



Scotland's Highlands are home to many malt distilleries.



A Magic of Locality

SCOTCH WHISKY IS and has been the quintessential people's potion. The great and the notorious, the privileged and the common alike have distilled and drunk Scotch whisky both legally and illegally for over six centuries. Novelists and poets, most notably Scotsmen Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns, have through their words passionately celebrated Scotch whisky's comforting warmth in the breast and its stimulating effects on the mind. Robert Burns, Scotland's bard, in his late eighteenth-century poem *Scotch Drink*, called the native whisky of Scotland ". . . my Muse! guid auld Scotch Drink . . ."

Writers, though, have not been the only keen observers when it comes to Scotch whisky. Actor Humphrey Bogart commented during a slump in his film career, "I never should have switched from Scotch to martinis." Entertainer and famed Scotch admirer Joe E. Lewis quipped, "Whenever someone asks me if I want water with my Scotch, I say 'I'm thirsty, not dirty.'" But perhaps Ivor Brown, the renowned twentieth-century British drama critic, essayist, and novelist, captured Scotch whisky's essence best when he said, "Scotch Whisky is a mystery, a magic of locality. The foreigner may import not only Scottish barley but Scottish water, Scottish distilling apparatus, and set a Scot to work on them,

but the glory evaporates: it will not travel” (H. Charles Craig, *The Scotch Whisky Industry Record*, 1994, p. 524).

While the legend of Scotch whisky may be exhilarating and singular, the saga of its rise first in Scotland’s then in Great Britain’s commercial environments has at times been more blood-soaked and chaotic than either benign or orderly. In eras past, ordinary Highland Scots who distilled whisky were arbitrarily jailed, unfairly taxed, and relentlessly hunted down by government excise agents. Many courageous Highland Scots, in the face of the unjust legislation by Parliament, sacrificed livelihoods and homes in the turmoil. A few even perished defending the right to make it. Nonetheless, Scotch whisky, both as a local libation and a national industry, flourished inside and outside the law. Because of Scotch whisky’s astounding international market success against the seemingly insurmountable odds of overtaxation, wars, Prohibition, fierce whiskey industry competition, and temperance, Scotland has more than survived. It has prevailed while somehow miraculously retaining its special, innate national aura.

Scotland is a compact, pocket-size country of a mere 30,414 square miles whose remarkably enterprising inhabitants and ex-patriots have given the world such modern wonders as the telephone, the steam engine, penicillin, color photography, refrigeration, the telescope, and television. But even after all these landmark achievements and inventions that have advanced the cause of an entire civilization from the time of the Industrial Revolution forward, Scotch whisky remains Scotland’s most recognized historical and commercial contribution. No other type of alcoholic beverage—wine, beer, or distilled spirit—is as closely and immediately identified with its homeland as Scotch whisky. Since genuine Scotch whisky can be produced only in Scotland, it indelibly mirrors all that is Scotland: its water and earth, its geological composition, its climate, the Scots who for generations have made it, even the nation’s air.

Since the first half of the nineteenth century, the Scotch whisky industry has been a vigorous business with global ambitions. To accomplish this goal, the industry’s visionary, if pragmatic, captains piggybacked its exportation onto a never-before-seen juggernaut, the rapidly expanding British Empire. By the last quarter of the 1800s, Scotch whisky was

available in most ports of call around the world. Today, Scotch whisky can be found in over 200 nations.

Comprehending the purpose of Scotch whisky and, subsequently, the story of Chivas Regal and The Glenlivet means probing the nebulous mysteries and stark natural realities that compose Scotland, the land-mass. Fertile, wet yet often still frightfully remote, Scotland is the world's most exotic and famous location for converting the dirty brown mash of water, grain, and yeast into the crisp, fresh-tasting, crystalline spirit that, in time, will be legally known as whisky. As part of an unforgiving North Atlantic island, coastal Scotland is sculpted by the blustery maritime influences of sea and wind. Lofty mountain peaks, deep valleys, and rolling pastures highlight inland stretches of pastoral splendor that have been shaped by rainfall, streams and rivers, and wind erosion.

Sharing the island of Britain with England and Wales, Scotland boasts a population of just over five million inhabitants. Greater Scotland includes the 787 islands of the Inner Hebrides, Outer Hebrides, the Orkneys, and the Shetlands. Of these rugged and windswept islands, 130 are inhabited. Six of the inhabited islands—Arran, Islay, Skye, Mull, Orkney, and Jura—currently produce single malt whisky.

First-time visitors to the Scottish Highlands, especially the Grampians in the heart of mainland Scotland, are typically struck by Scotland's vivid floral color displays from late April through August. The deep blue of Scottish bluebells and the golden yellow of gorse in spring; the dusty yellow of yarrow in early to midsummer; and the purple and rose-pink heather in August annually saturate the landscape in bright shades that contrast with the gray mountains, the deep green meadows, and the henna moors. Scotland is a feast for the eyes at any time of year.

Twelve millennia before the emergence of Scotch whisky and brands like Chivas Regal and The Glenlivet, the last Ice Age shaped Scotland's topography. As the massive receding glacial shelves scraped and clawed their way back to the Arctic Circle, they carved out many of the lochs (lakes) that today enhance the Scottish landscape. Loch Ness, Loch Lomond, and Loch Lochy, to cite only three, are all renowned defining aspects of Scotland's topographical personality. Interior Scotland is a

land of free-flowing fresh water burns (streams) and rivers originating from the various mountain chains that dominate the central part of the nation. Central Scotland is predominantly a vertical landscape, featuring over three hundred mountain peaks that rise over 900 meters (roughly 2,950 feet). Ben Nevis in the western Highlands is Scotland's highest peak at 1,344 meters. The blue network of mountain-fed rivers and burns, along with ancient aquifers located deep within Scotland's bedrock base, provides the pure water necessary for distilling. It is no mystery why many of Scotland's malt and grain distilleries are perched next to long-established rivers and burns. Distilleries use copious amounts of water at almost every stage of whisky production.

Historians and archeologists calculate that, due to the forbidding presence of the glacial cap, the initial human presence in Scotland dawned no sooner than 10,000 to 9000 B.C. To date, the earliest known evidence of human hunter-gatherer habitation appears at Cramond, northwest of Edinburgh on the Firth of Forth, circa 8500 B.C. This nomadic group's high mobility, however, canceled any chance of unearthing a significant site. The initial Scots probably were women and children of the hunter-gatherers left behind by the ceaselessly roving bands who chased herds of game across the bleak tundra of northern Europe and the British Isles.

Agriculture, most likely in the fundamental forms of cereal grain cultivation and livestock farming, was introduced to Scotland by the early fourth millennium B.C. Tiny, primitive farms were established first in low-lying coastal pastures, then in the elevated glens and meadows that dotted the interior. At this embryonic stage, virtually everyone farmed the land as well as hunted. Scotland's damp, dank climate proved more suitable for growing hearty grains such as oats, wheat, and barley than for cultivating the fruits that were prevalent in the balmy climes of southern Europe. This environmentally influenced development in agriculture proved to be a significant step for the earliest beverage alcohol producers who, five millennia later, used malted barley initially as the key ingredient for brewing strong ale and later for distilling malt whisky from ale.

Also at this temporal point, deforestation began in earnest as Bronze Age agrarian communities cleared tracts of land to plant grains, graze

livestock, and found settlements. Wood was needed for the construction of houses; for fuel to heat the crude, drafty domiciles; and for pens to protect livestock. Proving that point is an extraordinary excavation, dated at roughly 3600 B.C., of a farming community near Balbridie in Aberdeenshire. It includes a wooden structure that is approximately 26 yards long and 11 yards wide. Huge for its era, the Highlands lodge was a domicile, possibly for both families and their livestock. By the time the Romans invaded the island of Britain in 55 B.C., most of Scotland's original forests were leveled and cleared. Today, sadly, only one percent of Scotland's primeval forest remains.

Deforestation likewise indirectly affected the Scotch industry, in that, with the forests gone, the main source of fuel in prehistoric Scotland became peat. As any avid gardener knows, peat is tightly packed, decomposed vegetation (e.g., heather, gorse, grasses, weeds, and low shrubs) that has been compressed over time by layers of succeeding growth. Another loose definition bandied about in the Highlands is that peat is decomposing organic matter at about the halfway mark to becoming coal. The tradition of using peat as a primary source of fuel eventually turned into a key element of Scotland's whisky industry because peat became the customary fuel used to dry barley before it became part of the mash. Fortunately, Scotland has no shortage of peat since peat bogs still cover an estimated 810,000 hectares (over 2 million acres) of the nation's surface.

Well before Julius Caesar first set foot on Britain, or Britannia as the Romans called it, in the middle of the first century B.C., the growing of grain had been established in Scotland for more than three thousand years and peat was the leading source of fuel. Both the proliferation of grain growing, especially of barley, and the widespread harvesting and employment of peat proved three millennia later to be crucial building blocks in the formation of the fledgling whisky distilling industry.

An Awful Silence

Although the landscape of Scotland features scores of Stone, Bronze, and Iron Age ceremonial standing stones; massive burial mounds composed of grass, stone, and mud; stone watchtowers; and entire excavated

villages such as Skara Brae (3100 B.C., on the main island of the Orkney Islands, no written historical account exists that we know of, prior to the recorded observations made by a Roman scribe of the first century A.D. According to historian Fitzroy Maclean in his book *A Concise History of Scotland*, second revised edition 2000, p. 6), that first recorder of Scotland's everyday doings was Tacitus, who accompanied the Ninth Legion into what is now southern Scotland from A.D. 81 to 84.

Tacitus told future generations, frequently in vivid detail, that his father-in-law, Gnaeus Julius Agricola, the Governor of the Roman Province of Britannia, rumbled north into southern Scotland with a well-oiled machine of 20,000 soldiers, including the Ninth Legion, and a fleet of ships off Scotland's east coast. Agricola's force represented approximately one-tenth of the total Roman Army. When marching, the army's ranks stretched to the horizon for about 20 miles. Having subdued most of Britannia (England), the conquering Romans yearned to gain control of the feisty and ferocious Caledonians, the name that the Romans bestowed on the various tribes of Picts who resided north of England. The dominant Pict tribe was called the Calidonii. The Romans considered the Caledonians to be dangerous and unpredictable savages. Tacitus described them as having "fair or reddish hair" and "large limbs." They were fearless combatants who regularly and with gusto took the fight to the Romans. Wrote Tacitus, "The native tribes assailed the forts; and spread terror by acting on the offensive."

At the time, Caledonia was anything but a unified nation. It could more accurately be described as a ragged, tenuously connected confederation of Pict tribes, who often fought among themselves. The common menace of the advancing Romans, however, compelled the fractious tribes to temporarily band together into a single fighting force of approximately 30,000 in late A.D. 83. Underestimating their opponent, the tribal chief Calgacus and his lieutenants decided that their course of action should be direct confrontation. In early A.D. 84, the unskilled Caledonian army, made up of farmers, hunters, and tradesmen, waged an ill-fated, hand-to-hand battle at Mons Graupius. Though they were fighting on their home turf and had a numerical advantage, the Caledonians were no match for the organized, disciplined, and relentless Roman

brigades. Ten thousand Caledonians were slaughtered in a single disastrous bloodbath. The Caledonians who survived the rout retreated further into the Highlands, taking with them their women, children, and meager belongings. "An awful silence reigned on every hand; the hills were deserted, houses smoking in the distance, and our scouts did not meet a soul," reported Tacitus the day after the battle.

Just as Agricola's land and sea offensive was succeeding in bringing Caledonia under heel after Mons Graupius, orders arrived from Rome directing him to return to Britannia to regroup and refortify. With so many far-flung outposts from Britannia to Egypt to Germany to Mesopotamia, the Empire's overworked heart was deemed vulnerable to attack by marauding barbarians from the steppes of Asia. The critical middle, the solar plexus of the Empire, needed protection. Therefore, trusted, hardcore legions like those under Agricola needed to be drawn closer. As reported by Maclean in *A Concise History of Scotland* (p. 10), Tacitus bitterly wrote of this decision to withdraw from Caledonia, complaining, "Britain conquered and then at once thrown away."

Four decades later, the Roman Emperor Hadrian toured Britain. Tiring of the audacious Caledonians' pesky guerrilla-like strikes against his soldiers and encampments along the present-day border between Scotland and England, Hadrian ordered the construction of a wall, discreetly named Hadrian's Wall, which he hoped would discourage the Caledonians from future sorties. His stone wall was four meters high and two and a half meters thick; it marked the topography from Carlisle to Newcastle in what is now northern England as well as the northernmost reaches of the Roman Empire in the early second century A.D. Built between A.D. 122 and 128, the wall stands, relatively intact, to this day.

Realizing the expense in resources and troops of dealing with unruly indigenous tribes like the Caledonians, Hadrian instituted Rome's initial anti-expansion policy to firm up the Empire's center. Hadrian's stay-at-home strategy collapsed, however, when Antoninus Pius succeeded him and had Roman troops redeployed to southern Scotland to build the 37-mile-long Antonine Wall in the middle second century A.D. This stone line of defense against the dreaded Caledonians ran

from the Firth of Forth to the Firth of Clyde just north of what are now Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Emperor Severus, Rome's next leader, conducted a hit-and-miss military campaign in A.D. 208 that the Caledonians fought off over the course of three years. Memories of the blood that Calgacus and his renegade force had spilled a century and a quarter earlier sharpened the tactical sense of the third-century Caledonians. Severus discovered that the Caledonians' past battlefield miscalculations had taught them never to fight the Roman legions head-on. Instead, they ceaselessly harassed them in lightning quick, hard-hitting raids. The small, mobile fighting units were difficult to capture. After invading Caledonia three times, after building 60 camps and forts, and after erecting two defensive walls, the Romans said "Enough." By the fifth century, the last remaining Roman outposts in southern Scotland and northern England were abandoned. In the end and at great cost, the Caledonian/Picts had rebuffed the world's mightiest and best-equipped army, the best strategically trained generals, and the overwhelming strength of the Roman Empire.

On such hearty disposition, love of the homeland, and single-minded determination was the fundamental character of the modern Scots built. But the invasions were just beginning.

The Four Tribes

Just who were the Pictish tribes of Caledonia that the Romans feared and respected? From what gene pools did the present-day Scots evolve to produce an elixir like Scotch whisky?

The majority of historical evidence identifies the Picts as the group that formed the core of the Caledonians. The Picts were a tribe of Celts who had arrived in Britain from continental Europe sometime in the Bronze Age (3500 to 1500 B.C.). The Celts were of Indo-European origins and dwelled first in central-western Europe during the Neolithic Age (8000 to 5000 B.C.). They were driven westward to the British Isles first by the Germanic Angles and Saxons, who invaded western Europe from the Baltic region, and then later by the Romans.

An artistic and imaginative people, the Celts constructed a vivid mythology and an earthbound philosophy that still are more than faintly evident in Ireland and Scotland. Both nations, although Christian, quietly tolerate the supposed ethereal presence of faeries, ghosts, elves, and pixies as well as the discreet practice of elemental rites and ceremonies based largely in Celtic beliefs that are thousands of years old. More than a few whisky distillers in Scotland, in fact, report “strange happenings” in warehouses and distillery buildings by unseen forces that have their basis in ancient Celtic legends. Scotland’s distilleries are famous for three things: the world’s best whisky, distillery ghosts, and celebrated cats who stalk the distilleries at night.

By the mid-fifth century A.D., the Romans departed from Britannia for good, leaving four main tribal groups in control of Scotland. Three of Scotland’s four central societies were of Celtic lineage and communicated in similar though not identical languages. The Picts held firm mastery over the north and east of Scotland (today, the Caithness, Ross and Cromarty, Aberdeen, and Angus regions). The Britons, who also were Celts, resided mostly in Scotland’s southwestern region known as Strathclyde (present-day Ayr, Kirkcudbright, and Wigtown). The Teutonic, or Germanic, tribes of Angles and Saxons moved into Scotland from northeast England and subsequently ruled the central southern Lowlands (modern-day Roxburgh, Berwick, and Selkirk). The Scots or Scoti, yet another branch springing from the thick trunk of the Celtic tree, lorded over western Scotland (Argyll and Kintyre) and the western islands (Arran, Islay, Jura). In fact, the Scots were the Gaels of Ireland, who crossed the Irish Sea and landed most likely on the long crooked finger of the Kintyre Peninsula. The Scots-Gaels introduced the Gaelic tongue to western Scotland, which about 80,000 people still speak in the western islands and Highlands. Their kingdom was called Dalriada.

During the two and a half centuries that immediately followed the final Roman evacuation, circa A.D. 430, the Irish Sea, the slender but turbulent body of water that separates extreme southwestern Scotland from the north of Ireland, was a remarkably busy corridor of salt water. According to historians Thomas Owen Clancy and Barbara E. Crawford writing in *The New Penguin History of Scotland: From the Earliest Times*

to the Present Day (2001, p. 29), “Throughout the sixth and seventh centuries, the Irish Sea was abuzz with material and intellectual exchange, from Gaul to Britain and Ireland and around the points of this open salt-water loch.”

This advancement of ideas, cultures, technology, and languages relates directly to two pivotal events in early Scottish history: the creation of Scotch whisky and the social impact of the spread of Christianity.

The Origin of Scotch Whisky

The Irish were acknowledged to be skilled barley farmers and brewers of strong ales, the forerunners of stout, possibly as early as 2500 to 2000 B.C. They advanced to become avid distillers at the latest by the eleventh or twelfth centuries A.D. Was it the Irish who introduced to Scotland the secrets, first, of fermenting grain into ale and then, later, distilling ale into whisky?

Though hard evidence does not yet exist, it falls within the realm of high likelihood—and deductive reasoning—that the Irish introduced and pioneered the distillation process in Scotland. Not so with brewing ale, however. Ale brewed from barley or wheat appears to have already existed in the regions of Scotland controlled by the Picts. Northern and eastern Scotland were especially good areas for grain cultivation. In his book *The Ale Trail* (1995, p. 159), British beer authority Roger Protz writes, “The earliest brewers in Scotland were . . . the Picts. . . . The Picts brewed a heather ale, the fame of which spread far beyond the borders of the remote, mountainous country. The navigator Pytheas, when he visited Scotland, recorded that the Picts brewed a potent drink.”

Pytheas was the Greek geographer and adventurer who circumnavigated Britain around 325 to 320 B.C. Indeed, it was Pytheas who named the North Sea islands. He referred to them in Greek as the Pritanic Islands after a tribe called the Pritani. The Romans altered that moniker to *Britannia*, and they referred to the people as the *Britons*.

If the making of beer was already well established in Scotland, when did the art of *boiling* beer, or distillation, to make potent spirit first arrive? As detailed in Chapter 2, the first indisputable record of distilling

in Scotland occurred in the late fifteenth century. Distilling knowledge itself arrived on the European continent no sooner than A.D. 800 to 900. So, the actual transfer from Ireland to Scotland of salient technological information on distilling could not have realistically happened before A.D. 1100. No one is certain. We may never know. By piecing together circumstantial evidence and conjecture, many contemporary whisky experts and distilled spirit historians estimate that widespread distillation most likely didn't have firm footing in Scotland until the fourteenth century. Chances are that the majority of early distilling in Scotland occurred in the cellars of Christian monasteries. The monks were proficient brewers at the minimum and quite possibly serviceable distillers as well.

The Impact of Christianity

From across the Irish Sea, Christian missionaries journeyed to Scotland around A.D. 560. Their "divine mission" was to convert the pagan tribes to the cause of Christ and, thereby, bring order and cohesion to wild and woolly Scotland. Stepping ashore on Scotland from Ireland in A.D. 563 was Columba, a charismatic monk and politically savvy and motivated orator. Born of aristocratic lineage, he was a favorite of the Scots-Gaels. Headquartered on the western island of Iona, Columba established a succession of monastic communities deep into Argyll to serve the local Scots-Gaels populations, who had reverted back to their pagan roots following their colonization of western Scotland. Before the Scots had migrated to Scotland, they had been northern Ireland Christians. The embracing of Christianity over traditional, environmentally infused Celtic pagan beliefs gradually altered the social and political fabric of southwestern Scotland.

Moving further north from Argyll, the energetic Columba pushed into the regions ruled by the Picts. J. D. Mackie reports in *A History of Scotland* (1964, p. 25) on Columba's zeal, "Armed with prestige, great gifts, unshrinking faith, and high oratory, Columba not only reawakened the dormant Christianity of the Scots but penetrated into Pictland . . ."

After Columba's death in 597, more missionaries fanned out across Scotland. By A.D. 750 to 800, most of the primary tribes had converted to the faith, at least outwardly. Paganism had a strong hold, however, and continued to be a quiet force for another two centuries. Over a little more than two centuries, Christianity brought, if not peace and cooperation, a fragile, nervous acknowledgment to the four groups—the Picts, Scots-Gaels, Britons, and Angles and Saxons—of medieval Scotland, whose uncharted territories overlapped. The Christian monks likewise established brewing as a commonplace activity wherever they founded outposts. Brewing eventually led to distilling. The four tribes clung to both strong ale and religion in the next three centuries, A.D. 780 to 1050, as another onslaught brought by a foreign enemy commenced.

Though Christianity dominated most regions of the four kingdoms of Scotland, long-standing loathing continued to separate the tribes. Then in the 780s, a vicious new adversary threatened Scotland's coastlines and islands. Stealthily approaching from northern Europe in sleek, oceangoing wood vessels named longships, these seafaring, fair-skinned Dane and Norwegian warriors were known as the Vikings. They swept westward across the British Isles, Greenland, and Iceland like locusts. For three hundred years beginning in the late eighth century and ending in the mid-eleventh century, all of maritime Scotland and much of the Highland interior came under attack by the swift-moving Vikings.

The impact on the destinies of the four groups was immediate and irreversible. Indeed, the regular assaults and subsequent devastation wreaked on the areas ruled by the Picts contributed to their race's decline, dilution, and eventual disappearance. Even though the heretofore politically and militarily robust Picts valiantly battled the Vikings—in many cases, triumphantly so—the defense of its islands and northern heartland, proved too much for the Pictish kingdom. Decay began to erode its core.

The vacuum created by the Picts' degeneration allowed the Gaelic-speaking Scots-Gaels of Dalriada to fill the void as they assumed control of vast areas to the north and east that the Picts had lorded over. In 843, the Scots-Gaels king, Kenneth MacAlpin who had Pictish ties, crowned himself king of both Dalriada and the Pictish kingdom, effectively becoming the first unifying monarch in Scottish history. The new realm,

spanning most of what is present-day Scotland, was known as the Kingdom of Alba. Over time, the Scots-Gaels' political dominance led to the renaming of Alba as *Scotia*, the forerunner of *Scotland*. By then, there was no stopping the Gaelic influence.

In the tenth century, the Scots reached out to the English to help stem the tide of the Norsemen, who were of equal threat to England. The English were far more powerful than the still, by comparison, disorganized Scottish monarchies. By the middle of the eleventh century, the Viking aggression in large measure abated. The extended influence of the Norsemen was evident culturally and biologically, particularly in the north of Scotland and the far northern Orkney and Shetland island chains, where intermarriage had become widespread. Scotland continued, if painfully through bloodshed and social upheaval, to take shape as we know it.

In 1034, Duncan I the Gracious, seven generations removed from Kenneth MacAlpin, became the first Scotsman to ascend to a bona fide Scottish throne, with influence in all parts of Scotland and, as a bonus, northern England. Though a weak and inept leader, Duncan I's line would nonetheless, for more than 650 years, spawn generations of succeeding monarchs of historical significance: Malcolm Ceann Mor; David I; Robert the Bruce; James I; Mary Queen of Scots; Charles I; James VI, who was also James I of England; and Charles Edward, who was called Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Historians David Ditchburn and Alastair J. MacDonald, in *The New Penguin History of Scotland: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (2001, p. 156), address the difficulties that the peoples of different races, tongues, and traditions in Scotland had in constructively coming together during the medieval era: "The Scottish realm was . . . by no means an easily unified entity; it was of large extent and difficult terrain in much of its area; and the peoples of the kingdom were a very diverse assembly, emerging from the early medieval groupings of Picts, Scots, Britons, Angles and Norwegians, and entailing also twelfth- and thirteenth-century Anglo-French incomers."

By the fourteenth century, the first glimmer of a genuine and distinct national character emerged as conflicts with the vastly more powerful English galvanized Scotland's various clans, aristocrats, and

fiefdoms. Under King Edward I and his son Edward II, England strove to conquer Scotland and thus unify the island of Britain under English rule. After the fiery Scots rebel William Wallace, aka *Braveheart*, was defeated then later captured by the English, the Scots needed a leader who was both militarily skilled and politically composed. Enter Robert the Bruce, Scotland's most popular historical figure, who became King of Scotland in 1306. After absorbing several early military defeats at the hands of the English, Bruce decisively routed the heavily fortified and numerically superior English force in a momentous battle at Bannockburn on June 24, 1314. In the process, Bruce pierced the heart of English confidence and, thereby, its threat of dominance. Diplomatically under the reign of Robert the Bruce, Scotland entered the international stream by becoming Europe's first nation-state since the fall of Rome. Bruce died in 1329, but his legacy put Scotland ahead of any of its diverse parts. That legacy lives on.

Over the winding, treacherous course of five and a half millennia, the modern-day race of Scots has been sculpted from an exotic amalgamation of Celtic, Scandinavian, English, Irish, French, and Anglo-Saxon ancestry, ceremony, and custom. Doubtless, one of the greatest outcomes in the history of that gradual incorporation has been Scotch whisky, the Scots' distilled barley beer. If Scotch whisky, a magic of locality and a leading distilled spirit, has existed for roughly seven centuries, how long has distillation itself been lifting up the disposition of civilization?