

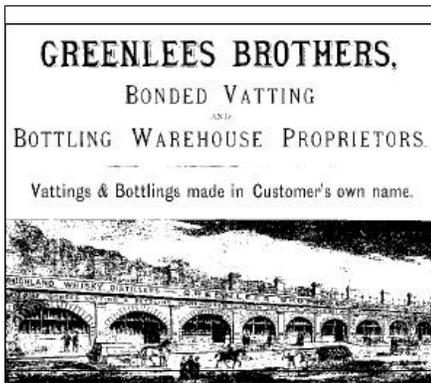


SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW

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ARGYLL'S FORGOTTEN WHISKY BARONS

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The great names of Walker, Dewar, Mackie and Buchanan are well established in the lore of the whisky industry. Less well known now, though leaders and innovators in their own day, are the Greenlees Brothers, whose brand Old Parr is still a major player today in markets such as Japan. Subsumed into the Distillers Company (now United Distillers) shortly after the 'great amalgamation' of 1925, Greenlees Brothers had a proud history which began in, and never lost touch with, Campbeltown. What follows is a short history of this remarkable firm from its infancy until the retirement of the two founders of the business in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

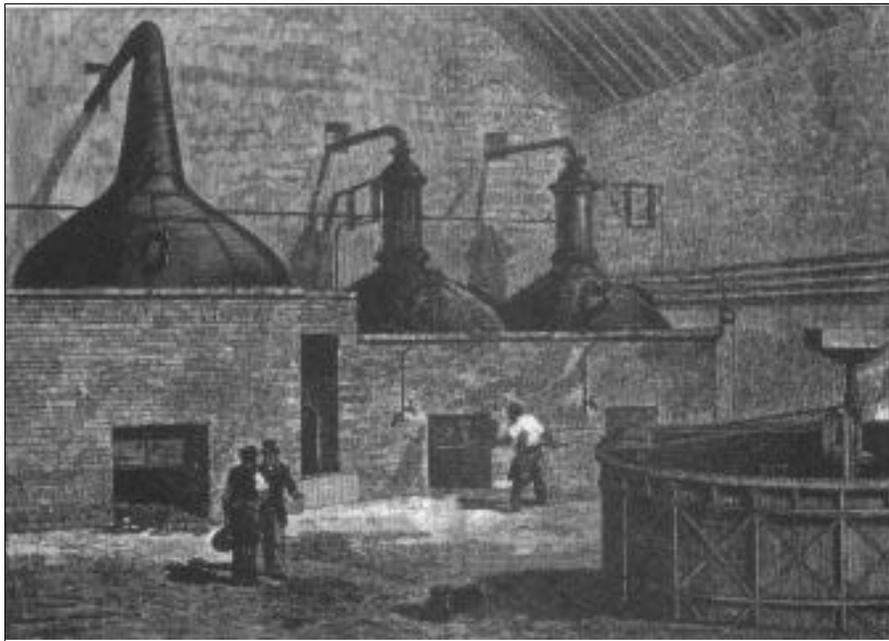
The Greenlees family came to Campbeltown in 'about' 1640, when a miller of that name moved from Lochwinnoch (Renfrewshire) to Southend (8 miles SSW Campbeltown). In 1810 James Greenlees, farmer at Peninver (3.5 miles N Campbeltown) married Catherine Galbreath. Peninver was the farm originally worked by Catherine's father, Samuel Galbreath. The couple had 11 children, the first born son (b. 1812) being named Samuel, after James' father. James died in 1850 leaving £186 18s 7d, of which £137 18s 9d represented cattle, horses and farm implements. Samuel worked with his father on the small farm at Peninver; at some point between 1836 and 1839 he joined with his brother-in-law Daniel Greenlees as a partner in the Hazelburn Distillery, Campbeltown. The distillery, built in eighteenth century occupied lands rented and feued from the Duke of Argyll. The partnership was known as Greenlees Colvill & Co. 'Possessed of great natural energy and unwearying perseverance, he [Samuel Greenlees] ...soon made the business one of the most extensive and successful in the town'. Samuel Greenlees was in particular responsible for selling the product of the Hazelburn Distillery, and

In 1881 Samuel Greenlees bought out his brother-in-law's interest in the business and became sole partner in Greenlees Colvill & Co; his share in the firm was valued as £14,711 6s 9d when he died in 1886. It was estimated at this time that the distillery had an annual capacity of 250,000 gallons, and an actual production of 192,000 gallons. The wash still, holding 7,000 gallons, was the largest in Campbeltown. The distillery workforce was around 14 men. By 1881 Greenlees Colvill & Co had also acquired Moy Farm which was extensively improved by Samuel Greenlees, 'his early experience in agriculture being of great use to him in the improvements he made...'

Samuel Greenlees married his cousin, Agnes Greenlees, in December 1840. The couple had five children, including sons James (b. 1848) and Samuel (b. 1850). Agnes died at some point between 1850 and 1861, when Samuel married Isabella Ralston, by whom he had a further 6 children. Isabella Greenlees died in 1897 at the Greenlees family home, Hazelbank. James and Samuel Greenlees were both educated locally in Campbeltown at the United Presbyterian Academy. On leaving school Samuel joined his father working in the distillery whilst his elder brother James was an apprentice in the offices of Baird Brothers, the coalmasters and ironfounders at Glasgow and Gartsherrie. In 1871 both brothers moved to London where they established the firm of Greenlees Brothers at Gresham Buildings. At 21 and 23 years of age they were remarkably young to take such a step; it seems unlikely that it would have been without the encouragement (and possibly financial assistance) of their father, although it is possible they had also received an inheritance from their mother. The business they set up had

a firm base in the agency for Hazelburn whisky; they also had agencies for another Campbeltown Distillery, Dalaruan, and for Lagavulin. However their intention in London was to exploit the market for blended whiskies, still very much in its infancy. Taste in London was still geared towards the lighter Irish whiskies—in their early years Greenlees Brothers sold three vats of Irish whisky to one of Scotch; 'it took some time to get it [i.e. Scotch] into the trade and the public favour' recalled James Greenlees in 1908. Their endeavours, particularly within the London market, were path-finding both in terms of 'educating the public up to a blended whisky of a pleasant description', and also in developing brands: 'If you buy a bottle of whisky with a brand on it the public know the firm's name is on it, and they depend on it...' Their earliest blend carried on the label the distinctive signature Greenlees Brothers, a style subsequently much imitated. 'Greenlees Brothers may' wrote the *Campbeltown Courier*, 'be regarded as pioneers of whisky blending as well as the pioneers in popularising Scotch whisky throughout the world'. 'To Messrs. Greenlees Brothers', wrote *Wyman's Commercial Encyclopaedia* in 1890, 'belongs the credit of having made the trade in Scotch whisky, and of having introduced that beverage to the British public in a wholesome and agreeable form, blended with the utmost nicety and judgement, so that delicacy of flavour and absolute purity are, as far as possible, combined. Greenlees Brothers' principal brand of blended Scotch was Lorne Highland Whisky. They had begun selling this in 1871, and applied in January of that year for copyright of a trademark (St Andrew's Cross, Lion, Thistle and GB quartered on shield), and also of a showcard which featured a portrait of





HAZELBURN DISTILLERY, STILL HOUSE

the Marquis of Lorne and the words Highland Whisky and a background of Argyll tartan. In addition they also sold a Fine Old Irish Whisky, and Connaught (1879) Irish whisky, which must have accounted for the bulk of their sales in these early years. The firm also sold a single or self whisky under the name Hazelburn (1872), North British Very Old Scotch Whisky (1873) and another blend, Glenlussa (1875), named after a glen 3 miles north east of Campbeltown. Argyll associations were also used with Davaar Scotch Whisky (1885), celebrating the island at the mouth of Campbeltown Loch with its famous cave paintings, although Dew of Ben Gullion (1885) apparently refers to a fictional location. Other nineteenth century brands included Dunblane Very Old Highland Whisky (1885), Club Whisky (1885) Peacock Brand Old Scotch Whisky (1886), Deeside Scotch Whisky (1886) and the Golfer's Special Whisky. In the early twentieth century, in the heat of the 'what is whisky' crisis, Greenlees introduced a Matured Scotch Grain Whisky (1907). By 1909 they had also introduced (Ancient) Old Parr, and in 1911 The Old Admiral Finest Highland

Whisky. In addition to these trademarked brands the firms also sold other 'patriotic' blends, such as 'Death or Glory' and 'Thin Red Line'. By 1885 Greenlees brothers had apparently achieved a dominant position in the marketing of blended whisky in England, and also had some success in exports. James Buchanan recalled that 'the wants of the licensed Trade in London were pretty well met by Messrs. Greenlees, whose Lorne Whisky practically held a monopoly of supply'. Like other firms they exploited advertising whenever possible, often obtaining exposure in novel ways. In November of 1889 they secured the sole contract to supply whisky at Olympia during Barnum's residency there. By 1884 they had opened bonded and export warehouses in Osborne Street Glasgow, where they claimed to have handled over 1.3 million gallons of whisky in 1886. By this time they had also moved from Gresham Buildings in London to 31 Commercial Street, 'one of the finest buildings' in the East End. The additional capacity afforded by these new premises was not simply to cope with the increasing sale of whiskies, but also to house stocks held under agencies for a wide range of champagnes and wines. By 1890 the Osborne Street site had been extended to cover an acre and a half, the warehouses holding 15,416 casks and 10,000 cases of whisky. The monthly turnover of the Osborne Street warehouse was 72,000 gallons, in excess of 3.5 million gallons for the year. Greenlees Brothers brands were supplied, claimed one advertisement, 'to His Majesty the King, His Excellency the Viceroy of India, and to the Courts of their Highnesses the Gaekwar of Barodas, the Maharaja of Rapur, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the Nawab

that Greenlees Brothers whisky was 'used by all nationalities all over the world'.

In 1886, following the death of Samuel Greenlees Senior, the two brothers took over the Hazelburn Distillery, converting it into a limited liability company, with a capital of £25,000. In 1888 the two brothers took over the business known as Colvill, Greenlees & Company at the Argyll Distillery, Campbeltown, which they formed into a limited company with a capital of £12,000; here they planned to build a new mash and still house and raise annual output to around 150,000 gallons. Both of these firms came under the general supervision of Samuel Greenlees, who for some time was based in Campbeltown, where in 1893 he guided a party led by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Albany around the Hazelburn plant. By 1900 the firm's distilleries were said to have an output of half a million gallons of whisky a year. Both Samuel and James were prominent in a variety of trade pressure and benevolent organisations; James gave evidence to at least two parliamentary enquiries into whisky, making the most of the opportunity for advertisement. 'The production of a beautiful electro-plated model of the still from which runs the silver stream, which changes into a golden one, by the time Mr Greenlees has done with it, completed a useful piece of testimony, with just a not too predominant flavour of advertisement'. By this time the brothers were arguably past their peak, and there were to be no successors to follow them. James Greenlees retired from the business in 1910, aged 62. By 1926 he had died. Samuel continued as a director of Greenlees, Colvill & Co Ltd until 1919, when he sold his majority shareholding to the distillers Mackie & Co. He had already moved to London to play a more prominent role in Greenlees Brothers and was no doubt responsible for the decision to merge that business with those of Sir James Calder to form Macdonald Greenlees Williams Ltd, initially a rival to the DCL's increasing domination of the whisky trade. It was to be this business that merged with the DCL, taking with it Old Parr, the Greenlees Brother's (and Argyll's) lasting contribution to the world of whisky.

