



Object of the Newsletter

To promote the appreciation of fine Scotch Whisky, the area from which it comes, the people that inhabit the land and it's history. By the way, I do not profess to be an expert, I am merely expressing an opinion on the whiskies I am tasting.

Yes, that time of year is approaching when we get dressed up, listen to poetry and eat haggis to celebrate the life and works of Scotland's favorite son, Robert Burns. I now look at Arran "Robert Burns", whisky which I tasted in the King's Arms Hotel in Melrose Scotland in May of last year.

My wife, son and I had just finished looking around Melrose abbey (well worth a visit), and were wandering around the town of Melrose when we came across this 300-year-old coaching inn and decided to pop in and have a drink.

When I saw the Robert Burns whisky, I immediately wanted to try it, The friendly young woman behind the bar poured me a dram and watched me taste it, then asked "what do you think?" She was stunned when I said you can really taste green apples, she said "green apples from a whisky, is that possible?"

I assured her that it was, and with practice, much like developing your senses for wine tasting, the same holds true for whisky, she was very surprised. So, as well as trying a nice new whisky, I hope I enlightened the young barmaid and broadened her horizons somewhat, or maybe I'm just a delusional old guy.

You can buy Arran "Robert Burns" for around \$37.00 a bottle.

Tasting Notes;

Nose - Apple, vanilla and some spice

Palate - Custard, green apple, pear

Finish - Apple, vanilla, some spice

"Slainte Mhath"

Paul Bissett





Scottish Formal Attire

This month it is traditional to get dressed up for burn night to celebrate Robert Burns, the bard of Scotland. To that end I have taken the following information from "The black tie guide" and put it in here to hopefully answer any questions that anyone may have about getting dressed for the occasion.

<http://www.blacktieguide.com/Supplemental/Scottish.htm>

To see the full range of formal highland dress, go to the above website.

Scottish evening dress traces its roots back to the seventeenth century and is as diverse as Anglo-American black tie, if not more so. Consequently, this page is only intended to serve as an introduction to the topic. It does so by repeating the descriptions in the Wikipedia "Highland Dress" article (which has improved considerably since the previous edition of the Guide) and enhancing them with some additional clarification and much-needed illustrations.

For in-depth explanations of the various components of highland dress the Guide highly recommends Kinloch Anderson's web site. They are a sixth-generation family company based in Edinburgh and are official tailors and kiltmakers to the Royal Family which makes them a much more reliable source of etiquette than mainstream rental shops.

Scotweb is another excellent visual resource and most images here are taken from their site.

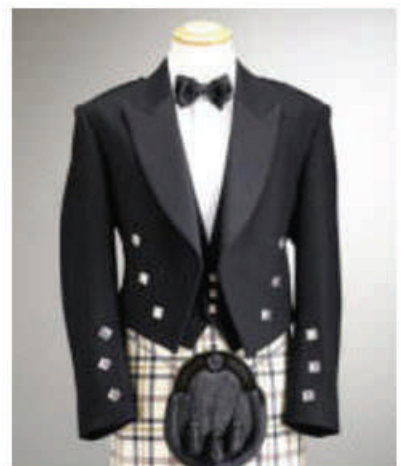
Highland Dress: Black-Tie Equivalent

Scottish Highland dress is often worn to black and white tie occasions, especially at Scottish reels and *céilidhs* (traditional social dances).

LEAST FORMAL KILT JACKETS



Argyll jacket: this is the least formal option because lapels are notched and self-faced. Cuffs are usually Argyle style (gauntlet) as shown.



Prince Charlie jacket (aka coatee): features peaked lapels which are usually faced in satin; back of jacket features short tails and cuffs are usually Braemar style as shown.



Below is a simple guide to help you choose your single malt Whisky, and the flavor notes you should expect from it. Being Scottish I recommend you find a likely candidate and try it in a bar before buying the whole bottle. This Issue; Arran "Robert Burns". For more information go to <http://www.arranwhisky.com>





Where to go if the spirit moves you.

I'LL have a 17.26 and . . . a kedgeriee (breakfast/brunch dish), please," says the polite gentleman with the neatly-trimmed white beard.

It's not the usual type of order you'd expect to hear in an Edinburgh bar, but then No 87 Giles Street isn't your typical boozer. This is the home of the Scotch Malt Whisky Society, the members-only club for all lovers of the water of life.

With its battered leather sofas, brass chandeliers and plaid-print carpet, its faded, old-fashioned decor very definitely suggests a gentleman's club. And, according to one cheeky entry left in the society's visitors' book, it is exactly that . . . just "without the nobs". Indeed, looking around at the lunchtime crowd, there's certainly few that would appear to fall into that category.

There is only one middle-aged gentleman wearing a blazer and cravat, and very few customers are wearing tweed. Most are young, and about half the punters are actually - gasp - female. There are a few people having a business lunch, but the majority seem to have come for a quiet drink - surprisingly not that many are having drams or even the kedgeriee - and a read of the newspaper. There's no blaring music, no smog of smoke fumes and only the gentle murmur of chatter in the background.

All this might explain why the society, founded 20 years ago by a group of friends who shared the price of a single cask of malt, has become rather successful.

It now boasts 24,000 members worldwide, an annual turnover of around 2.6 million, and next year it will expand to a new club over five floors at 28 Queen Street.

Richard Gordon, managing director for the past nine years, says it is now so busy that there is standing room only at the bar on many nights.

"We decided to expand because we have started turning people away from here - even on a Tuesday lunchtime you can have a wee job getting a seat - so we need somewhere else.

"A lot of people find it hard to come to Leith, and a lot of people work in the city centre, so Queen Street will be ideal for them."

So, apart from some relaxed surroundings, what is the big attraction of membership? The answer to anyone who enjoys a dram lies glinting in the dozens of green bottles lining the wall behind the bar. These are the society's own bottlings of cask-strength whisky, row upon row of them, all labeled with mysterious numbers - like the aforementioned 17.26 - which correspond to their rather secret origins.



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The whiskies may have come from any one of 113 Scottish distilleries which supply the society, but there's an, er, gentleman's agreement to name only their region, as the characteristics of individual casks can vary significantly from the distilleries' usual finished product.

There is another way to tell them apart - some of the bottles are wearing colored ribbons in gold, purple or red to denote their price band. But, unlike in some upmarket bars in the city.

"We are just offering an excellent quality product in a very relaxed atmosphere," says Gordon. "In 1983, a group of friends shared the price of a cask, bottled it and then the reputation spread. That's still what we do today - we select whiskies, bottle them and sell them to our members."

Most of these members are still men, and some might argue that whisky drinkers have traditionally been like a virtual men-only club. The image certainly put off your scribe until introduced to the delights of a single malt by a (female) friend. Eventually you get used to bar staff automatically plonking your whisky in front of your male companion who actually ordered a Tia Maria and Coke, or staff at whisky tastings trying to hide the 25-year-old Highland Park because they think girls know nothing about whisky.

Gordon agrees that whisky's image has been very male, but he says there are plenty of female club members. They include writers Isla Dewar - her cartoonist husband Bob provides the distinctive illustrations for the society's brochures - and Abigail Bosanko, whose nose for whisky is good enough to have secured her a place on the society's tasting panel.

And some of the tasting notes are Jilly Golden-esque (wine expert). How do you fancy sampling a whisky described as "sugar mice and smoldering twigs", or "Balsamic vinegar and puff candy", or "flowering nettles and tinned peaches"? You get the idea.

Gordon selects a dram for me to taste - it's number 66.15, a light but peated malt. The most accurate tasting note I can offer is "it's smoky, but sweet".

"You're quite close," he says. "The tasting note says: 'Damson jam and coal tar'." But if there's any snobbery about tasting notes, it's nothing compared to the rules on how you're supposed to drink whisky - the purists say you should only add spring water, no ice and never soda water.

Gordon recommends adding some water to take the burn out of the drink - the society casks are bottled at full strength which is a head-nipping 55 to 65 per cent alcohol - and allow its flavors to be released, but he says there shouldn't really be any rules at all. The society's bar staff won't refuse to let you put ice cubes in your dram.



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In fact, they are laid back enough to even commit the sacrilege of serving whisky which is not even Scotch.

"Maybe it is sacrilege to serve Irish or Japanese, but we do it. And last year we even bought a Japanese cask, bottled it and sold it back to the Japanese.

"It was a big story there because they take their whisky very seriously.

"But you should be able to drink whisky any way you want.

"The best way to get the flavor out is to add water, but if you were in a hot country you wouldn't want warm whisky, you'd want a tumbler full of ice and a splash of soda water.

"Whisky has been its own worst enemy for too long."

Banking on a best-seller

FOR a whisky lover, it must be something of a dream job: to visit more than 100 distilleries, sample their wares and get paid for it.

But that's exactly the assignment that best-selling author Iain Banks managed to land when publishers approached him to write a book about whisky.

The result is *Raw Spirit*, the North Queensferry-based writer's first foray into non-fiction - and an extra stone in weight for the author.

Banks, who is a member of the Scotch Malt Whisky Society, travelled around Scotland by car, plane, motorbike and ferry earlier this year. His odyssey to discover the contemporary meaning of whisky to the Scots included a two-week stay in Speyside and a week on Islay.

Apparently, the author of *The Wasp Factory* and *The Crow Road* enjoyed all his drams. But he let slip during a radio interview that he is particularly fond of Lagavulin - the giant of the Islay malts.

The brief was much envied by his whisky-loving friends who were very keen to aid his research. *Raw Spirit* will be published by Century Books on November 4, priced 17.99, and is due to be launched at the Scotch Malt Whisky Society

With thanks to;
www.scotsman.com