed (and probably well buckled) Alfred Barnard upon his arrival to the People’s Republic at the height of Irish distilling’s last great flood. In Alfred’s day, the banks of the Lee were wet with more than just water as the Watercourse and North Mall distilleries supplied the city’s harbour with some of the finest Munster distillates honest money could buy. Beyond the island fayre, rural producers like Bandon and Glen (one of only two Irish distilleries dedicated strictly to single malts at the time) kept alive a rebel tradition of excellence that ran all the way back to the time of Spenser himself, when thirty two gallons of the Earl of Cork’s own Usquebaugh stocked the last New World voyage of Spenser’s friend Walter Raleigh.

But even by Barnard’s time, Munster’s spirituous liquids were fairly on the rocks. Struggling to compete with blended scotch, Dublin pot still, and even imported rum, the southern spirit had been hit earlier and harder than its northern sisters with several of Cork City’s famed distilleries already closed and the lingering effects of both the Famine and Father Mathew’s Total Abstinence Society still keenly felt. Nobody in the industry would have been likely to predict in 1886 that, ninety years later, the last great stand of Irish distilling would pitch camp in Middleton rather than on Bowe Street – and few of those pitching that camp could have envisaged the flood of southern spirits that we see pouring forth in 2015. From craft distilleries in Kerry and Waterford to world-class bartending across the province to the jaw dropping (or rather filling) work of our own Corkonian chapter, the heart of Munster whiskey is beating firmly once again. As Ireland’s wider whiskey eruption keeps on rising, the south have made it clear that, well beyond Middleton, Munster distillations will be driving the ensuing downpour. This issue of *The-Heart of The Run* is dedicated to the great work of both our own Corkonian branch and the movers and shakers currently at work in Irish whiskey’s southern currents.

As before, we’ve divided the newsletter, like a freshly cut distillate, between a “Heads” up (nationwide reminders about specific tastings, events, and IWS developments), the “Hearts” of the news (Whiskey world

news and interviews) and “**Tales**” (trivia, in-depth looks at topics from whiskey history or production, and special contributions from members or guest bloggers). We would like to remind the membership that *any* members who would like to contribute photos, possible topics, opinionated rants, articles or even just requests are openly encouraged to do so. This is your newsletter and if there’s anything you want to see it covering, please get in touch with us at newsletter@irishwhiskeysociety.com.

Sláinte!

HEADS UP!

UPCOMING WHISKEYEVENTS

DUBLIN EVENT: (NEARLY) BURNS NIGHT WITH CHARLES MACLEAN AND THE SMWS - JANUARY 28TH, WYNN’S HOTEL

Happy New Years! For any o ye traddies who rang in Hogmanay wi’ a well whisky’d round o’ Auld Lang Syne, ye’ll be fain to lear we’ve a bonnie calendar lined up full o more o the same an aw. But, as the baird laureate o the above Scots leid once wrote, “*the best laid schemes o’ mice and men gang aft agley*” so, all leids and lead-ons sincerely aside, we’re going to hit the ground running with a Robbie Burns Night scotch tasting in the company of world class critic Charles MacLean and the Scottish Malt Whiskey Society, which he currently chairs. For those of you unfamiliar with our distant Scottish cousins, the SMWS was founded in the late 1970s by Phillip “Pip” Hills and a small group of like-minded spirits in an even smaller kitchen with a large bottle of Glenfarclas drawn straight from the cask. Today, their headquarters in Leith is home to a reservoir of staggering expressions from across Scot-

land’s maltscape and their sleek, dark green bottles have become liquid icons of Scotland’s finest fluids. Tonight, we’ll be tasting MacLean’s hand selected range from those same members-only bottlings as he walks us through the nooks and crannies of his national nectar with a depth and insight afforded by a lifetime in the heart of whiskey criticism. The author of numerous classics such as *Whiskypedia* and *Whisky: A Liquid History*, MacLean is a living legend on the Scottish whisky stage and it is our absolute pleasure to invite him and his society to Dublin for what we’re very confident will be a night to remember and the beginning of an Auld Acquaintance n’er forgot in new years to come.

CORK EVENT: OLD BUSHMILLS – A TASTE OF WHISKEY HISTORY, JANUARY 29TH, COUGHLANS

A satisfying sup of Bushmills 21 Year Old at our luxury Irish event in September sparked the idea for a proper Old Bushmills tasting. A chance encounter with Mr. Seamus Lowry of Bushmills distillery sealed the deal and we now look forward with much anticipation to this long overdue tasting. Bushmills have been around for hundreds of years and are purveyors of a choice selection of Irish whiskeys including the ever-popular Black Bush blend, the Bushmills 16 Year Old Malt and of course the marvelous 21 Year Old Malt.

Seamus has promised to impress us with his selection on the night and as an added bonus we are dipping into the private collection of one of our Committee members to sample a rare Bushmills Millennium 1975 Single Cask bottle and a Bushmills 1608 400th Anniversary Limited Edition which was produced with crystal malt! So please join us at Coughlans on Friday, January 29th for what we’re sure will be a tasting to remember.

SOUTHEASTERN EVENT: SECOND CHAPTER TASTING, FEBRUARY 8TH, THE REG

From Kilkenny to Carlow and from Wexford to Waterford, the sunny southeast is back on form! Our first tasting of 2016 will take place in The Reg in Waterford on Monday, February 8th and doors are welcome to all interested whiskey lovers, regardless of what county (or even province) you hail from. All are welcome and an even wider range of whiskeys will be sampled by all; guest speakers will step forward to give a few words on each bottle and we promise that plenty of craic will be had by all who attend. As the southeastern chapter is still in its early days, a booking page hasn't been set up on the main society website yet but all tickets can be purchased either on the night or through Willie Murphy (who coincidentally has some rather grand drams lined up for the proceedings) at liamriomurchu@gmail.com. See you there!

SPECIAL EVENT: (NEARLY) BEHAN NIGHT WITH THE PALACE BAR – (WEEK OF FEBRUARY 9TH, DATE TO BE CONFIRMED)

As a follow-up hooley to the far more familiar Burns Night, we'll be toasting the birth of a whiskey-loving writer of our own at The Palace Bar, where he was once barred for calling Mr. Aherne's grandfather a Tipperary bollocks. It's been a long while since Behan was thrown out so, working under the assumption that the statute of limitations has run out by 2016, we'll be re-inviting the ghost of Brendan to a special IWS launch of the Aherne pub's new port-tinted Teeling commemorating their own pub's rich literary heritage. From the cigar-thumbing Irish Times editor Bertie Smylie who once held court in the bar's press-infested "alligator pit" to the infamous satirist Myles na gCopaleen (A.K.A. Flann O'Brien) who infamously drank whiskey with gloves on after promising his dying mother he would never touch another glass, the

Palace has plenty of colourful (and in Behan's case often very colourful) language behind it already but we'll still be inviting members to come forward with all your party pieces, pub stories, and general craic for a laidback walk through the impressive pub exclusives on their shelves. Readings, stories, songs, and renditions of The Auld Triangle all welcome. No literary or musical qualifications required...

DUBLIN EVENT: EARTHLY POWERS, FEBRUARY 25TH, WYNN'S HOTEL

Lathery, knife-and-fork necessitating, leathery Johns Lane. It's been a modern Irish classic and a society staple virtually since the day of its release. But that same earthy tobacco and almond bristle that sent new flavour shockwaves through Irish distilling in 2011 was once the dominant style of pre-blended Dublin, when names like John Power & Son were inseparably tied to darker tones of old Irish oils and densely textured distillate-driven pot still tipples. When the old Johns Lane distillery closed down and the new blended Powers took centre stage, it may have looked like those oily polishes were just one more artifact of a distant, different, Dublin and a slowly fading age. Today, however, those same flavour phantoms are beginning to look slightly more like forerunners of Ireland's new vanguard of flavour-forward oils and spices, with several new heavyweights all joining the fight under the John Power flag. From specialty bottlings to an expanding range of core expressions, it's clear that the brand is once again a Power to be reckoned with. Join international brand ambassador Gerard Garland and our own Powers-full regular Willie Murphy for a nightlong ode to Powers past and present as we toast the very promising future of this venerable old brand and the classic full-bodied flavours it continues to champion.

The *Hearts*, distilled

Whispers in Waterford: A Diageo Corpse with a Bruichladdich Pulse



“Don’t forget the story about the man who suddenly got everything he wanted.”

‘What happened to him?’

‘He lived happily ever after.’”

That might sound like the summary sales pitch for the recently purchased Waterford Brewery, but it’s actually taken from Willy Wonka’s ambiguous congratulations to little heart-of-gold orphan Charlie Bucket at the end of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Having resisted the lures of the candy factory, Bucket is handed the keys by its eccentric chocolatier with just a lightly sugarcoated warning about fulfillment and desire. Those of you familiar with the fable and those of you famil-

iar with Bruichladdich distillery I hope won’t mind as I draw the easiest analogy in the world of Scotch whisky. For years, the “Progressive Hebridean Distillers” – with their inexhaustible entourage of oddball releases – were essentially the Wonkas of the Islay single malts. On an island famed for a specific style of smoky spirit, Laddie ignored the script to produce pretty much anything they thought might work: the quadruple distilled X4, organic Islay Barley, bog-breaking Octomore, everlasting gobstoppers and

many more besides. Famously playful, infamously interesting, and notoriously averse to Scotland's wider marketing tides, "Laddie" shed water in more than a few dram-dammed eyes when, in 2012, the entire operation was sold to Remy Cointreau. We've been promised, of course, that quality will continue as usual but, to those with a soft spot for Laddie's old ethos, it still feels a little like big multinational Slugworth's finally bought the factory while Willy's discreetly packed in his candy bags.

*"I spent two years licking my wounds."
"Someone said it was like a bereavement—I was going through the standard procedure of grieving."
"I still had work to do."*

No, that's not Wonka again. That's ex-Bruichladdich capo Mark Reynier recounting the fateful board meeting and vote while walking a few members of our southeastern chapter around his recently purchased Waterford Brewery. Having fallen off the radar for the past few years, Reynier recently resurfaced in southeast Munster, where he intends to distill the greatest Irish malt ever poured into a glass and where he caused a fair bit of a surface stir with some outspoken comments on the rest of Irish whiskey. Rejecting what he calls the "sweet and simplistic" values of the existing heavyweights, Reynier claims that he'll be the man to re-inject the "mind-fuckery" back into our national fluid. Personally, I was of the opinion that, even if the puritanical tastes of a Scotch-only orgy might not be privy to them, we've had plenty of our own little epicurean epiphanies on this island before.

"Oh. He's mad. Everybody knows it. He's just mad," an industry worker assured me when the subject came up. (To be fair, that's eerily close to what was said about Wonka.) Like more than a few of our society members, I'd read Reynier's remarks when they first appeared and found the assessments nauseatingly condescending for a newly landed Scotch business exile. At the same time, like

fellow visitors Willie Murphy and Eoin O'Neill, I was still a little curious about where exactly those sentiments had settled. To set the record straight, we paid a drop in call to Waterford to find out.

I'm still not convinced that they've settled in Ireland. With equal parts contempt and exasperation for the major players of both his adopted spirits scene and the conglomerated Scotch business he's left behind, Reynier's new venture is closer to an Independent People's Republic of Whiskey that just happens to have pitched its defenses in Ireland. With an irony Roald Dahl would have probably appreciated, those defenses were built from the industrial ruins of Diageo's remains. With some ugly reworked equipment from the abandoned Phoenix brewery and a payroll filled with the very employees left hanging by its loss, Reynier's disdain for the building's old ghosts still swells from a firebrand commitment to production integrity and flavour (rather than finance) grounded innovation. Not only has he brought the values of old Bruichladdich with him, he's equipped them with a battle plan outlined by the pitfalls of its past.

"Everything I did there [Islay] was an uphill battle... We've already done more here than we did at Bruichladdich in years." Railing against marketing blarney and the divvied up distribution trade's "massive pipeline straight into your gob", Mark walked us past his newly imported French oak casks beneath the suspicious gaze of of Arthur Guinness via a gable end portrait from the site's former owners. *"I'm going to be introducing Ireland to wood the like of which the whiskey world has never seen,"* he remarked with a wave.

With a background as firmly rooted in the wine world as the spirits scene, Mark not only hopes to maintain rigorous cask standards but to draw from the grape trade's wood research to break new barriers between spirit and cask. *"The oak policy of the 70s and 80s was crap,"* he

recapped once we'd returned to his office. *"Everybody relied on chill-filtration and caramel."* Although barrels have improved, Reynier insists that the real problem (and its cure) is more deeply seeded again. *"It's about traceability. It's about provenance."* From the soil the grains were grown in to the vintner who seasoned the cask, Reynier wants to create a production-led view of organic distillation with one eye fixed on where his raw materials are coming from and another eye fixed on how creatively they're being put to use. As far as he's concerned, that currently isn't being done by internationals on either side of the Irish sea.

So what exactly will Waterford do differently? In answer to that question, Mark pulled up a detailed map not only marking the locations of the individual farmers from whom he intends to source his barley but the soil type and varieties of the grains they'll be growing. *"The grain is directly responsible for the complexity of the malt. I want to make the most profound whiskey ever distilled. To do that I need a portfolio of component whiskeys and that's where the barley comes in."* That's how he talks about pretty much every stage in the making of his malt. Biodynamic barley. Flavour-veined oak from well sourced vintners. Distillations and vatting that will compliment those components and well-shaped pot stills that will produce the spirit he believes will redefine the rulebook of the industry itself.

Until recently, what Mark refers to as the 'market-ing-led' paradigm could say what it liked to an admiring public. *"The difference today is this!"* Admiringly holding his iPad in the air, Mark's expression turned from exasperation to triumphant satisfaction. Brands and distilleries can still say whatever they like, he continued, but consumers can now check those facts against blogs and reviews with the click of a button and, despite the marketable allure of the Highlands or the pure mountain dew, a whiskey of hardline provenance is long overdue. *"Today*



we need to prove what we're saying. We need to be able to prove why the price tag is there. You go to Ferrari in Milan and you can meet the bloody cow whose leather's going to be stretched over the driver's seat." That's the kind of distillate Reynier wants to make and that's the kind of spirit he'd had in mind for Bruichladdich when it sold— But unlike Wonka's wonder-man who got everything he wanted, Mark was outvoted and found himself twitching with a project still unfinished. With the drive still there, he's gone back to the start to distill it from scratch. Islay's loss is Ireland's gain.

So if not the whiskey, what drew him west? The simple answer is that, competition aside, Ireland's gain is Ireland's grain. *"A friend had told me the best barley he had ever seen came from Ireland."* The point stuck in his mind like a well planted seed and today he's convinced that the sunny southeast is the finest barley region in Europe. With Scotland packed with rivals and his heart re-set on a biodynamic distillate, in Reynier's mind there was no other option... Of course, like the seeds of the barley he sees producing it, the roots of that project stretch even deeper once again. Long before Bruichladdich, his time in the wine business exposed him to a paradigm of ter-

roir that has since fueled his vision for single malts. After his independent bottling enterprise Murray McDavid brought him into intimate proximity with samples from across the maltscape, his resolve only hardened to redefine what he already calls the most complex spirit ever known to man. *“The wine and whiskey trades absolutely hate each other, by the way. Each one has what the other one wants. One has huge money and no knowledge. The other has knowledge and no money.”*

Outspoken words again. Luckily, this is neither an industry magazine nor a trade society and what most of our members really want to discuss is the whiskey itself. Whether you agree with his prides or his prejudices, his vision for Waterford seems incorruptibly pure. If he puts his fluids where his mouth is, it'd be a bitter tippler indeed who'd refuse to swallow. As we left the gates of the gritty looking premises Mark calls his 'industrial translator', I couldn't help feeling a deep respect for the plans on the table. We argued for another week's worth of emails about the rest of Irish whiskey (a discussion only aborted by the promise of a tasting) but when it comes down to it, there's still a Wonka-like madness to the prospects of his own. Imagined like chocolate and designed like wine. But maybe chocolate and wine have been the wrong analogies all along. Whatever Reynier's views on the liquid landscape of his adopted isle, his new distillery's attitude might be better compared to that French oak's other great national product. Cheese. It may smell a little offputtingly rotten, but the point is that it's rotten in all the right ways. Whatever he's making, I'll gladly take Waterford rancor over rancid marketing any day I'm drinking and, regardless of their place in the new Irish network, the scope of Irish whiskey will be better for Waterford. When I asked Reynier if there were any other new distillers that had caught his attention, his reply seemed as bewildered as the promised effects of his forthcoming malt.

“Should I? Honestly, I wish them all the very best of luck but we've got work to do.”

THE MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE: A LIQUID TOUR THROUGH MIDLAND DISTILLING

He may not be in Munster but congratulations are still in order to Ken Quinn, our man in the midlands, for a fantastic society field trip to the old Kilbeggan distillery, the new Tullamore Dew distillery, and the historical whiskey hotspots of his hometown Tullamore. Undoubtedly one of the highlights of our 2015 Calendar, the liquid weekend was even more rewarding than either Ken's months of preparation or the sell-out ticketing suggested! Aside from coordinating drivers, arranging discounts at the local Bridge Hotel, and collaborating with the Offaly Historical Society for a full tour of Tullamore's liquid history, Ken worked tirelessly with our friends in William Grant and Cooley to ensure a full reception with plenty of enticing fluids on both sides of the Offaly border. From all of us in the society— thank you Ken. For anyone looking to put together an expedition of their own, here is the mark to aim for and don't be shy about shooting something off next year!

So what exactly is running off the stills out there? By the looks (and taste) of things, quite a lot! On pulling into the parking lot of the revamped Tullamore visitors' centre on Friday morning, we were divided into two alternating groups to tour either the recently remodeled visitors centre or the off-limits innards of the newly built distillery just outside the town. Although most of our readers are probably far more curious about the latter, it's worth mentioning that the visitors' centre is really a rather noteworthy signpost of midland Tully's global appeal. Outfit-



ted with sliding doors to vat-shaped spaces, alternating projections of charismatic front man John Quinn talking about his “triple blend”, and an audio-visual fanfare lifted from the playbook of a Universal Studios theme park, the new centre not only leaves the set up of its big brand rivals looking plainer than porter but is clearly intended to leave a Tully-tinted stain on the memories of the busloads of tourists they’re expecting to attract. From a marketing perspective, it’s clear from the moment you enter the gift shop that Grant and Sons believe in their new brand.

Indeed, Grants’ deliberately modern marketing of what was once a dusty old brand is possibly the loudest commercial call of confidence in Irish whiskey’s anticipated boom. Once relegated to a few mid-shelf labels and the no-mans land between Midleton distillation and C&C ownership, Tully today boasts a wide shelf of blends, malts, and unusual cask finishes with a cathedral sized distillery pumping out the makings of a future solely managed by the new owners themselves. As the world’s number two Irish seller, it’s the likeliest label to break new ground after category heavyweight Jameson... And if Irish whiskey is going to continue its staggering growth, it’ll need more big names than Jemie to build that future and more fluids than Midleton’s to meet the ensuing demand. Far beyond the Tullamore warehouses, the fact that those stocks are even there is invaluable to the bloodstream of Irish distilling as a business.

So lets talk about that new supply. Having completed our visitors’ centre tour, my own half of the group were met by Mr. Quinn himself and bussed out for a look into what exactly that new distillery was producing that morning. Surrounded by flatland bog and slated with a pale stone exterior, the new distillery cuts an impressive figure on the Offaly skyline. Inside, four bulbous pot stills are already hard at work condensing newmake (with two distinctly shaped low wines stills for single malt and single pot still production) while space has been set aside for another row of pots to allow them to produce both styles in tandem. Beyond the pots, a larger column still operation and some new bonded warehouses are all being laid down for what will soon be one of Ireland’s main production centres. After a full tour of the facility and a taste of some rather fine fluids from John’s personal cask, we returned to the visitors’ centre to regroup for a second leg session at the nearby Kilbeggan distillery.

If you want to get a glimpse into Irish distilling’s future, visit Tullamore. If you want to get a smell of its industrial past, go to Kilbeggan. Any members who have made the trip out will be familiar with the arcane atmosphere of Ireland’s oldest working whiskey buildings. The hulking relics of machine-age industry and the smells of revamped small batch fermentation fit together like fluid and cask and, as delightful as the place looks and smells when left to its own archaic devices, our visit today was made all the more sensory by some gorgeous samples from the back coat pockets of Cooley brand capo John



Cashman, who took time off to show us all personally around the stocks. With glasses pulled from experimentally triple distilled Connemara to our own society cask, Cashman had clearly set out to showcase the more secretive crevices of Cooley's whiskey well.

For those unfamiliar with unbottled treasures like the once-off Irish rye or the revivalist Kilbeggan mash bills, its worth mentioning that there really are a few odd corners to Irish whiskey's most commonly drawn on warehouse well. Although the once overflowing experimentation became somewhat scarce last year as Beam-Suntory tightened the reigns (and the bottling contracts) to focus on core brands, Cashman is confident that the special stocks we tasted have a bright future ahead of them and that creative Cooleys will be back on stream with the rest of Irish whiskey's promised future. The decision of perennial Jim Beam arch-nemesis Brown Foreman (i.e. Jack Daniels) to build their own Irish distillery in nearby Slane seems to have startled a few executives in Kentucky and, although it'll still be a while before anything we tasted finds its way into a bottle, the fluids themselves will certainly be worth the glassware when it happens. "When all these new distilleries have their first three year old pot stills ready at last, we'll just be sitting on even older casks of this stuff!"

Cashman remarked enthusiastically. As for our own society cask, members will be glad to know that our rather quirky Kilbeggan (60% malt, 35% raw barley, 5% oats) is maturing just fine in a fresh bourbon cask and, although we've similarly no intention of bottling it for another few long years at the very least, when we finally do, there'll be plenty to celebrate.

Speaking of celebration, the midland visit finished off back in Tullamore town with a full flight tasting of Tullamore Dew's most recent expressions and a wonderful walk around the old Egans and Williams buildings (courtesy of the Offaly Historical Society) full of strange stories about illicit underground whiskey pipes and close inspections of the stonewall remnants of what was once (and with a little Grant injection might hopefully become again) one of Irish whiskey's most well known towns. With the evening capped off by an informal society pub-crawl around the local bars and plenty of banter about what exactly we'd all been tasting during the day, it's a weekend I doubt will quickly be forgotten by any of its attendees. By the state of what we'd actually seen, however, I similarly doubt it will be terribly long before we find ourselves revisiting the far from still still houses of the Irish midlands.

A *Southern Wind blows* North at The *Irish Whiskey Awards*

In our last issue of *The Heart of the Run*, we found ourselves prowling the floor for feedback at the launch of the new Teeling Distillery and it looked like they'd filled the place to boiling point with people and buzz. Turn off the music, sit everyone down, and boil that buzz to a point of outright distillation and you'll be close to the feeling of this year's Irish Whiskey Awards,

which the same distillery very kindly hosted just last month. Now in its third year, the Irish Whiskey Awards has cemented its place as the landmark accolade in contemporary Irish spirits and, thankfully for ourselves, all society members are among the slim connoisseurship invited to participate in the blind tastings that decided them. There's no charge to put a whiskey up for consideration, ticket pro-

ceeds go to charity, and the categories are diverse enough to provide a well-rounded window into what's worth drinking in the country today.

Regardless of the winners, Irish whiskey is obviously doing well. With category giants sitting side by side with rebellious micros, craft-driven bartenders, association reps and even the odd IWS member who made sure to grab a ticket, the sold-out ceremony has not only given the whiskey business a blind evaluation of its annual production stream but an opportunity to bring rivals and customers close together to talk about where that stream is actually flowing. With a comedy-and-controversy salted lecture on global whiskey commerce from old industry upstart John Teeling, the night was extremely well presented and principal architect Ally Alpine had clearly put in work to make sure his awards were granted as professionally as they'd been determined. To everyone who walked home with glassware, keep up the astounding work.

In keeping with this issue's chosen theme, Munster clearly left the capital with plenty to toast. Aside from the more predictable success of industry-leading Middleton, who took home the coveted 'whiskey of the year' award for Redbreast 21, Waterford's Blackwater Distillery

walked away with best gin (*Thin Gin*), Dick Mack's pub in Kerry claimed the 'best whiskey bar in Ireland' award for the second year running, and even the Kerry-inspired Dingle Whiskey Bar (spearheaded by Corkonian exile Tom O'Connor) surprisingly took the prize for the Leinster trophy. As a follow-up to last issue's article on 2014 Leinster winners The Palace Bar, we also sat down with last year's Munster and overall bar winner Dick Mack's shortly before Finn MacDonnell managed to bring home the national Glencairn for its second stint in Kerry.

Of course, two years on a MacDonnell shelf isn't really all that long from the point of view of the shelf. Founded in 1899 as a leatherworks shop and one-tap pint dispensary by Finn's great-grandfather Tom, the "Mack" house has a very long heritage behind it, but its relationship with the hard stuff really only began a few years ago with MacDonnell the Younger's return from college and his decision, in the early days of Dingle's newly constructed distillery, to invest in a few new bottles for those same old shelves. Aided by society president Peter White, Finn has since built that very honestly priced collection (6.50 for a Johns Lane!) from half a bottle of Laphroaig to one of the most impressive whiskey lists in Ireland and he's been keen to equip it with corresponding tastings to share with his visitors what exactly he has in stock. "It was all a bit of a gamble," MacDonnell admitted. *"I had to go through my dad and [uncle] Oliver, who'd be wary about the money in it or about changing the bar too much. It's like every generation – I'll probably be the same down the line. But to be fair, dad got right behind it and now he's delighted with the whole thing. Along the way I met loads of odd people who were incredibly helpful— Willie [Murphy] and all of ye in the whiskey society, Ally Alpine and the lads in the Celtic Whiskey Shop – you'd go up to Dublin for a few bottles and they'd remember your name. They'd come down. They'd be in here and they'd talk to you about what you're doing."*

For all the bottles and all the shelves, it's people that



have really built the pub into one of Ireland's most interesting whiskey wells and it's the spirit of the people involved, from international dram hunters to enthusiastic locals, that still defines its success from Finn's point of view. *"What I love about it at the end of the day is that, well, bar work can get very boring after a long shift..."* he admits with a slight bit of a smile, *"but with the whiskey, you're meeting different people all the time who want to talk about a particular bottle and you've a lot more going on behind the bar. I've gotten into chatting with all kinds of locals, barmen, Germans, Americans... everyone really. You're educating people. You're changing the way they look at what they order."* For those of you who haven't been down already, it'd be a dour reader indeed who got through a dram in Dick Mack's without a conversation on the side. Filled with local characters oiled with strong opinions (and whiskey of course,) the pub's appreciation of the new project's spirit isn't restricted to what's on the shelves but those shelves have built an ideal companion to the spirit of the place.

Despite a little early hesitation, Finn assures us that his regulars have fallen just as deep into the new pool of bottles as any of his newcomers or visiting whiskeyphiles. *"We'd have some old fellows who've been drinking Jameson all their lives. Now they're ordering Teeling Small Batch"* he remarks. *"You'd come in with a new bottle and as soon as they'd hear a clink they'd be shouting 'ah you'll have to open that now! Quality control!' – But even that'd come back to you. Half an hour later, you might have a family from America coming in and the same fellows will be telling them 'oh you have to try that new Teeling that's just come in.' They're loving it. There's more life in the bar and the whiskey becomes a talking point for them."*

That's saying a fair bit for a pub in which everybody is doing exactly that. Talking points abound on the Dick Mack's floor and, even without the whiskey, the chatter on the barstools seems to be flowing from a never end-

ing cask. I was a little startled last year that the far-flung Dingle pub had garnered enough attention to win the national title but, given the interest, the energy, and above all, the discussion it devotes (both through Finn and his customers) to its newfound spirit, I can't say I was terribly surprised for long. When this particular conversation turned to the upcoming awards, Finn's face changed from the casual grin of someone discussing a favourite talking point to the determined focus of a mid-match captain counting up his points. *"I feel like we've done an awful lot of work behind the bar,"* he remarked with his hands tapping the table after each successive point.

"We've trained the lads. We've written up menu. We've our own glencairns and we're more clued in. We know how to talk to people about it." But even in the grip of competitive focus, that instinctual grin wasn't too long gone as his clear love for his bar-work crept back into his eyes. *"They can all handle it. I love when I come into work a little late and I look round and there are people around with their own dram. I know that even if I'm not there, the lads will work away and take care of them. I'm going to Islay again this year and I want to do the Kentucky bourbon trail. It's a bit like a runaway train really. In the beginning we were afraid to buy a bottle and now you can just feel the momentum pushing it."* (Then with all focus facially returned,) *"A year ago we were just happy to be here. This year we want to win it."*

Luckily for MacDonnell, his wish came true. That conversation being had, it was a long night from any angle and, from the talk round the neighbouring tables, it sounds like more than a few publicans are already looking to get their trains in motion for the race next year. You could easily discuss the frontrunners for the next twelve months, but, for all the talk in Dingle, Dublin, or anywhere else, whoever takes whatever trophies home in 2016, the only winners who can rest assured of another easy victory are Irish whiskey drinkers like ourselves.

The Untold Tales

The Spirits of the South

By Eric Ryan

There is a long and proud tradition of distilling spirits in the Irish south. In 1608 the first official licence to distil in Ireland was not, as some claim, granted by the Lord Deputy Sir Arthur Chichester to Ulster, but rather it was granted to a Mr. Charles Waterhouse in Munster. Just a few years later in Youghal, East Cork, Richard Boyle, the 1st Earl of Cork, and friend of Sir Walter Raleigh, noted in his diary of 20th March, 1617 what is probably the first recorded export of whiskey or “Choice Aquavite” to America. Nevertheless, long established trading routes with France, Spain and the West Indies meant that, until the dawn of the 19th century, brandy and rum remained the most popular spirits in the south of this isle.

The association today, however, is quite different—with a notional nod to Cork Dry Gin before complete deference to the plethora of quality Irish whiskeys that pour forth from the hungry stills at Irish Distiller’s Middleton distillery. Jameson, Redbreast, Powers, Green Spot and Yellow Spot are whiskeys now bred in East Cork, although each retains a distinctive Dublin story. To truly determine the archetypal spirits of the south, it is necessary to dig that little bit deeper to unearth whiskeys exhibiting uniquely southern dispositions in both heart and soul.

WISE’S CORK OLD POT STILL WHISKEY

It was 1779 — one year before Bow Street passed into the hands of a certain Mr. John Jameson, when two enterprising brothers, Thomas and Francis Wise, erected a Leaside distillery that would thrive in a city soon to become, at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the pre-eminent producer of legal whiskey in Ireland. From 1827 until the mid-nineteenth century, Wise’s output was the largest in Cork and at its height, North Mall distillery, as it had become known, employed some 250 persons. Their best known brand was “Wise’s Cork Old Pot Still Whiskey” which enjoyed a terrific reputation and was sold locally by the cask or bottled for export, when five years old, at 10° under proof (approximately 51%abv).

In 1867, and in an early sign of things to come for the whiskey industry, an amalgamation of a number of Cork distilleries, including North Mall and Middleton, took place to form Cork Distilleries Company (CDC).

CORK DISTILLERIES COMPANY OLD IRISH WHISKY – “PADDY CENTENARY”

It was December 1882 when a gregarious young gentleman of thirty-two years joined the Cork Distilleries Company to work as a ‘traveller’ or sales rep. The name of this eager fellow was Patrick O’ Flaherty, commonly known as Paddy Flaherty, a larger than life character who liked to do things his own way. Although small in stature, Paddy had that rare ability of attracting instant attention when he entered a room. Always neat, well groomed and ‘dapper’, he had an admirable habit of wearing a carnation or other such flower on his lapel. When making his rounds, Paddy travelled by train and onwards by pony and trap to the nearest town or village. Having sent word of his expected arrival, he was inevitably greeted by eager locals, only too aware of

his famed reputation of standing all and sundry a few rounds of *Cork Distilleries Company Map of Ireland Old Irish Whisky*.

Paddy was off to be heard leading the inevitable sing-song with his favourite ballad “Carrigdhoun”, ironically penned by a famous Cork distiller and Young Irelander of a previous generation (Denny Lane of the Riverstown distillery). Perhaps he enjoyed the ‘craic’ a little too much, as when doling out complimentary nips of CDC’s delectable pot still whisky he invariably outspent his limited expenses account. Paddy’s perennial antics, including constantly seeking pay rises, would often upset the CDC Board of Management and he was warned, on more than one occasion, about his behaviour. It soon became clear, however, that the company better let him at it, as the orders began flooding in for “*Paddy Flaherty’s whisky*”. His unorthodox methods had clearly created a taste amongst the punters for this North Mall spirit. To his adoring public, *Paddy Flaherty* and *Cork Distilleries Company Old Irish Whisky* was one and the same thing, and CDC finally decided in 1913 to splash a label along the bottom of the bottle that proclaimed this whisky as the genuine article because it now bore, for the first time, the Paddy Flaherty signature of approval.

At the time of the adoption of the Paddy Flaherty labelling, *Cork Distilleries Company Old Irish Whisky* was aged for at least seven years. To celebrate the centenary of this event, in 2013 Irish Distillers released a new limited edition Single Pot Still. *Paddy Centenary* is a fantastically fresh and fruity pot still whisky that remains historically accurate to the seven year old pure pot still recipe and the use of *Cork Distilleries Company Old Irish Whisky* and distinctive map of Ireland imagery on the labelling.

There is a particular emphasis on the southern traditions of this brand through the use of the provincial Munster spelling of “whisky” as opposed to the “whiskey

promoted by the late Victorian Dubliners.

MIDLETON IRISH WHISKEY

Before the formation of Irish Distillers, the Midleton and Watercourse distilleries were respectively producing the pot still and grain whiskey components for the various Cork Distilleries Company brands. Pleasantly situated on the Dungourney River, Midleton distillery had sputtered into life way back in 1825 when the Murphy family, led by Jeremiah Murphy, concluded that prospects for distilling looked far better than those for tanning. This turned out to be a wise move as, right up to the early years of the 20th century, tanning concerns contracted severely whilst most whiskey distilleries boomed.

Pure pot still whisky (without the “e”) was always the name of the game in Midleton. Alfred Barnard noted in 1886 that Midleton manufactured a whisky simply called “*The Cork Whisky Make*” with an annual production of a little over one million gallons, a colossal output in those days.

At some point after that, Cork Distilleries Company began selling “Midleton” branded whisky of various ages. There was an expression with a cream label and red text that guaranteed the contents as “*Old Midleton Whisky*”.

There was also tall clear glass bottlings adorned with simple off-white labels proudly declaring “*Midleton Whisky*” and the 1825 establishment date of the distillery. The colour of the text signified the age; blue was guaranteed seven years old, red was bottled by ten years old and green was bottled by fifteen years old.

In 1966 Cork Distilleries Company amalgamated with John Jameson & Son and John Power & Son to form Irish Distillers. The board of the new company decided

to follow the lead of the Scots in concentrating on the production of blended whiskeys and later, in an effort to consolidate, closed down the creaking old distilleries to built one modern, multi-functional distilling complex alongside the old facility in Midleton.

One such blend bore the name *Midleton Reserve*, was bottled at 70° Proof (40% abv) in a more muscular bottle and declared that this was a “specially blended rare whiskey”. Interestingly, the same four leaf clover embossed bottle seems to have been used throughout the 1970’s not only for these old *Midleton Reserve*’s but also for the old *Powers 15*’s of this era.

In the early eighties, in an effort to produce a more sophisticated Irish whiskey, Irish Distillers decided to revitalize the *Midleton* brand. A limited annual release and a far more luxurious offering, these bottlings were to be labelled as “*Midleton Rare*” and the whiskeys used in the blend were to be, and still are to this day, specially selected by the Master Distiller himself.

The first *Midleton Rare* was made available to the public in 1984 and the brand has grown from strength to strength, culminating last year with a special thirty year celebratory bottling of the ultra- exclusive *Midleton Pearl*.

The component whiskeys for *Midleton Very Rare* have matured exclusively in first-fill and refill Bourbon casks for up to twenty-five years. Special casks are put to one side as dictated by the nose and palate of the Master Distiller with each bottle bearing the signature of the current incumbent: Barry Crockett from 1984 to 2013 and Brian Nation in 2014 and 2015. These are small quantity vintage bottlings that vary from batch to batch and show subtle changes from year to year.

Midleton Very Rare is a testament to the art of blending the best of spicy, oily pot still with silky, fragrant grain

and sweet, toasted American oak to produce a refined, impeccably balanced Irish whiskey.

In a hark back to the days of Cork Distilleries Company, Irish Distillers have, in recent years, released Single Pot Still whiskeys that display the famous Midleton brand name. *Midleton Barry Crockett Legacy* is named after the celebrated second generation Master Distiller, Barry Crockett, and is a most fitting tribute to a man who worked tirelessly to promote this quintessentially Irish style of whiskey. *Midleton Barry Crockett Legacy* is quite full flavoured; spicy, creamy, toasty, and showing lots of forest, orchard and citrus fruits.

Midleton Dair Ghaelach is the latest Single Pot Still to join the ever-expanding Midleton family of whiskeys. This one-of-a-kind whiskey has been matured in barrels made from virgin Irish oak grown on the Ballaghtobin Estate in Co. Kilkenny, with beautiful woodland fragrance, rich fleshy fruit and characteristic oily spice in abundance.

The almost nostalgic combination, by today’s standards, of Irish Pot Still, Irish oak and Irish craft brings us back full circle to those special Victorian times when the energetic passion of gentlemen like Francis Wise, Jeremiah Murphy and Paddy O’ Flaherty ensured that Cork whiskeys conquered the South and indeed the world.

