

## Editorial

### Whisky Business: Regulating and Recording the Whisky Industry

It is fitting that the launch of *Business and Industrial History*, which started out as *Scottish Industrial History* (1977-2010) and then continued as *Scottish Business and Industrial History* (2011-23), as an open access platform, should have as its subject one of Scotland's most enduring and both materially and symbolically significant industries; that of Scotch whisky. In its almost 50-year history, the journal has published historical research by professional historians, archivists and independent scholars, covering a wide range of topics on Scotland's business and industrial past into all periods and facets of Scotland's industrial and commercial past. The revival of the journal is also an appropriate tribute to and legacy of the work of two much-missed stalwarts, Professor Michael Moss (1947-2021) and Lesley Richmond (1956-2022), who did so much to preserve Scotland's industrial heritage and history, through their respective roles at the Archives and Records Association, Business Archives Council, Business Archives Council of Scotland and the University of Glasgow.

*Scottish Business and Industrial History* is intended to be a journal which serves as a space for archivists and historians to share and develop knowledge in the field in Scotland and globally. This commitment is reflected in the editorial board of archivists (Chris Cassells, Kiara King and Alison Turton) and business and industrial historians (Niall MacKenzie, Christopher Miller, Andrew Perchard and Zoi Pittaki) and number of members involved in various institutions that have been closely associated with the preservation of business and industrial history and industrial records and heritage, namely the Ballast Trust, the Business Archives Council of Scotland (BACS), the Centre for Business History in Scotland (CBHS; University of Glasgow) and the University of Strathclyde (formerly the home of the largest concentration of industrial historians who contributed significantly to the development of industrial history in Scotland). BACS and CBHS continue to support the journal's essay prizes each year (see page 10 for more details).

## Whisky Business

The call for contributions to a themed issue of the journal follows from the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Excise Act 1823, which profoundly altered the shape and ownership of Scotch whisky. The industry has been transformed since then through waves of agglomerations and mergers and acquisitions.<sup>1</sup> Such was the concentration of ownership, and the particular dominance by one firm, Distillers Company Ltd (DCL), that *The Economist* would refer in 1957 to a ‘tartan curtain shrouding the affairs of Distillers’, carrying with it the whiff of cartelisation.

In 1981, Michael Moss, along with John Hume, another leading industrial historian of Scotland, published *The Making of Scotch Whisky*, which was to prove highly influential not only as a reference point for researchers and archivists but for the industry as a whole.<sup>2</sup> As Iain Russell notes in this issue’s first article, the book would prove important to the development and enhancing of the evolving market for single malts. Up until this point, the bulk of the export market in Scotch whisky, which by 1976 sold to 190 countries and accounted for 34.5 per cent of the global market share in whisky sales, was in blended whisky. Crucially, for a heavily indebted post-war Britain, much of that export market was to the US offering valuable dollar exchange, with Scotch whisky accounting for around 30 per cent of the value of UK exports by 1964. The following year, export sales of Scotch were valued at £513 million (a little over £4 billion at 2023 real prices). However, the industry was facing a crisis with declining sales in North America, and with significant overproduction and with the need for fresh thinking. It would take outsiders coming into the industry to refresh existing capability in the industry to inject some renewal into it, building on the few existing single malts, to produce the Classic Malts range.<sup>3</sup> However, that rebranding drew on longstanding within the industry. A key element of that rebranding and the symbolic revival of the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael S. Moss and John R. Hume, *The Making of Scotch Whisky: A History of the Scotch Whisky Distilling Industry* (Edinburgh: James & James, 1981); Ronald B. Weir, ‘Managing Decline: Brands and Marketing in Two Mergers, the “Big Amalgamation” 1925 and Guinness-DCL 1986’, in Geoffrey G. Jones and Nicholas J. Morgan (eds), *Adding Value: Brands and Marketing in Food and Drink* (London: Routledge, 1994); Ronald B. Weir, *The History of the Distillers Company, 1877-1939: Diversification and Growth in Whisky and Chemicals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Moss and Hume, *The Making of Scotch Whisky*.

<sup>3</sup> Niall G. MacKenzie, Andrew Perchard, David J. Mackay and George Burt, ‘Unlocking Dynamic Capabilities in the Scotch Whisky Industry, 1945-present’, *Business History* (2024) 66:5, pp.1082-102.

fortunes of Scotch whisky, and of its sustainability, was reliant on industry and firm-level knowledge and appreciating the value of heritage and archives for marketing and other public relations purposes. In 1990, United Distillers Ltd created their archive (now the Diageo Archive) as a repository for the industry.

Scotch whisky has also created a historiographical business, some of it for whisky aficionados and others interested in the lessons that it can offer in the study of business, which has seen a renewed appetite in recent years. The first has seen the publication of longstanding whisky industry historian, and former head of whisky outreach at Diageo, Nicholas Morgan's history of Johnnie Walker, as well as a range of other specialised works.<sup>4</sup> The latter study has attracted studies of the Scotch whisky industry to explore such subjects as accounting, business-government relations and corporate political activity, entrepreneurship, internationalisation, marketing, philanthropy, technology transfer and strategy.<sup>5</sup> This work has all drawn on a wealth of company and government archives, as well as parliamentary records, historical newspaper databases and artefacts, in Scotland and beyond, carefully catalogued and maintained by archivists.

The papers included in this special issue add to that growing wealth of understanding of the development of the Scotch whisky industry through its collections. We have contributions which explore the early history of scotch whisky advertising (McCormack); the debate on the 'oldest' distillery (Russell), and the impact of the Excise Act on distilling in Ireland (Connolly). These sit alongside contributions from

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Morgan, *A Long Stride: The Story of the World's No.1 Whisky* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Julie Bower, 'Scotch whisky: History, heritage and the Stock Cycle', *Beverages*, 2:2, pp.1-14; Julie Bower, 'Accounting History of the Scotch Whisky Industry' in Martin Quinn and João Oliveira (eds), *Accounting for Alcohol: An Accounting History of Brewing, Distilling and Viniculture* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp.139-56; Niall G. MacKenzie, Jillian Gordon and Martin Gannon, 'A Spirit of Generosity: Philanthropy in the Scotch Whisky Industry', *Business History Review* (2019) 93:3, pp.529-52; Perchard and MacKenzie, 'Behind the "Tartan Curtain"'; Alison J. Gibb and Niall G. MacKenzie, 'From Scotland with Love: The Creation of the Japanese Whisky Industry, 1918-1979' in Mandy L. Cooper and Andrew Popp (eds), *The Business of Emotions in Modern History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp.143-58; MacKenzie et al., 'Unlocking Dynamic capabilities'; Julie Bower and David M. Higgins (eds), 'Litigation and Lobbying in Support of the Marque: The Scotch Whisky Association, c.1945-c.1990', *Enterprise and Society* (2023) 24:1, pp.286-316; Julie Bower and David M. Higgins, 'Working Behind the Scenes: The Scotch Whisky Association and the US Liquor Market, c1950-c1970', *Business History* (2024), Online First. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2024.2401395>.

archivists sharing their perspectives of the vital work of creating, curating and cataloguing collections in different contexts, from the Glen Mhor (Julier) to Macallan (Chorley) and Whyte & Mackay (Roper-Caldbeck & McDonald). Together they show the symbiosis of researching and writing the histories of businesses and industries on the one hand, with the practice of business archival curation on the other. In short, and beyond their individual contributions, they reflect this journal's aims perfectly, and offer a solid foundation for the next phase of *Business and Industrial History*.

### **Future plans**

The editors are excited to develop *Business and Industrial History: A Journal of Archival Research* as a forum for analysis at the intersection of archival practice and academic research in business and industrial history.

It is the intention of the editors to publish *Business and Industrial History* annually, with our next issue planned for publication in Spring 2026. We invite articles from archivists and historians in the UK and internationally and submissions are particularly encouraged from PhD students and early career archivists and researchers. Two essay prizes will be available annually to encourage new writing and the sharing of knowledge on any aspect of business and industrial history that uses archival resources.

A formal call for papers will be circulated in May 2025 with a submission deadline of September 2025.

*The Editorial Board (Chris Cassells, Kiara King, Niall MacKenzie, Christopher Miller, Andrew Perchard, Zoi Pittaki, Alison Turton)*