

## **The Universal Whisky: Advertising Scotch Whisky to the Empire in The Illustrated London News, 1890-1914**

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On Tuesday 12 May 1908, John Dewar & Sons, Limited, of Perth and London, officially opened their new bespoke headquarters at Dewar House, Haymarket.<sup>2</sup> The occasion was marked by a full-page article commemorating this achievement in the 23 May 1908 *Illustrated London News* [*ILN*]. The article celebrated the expansion and success of the business in the new premises due to Dewar's entrepreneurial spirit since they entered the London and export markets in 1886. By 1908, Dewar's recognition and popularity as a brand of Scotch whisky had grown to such a degree that the *ILN* author refers to Dewar's as 'a household name wherever people are sufficiently civilised to be able to appreciate whisky...' with distribution branches across the world from New York to Sydney, to Calcutta (Kolkata) and Barbados.<sup>3</sup> These branches represented an international network of distribution on a scale that hints at the demand for Scotch whisky outside of Scotland with Anglo or Imperial links but does not explain how the industry achieved this growth beyond the brand name.

In the 22 years since Dewar's arrived in London, drinking culture changed. Scotch whisky became synonymous with whisky, overtaking Irish whiskey consumption and replacing brandy's popularity in the city. Figures for the importation of spirits from Scotland and Ireland into the English market demonstrate that between 1870 and 1890, the two whiskies were relatively close in importation volume at approximately two million proof gallons [mpg] per year. In 1890, the figure for Scotch whisky importation started to climb reaching seven mpg in 1900, while Irish whiskey grew more modestly to 4 mpg.<sup>4</sup> While there are several factors that can explain the difference in importation for these whiskies that extend beyond the preference of the consumer, the purpose

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this article was supported by funding from the William Lind Foundation and the Centre for Business History Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> H.C. Craig, *The Scotch Whisky Industry Record* (Glasgow: Index Publishing, 1994), p.192.

<sup>3</sup> 'The House of Dewar', *Illustrated London News*, 23 May 1908, p.761, The Illustrated London News Historical Archive, 1842-2003, <<https://www.gale.com/intl/c/illustrated-london-news-historical-archive>> accessed 3 December 2024.

<sup>4</sup> R.B. Weir, *The Distilling Industry in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1974), p.159.

here is to represent the scale of Scotch whisky imports to England. Further to this, consumption of imported spirits outwith the production of the UK, which included spirits such as rum and brandy had reached a peak in 1875 of nearly 12 mpg in total, but by 1890 this saw a drop in volume to approximately 4.5 mpg for rum and 2.5 mpg for brandy.<sup>5</sup> With a world of choice, why did importation of the spirit from Scotland dominate the market share in England at the end of the century and how did this impact consumption within the Empire?

To answer this question, this article addresses two concurrent changes in the Scotch whisky industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the rise and recognition of brand names for Scotch whisky, and the adoption of Scotch whisky as a popular beverage. A means of mass promotion developed concurrent to the rise in exports of Scotch whisky, which made it possible to communicate brand names but also represent the changing cultural perception and preference for Scotch whisky. The *ILN* has been studied and recognised as a vehicle for the dispersion of British culture and mass advertising literacy within the British Empire, and for that reason is utilised here to examine the changes the industry underwent. Advertisements began in the classified format but transformed with technological innovation, allowing the inclusion of product images and further evolved to create semiotic aesthetics around brands and consumer goods. The period 1890-1914 also represented the establishment of visual and textual advertising tropes for the industry and the development of brand identities, which continue to be utilised by the contemporary Scotch whisky industry. Examining advertisements demonstrates the change that Scotch whisky underwent from a Victorian-coded Scottish spirit to a drink that had mass appeal, popular beyond the Scottish diaspora, for a wider Imperial community.

### **Advertisements as Textual Evidence**

Dewar's was not alone in expanding the distribution of Scotch whisky in markets beyond Scotland's border. Their success elevated them among the pantheon of whisky merchants to be immortalised as Whisky Barons, also referred to as the Big Five, by twentieth-century whisky writers such as Andrews, Daiches and Lockhart, who

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<sup>5</sup>Weir, *The Distilling Industry in Scotland*, p.165.

included firms John Walker and Sons, James Buchanan and Co., John Haig and Co. and Mackie & Co. later White Horse Distillers.<sup>6</sup> The authors venerated these whisky magnates by emphasising the enterprising qualities of the firm founders and successive entrepreneurial generations. Entrepreneurial credit is consistent with the literature in business history, as discussed by Hébert and Link regarding the treatment of entrepreneurs by historians and in the study of global alcohol drinks brands' origins by da Silva Lopes and Casson.<sup>7</sup> Clever business sense alone does not explain the entrepreneur's activity or reveal why some firms succeeded and others failed.

With the expansion of the Scotch whisky industry internationally, questions arise about how different levels of industry stakeholders achieved this growth. Writers and historians of Scotch whisky have broadened the entrepreneurial genius explanation, but they focus on entrepreneurs' decisions regarding distilling capacity and competition and cooperation among firms. Moss and Hume examined distilling capacity and changes in production in the 1981 *The Making of Scotch Whisky*.<sup>8</sup> Organisational studies by Weir and later Bower, then Perchard and MacKenzie, have examined the rise in power of the Distiller's Company Limited [DCL] through consolidation, amalgamation and cartel behaviour among a consortium of grain distillers who became a significant competitor and later collaborator with the Big Five.<sup>9</sup> The preference for Scotch whisky over brandy has also been attributed to the 1880s phylloxera blight that decimated grape vines in Europe causing significant supply problems for brandy drinkers, with whisky entrepreneurs taking advantage of a perceived gap in the market as a result.<sup>10</sup> It was not enough to control production

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<sup>6</sup> A. Andrews, *The Whisky Barons*. (Glasgow: The Angels' Share, 2002); D. Daiches, *Scotch Whisky: Its Past and Present*, first published 1969, 1<sup>st</sup> American edition (New York: Macmillan, 1970); R.B. Lockhart, *Scotch: The Whisky of Scotland in Fact and Story*, first published 1951, fifth edition (London: Putnam & Co., 1974).

<sup>7</sup> R.F. Hébert and A.N. Link, 'Historical Perspectives on the Entrepreneur' 2006 2(4), *Foundations and Trends in Entrepreneurship*, pp.261-408; T. da Silva Lopes and M. Casson, 'Entrepreneurship and the Development of Global Brands' 2007 81(4), *Business History Review*, pp.651-80.

<sup>8</sup> M. Moss and J. Hume, *The Making of Scotch Whisky* (Edinburgh: James & James, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> R.B. Weir, *The History of the Distillers Company, 1877-1939: Diversification and Growth in Whisky and Chemicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); J. Bower, 'Scotch Whisky: History, Heritage, and the Stock Cycle' (2016) 2, *Beverages*, p.11; A. Perchard and N. MacKenzie, 'Behind the "Tartan Curtain": Cartelisation in the Scotch Whisky Industry, 1830-1960' in M. Shanahan and S. Fellman (eds), *A History of Business Cartels: International Politics, National Policies and Anti-competitive Behaviour* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp.228-45.

<sup>10</sup> Weir, *The Distilling Industry in Scotland*, p.174.

capacity and whisky inventory; these entrepreneurs had to get their whisky to consumers via marketing strategies to increase consumer demand.

In the nineteenth century, the Scotch whisky industry experienced a significant transformation in its marketing strategies by integrating periodical advertisements. Increased promotion marked a pivotal departure in marketing by the industry to a targeted approach, which led to the formation of brand identities and brand equity for Scotch whisky firms. The increased investment in periodical advertisements was crucial in shaping consumer perception of Scotch whisky. Historic advertising for Scotch whisky has garnered some attention for enduring brands such as Dewar's, Buchanan's and Johnnie Walker, yet the identification of first entrants and the formation of tropes across the industry have been neglected.

Marketing activity includes distribution, pricing and promotion; opening branch offices abroad has explained the former, and accounts on pricing are limited to a reflection on market segmentation by Morgan and Moss.<sup>11</sup> The literature is divided regarding promotion and how much advertising contributed to the success of the Scotch whisky industry. Weir demonstrated in his thesis that in the last decades of the nineteenth century, advertising was considered by some to be a distasteful activity, continuing the emphasis on quality of the spirit and trust through brand names with brands such as Bell's and Walker's hesitating to use the medium to promote their blends directly to consumers.<sup>12</sup> Through the example of Dewar's, Weir demonstrated a shift that emerged to embrace direct-to-consumer advertising alongside international expansion, with the cost of this investment in annual advertising expenditure by the brand increasing from £688 to £22,244 between 1891 and 1900.<sup>13</sup> Despite this increase in advertising expense and frequency, Weir concluded that it is not worthwhile to judge the industry's growth by pitting the advertising activity of different firms against each other because advertisements were homogenous in themes and imagery.<sup>14</sup> Establishing an empirical figure for financial benefits from advertising by judging the reception of

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<sup>11</sup> N. Morgan and M. Moss, 'The Marketing of Scotch Whisky: An Historical Perspective' in R.S. Tedlow and G. Jones (eds), *The Rise and Fall of Mass Marketing* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.126-7.

<sup>12</sup> Weir, *The Distilling Industry in Scotland*, pp.440-1, 506-7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 535-47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.562-3.

specific campaigns may be insurmountable. However, firms like Dewar's considered it a worthwhile expense, or it would not have made financial sense to continue investment in advertisements.

Morgan and Moss also highlight the 'generic and well-defined themes' frequently used in the marketing of Scotch whisky but focus primarily on these themes in brands of whiskies that contributed to market segmentation and not on how these brands developed or communicated these themes in advertisements.<sup>15</sup> In sum, they explained the industry's success in expanding to an international market through the quality and consistency of Scotch whisky sold under brand names, especially those created by the Whisky Barons in the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Hands demonstrated how these brands, with the example of Buchanan and Walker, changed the perception of Scotch whisky by marketing their whisky as respectable.<sup>17</sup> These accounts move towards explaining the Scotch whisky industry's marketing activity away from the entrepreneur narrative but ultimately focus marketing on the brands these entrepreneurs created.

The emergence of brands is a feature across alcoholic beverages in the nineteenth century, with brand names offering assurances to customers for quality, consistency and origin. As demonstrated for champagne in works by Guy and later Harding, wine and spirit merchant W. A. Gilbey by Hands, and industry-wide alcohol brand development by Duguid.<sup>18</sup> Duguid made a case for the development of alcohol brands beyond the role of the entrepreneur to explain the emergence of brands as a response to external forces. He advocated for the role of the consumer; they contributed to the environment where brands were needed, such as requiring assurance of quality. Thereby, they dictated how brands developed through the consumer's interpretation

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<sup>15</sup> Morgan and Moss, 'The Marketing of Scotch Whisky an Historical Perspective', pp.127-8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.116-31.

<sup>17</sup> T. Hands, 'Making Scotch Respectable: Buchanan and Walker' in Thora Hands, *Drinking in Victorian and Edwardian Britain: Beyond the Spectre of the Drunkard*. (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), pp.69-83.

<sup>18</sup> K. Guy, *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003); G. Harding, *Champagne in Britain, 1800-1914: How the British Transformed a French Luxury* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021); T. Hands, 'The 'Illusion' of the Brand: W & A Gilbey' in Thora Hands, *Drinking in Victorian and Edwardian Britain: Beyond the Spectre of the Drunkard* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), pp.850-91; P. Duguid, 'Developing the Brand: The Case of Alcohol' 2003 4(3), *Enterprise and Society*, pp.405-41.

of trademarks and advertisements.<sup>19</sup> With this in mind, Scotch whisky brands developed within the context of similar forces among alcoholic beverages, with the formation of brands, their identities, and their advertisements representing what the firms believed appealed to or assured their customers. The literature on advertisements for Scotch whisky has had limited analysis; pictorial advertising is addressed by two trade books, one commemorating Victorian poster art and the other in service of brand identity.<sup>20</sup> This has been followed by a PhD thesis analysing the development and change in imagery used to advertise Scotch whisky from 1890 to 1970.<sup>21</sup> Analysing the advertisements across the industry, despite perceptions of homogeneity, reveals patterns in what competing firms wanted to convey about their brands to consumers and can infer what associations and motivations consumers had to drink Scotch whisky. The ability to examine the *ILN* holistically through a digital archive has made it possible to interpret thousands of instances where ‘whisky’ or ‘Scotch whisky’ was mentioned in articles and advertisements to identify patterns of change and activity by competing actors. This is a significant resource to interpret the industry’s activity during a periodisation when physical records for companies may not have been kept, have since been lost, or face access challenges by deposition in private corporate archives.

In contrast to the limited advertising accounts for Scotch whisky, advertisements in the periodical press have received attention for their contribution to the popularity of commodities and the emphasis on brand-name products. Advertisements as textual evidence in historical studies have demonstrated the persuasive power of advertisements and their role in social communication, shaping consumer purchasing with wider cultural influence.<sup>22</sup> In particular, works relevant to this study of Scotch whisky advertisements are the research on *fin de siècle* advertisements that shaped

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<sup>19</sup> Duguid, ‘Developing the Brand,’ p.433.

<sup>20</sup> J. Murray, *The Art of Whisky: A Deluxe Blend of Historic Posters from the Public Record Office* (Kew: PRO Publications, 1998); J. Hughes, *Still Going Strong: A History of Whisky Advertising* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> M. McCormack, *Making Whisky Scotch: Advertising a National Drink and a Global Spirit, 1890-1970* (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2024).

<sup>22</sup> W. Leiss, S. Kline, S. Jhally, J. Botterill and K. Asquith, *Social Communication in Advertising* (London: Routledge, 2018); D. Pope, ‘Making Sense of Advertisements’, *History Matters: The US Survey Course on the Web*, June 2003; R. Beasley and M. Danesi, *Persuasive Signs: The Semiotics of Advertising* (New York: De Gruyter, 2002).

British popular culture in the work of Hedley and advertisements that manipulated the perception of tea as an Imperial beverage in work by Chatterjee as well as Higgins and Velkar.<sup>23</sup> Smits illustrates how the *ILN* contributed to cultivating a shared Imperial identity and union between communities separated by a great distance.<sup>24</sup> The *ILN* features prominently in these accounts for its significant international circulation and adoption of illustration in advertisements, coinciding with the growth of Scotch whisky exports. The literature has recognised the *ILN* as a multi-disciplinary resource for cultural and literary studies and for its ability to study the development of brand identities and product design in advertisements.<sup>25</sup> In the study of commodities and brands, King noted that within the *ILN*, the advertisements typically represented luxury goods.<sup>26</sup> This is significant for insight into how *ILN* readers could have perceived Scotch whisky advertisements.

It is easier to quantify and analyse data from the periodical by the digitisation of the entire *ILN* publication from 1842-2003 in Gale Cengage's database (*Illustrated London News Historical Archive, 1842–2003*), the database uses Optical Character Recognition (OCR) which created a searchable transcript with metadata that facilitates browsing.<sup>27</sup> Access to the database makes quantitative and qualitative research possible, which can answer questions about brand formation and competition, first entrants, points of change and documentation of patterns. The search feature was used for this database to identify instances where the words 'whisky' and 'scotch whisky' appeared in the metadata. The results from this search identified the types of advertisements that

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<sup>23</sup> A. Hedley, 'Advertisements, Hyper-reading, and Fin de Siècle Consumer Culture in the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic*' 2018 51(1), *Victorian Periodicals Review*, pp.138-167; A. K. Chatterjee, 'Mythologizing Late Victorian Tea Advertising: The Case of *The Illustrated London News* (1890-1900)' (2024) 10:1, *History of Retailing and Consumption*, pp.43-82; D. M. Higgins and A. Velkar, 'Storm in a Teacup: Empire Products, Blended Teas, and Origin Marking Debates in 1920s Britain' (2024), *Business History*, p.1-24.

<sup>24</sup> T. Smits, 'Looking for *The Illustrated London News* in Australian Digital Newspapers' (2017) 23:1, *Media History*, pp.80-99.

<sup>25</sup> Leary, P. 'A Brief History of the *Illustrated London News*', *The Illustrated London News Historical Archive 1842-2003* (Cengage Learning, 2011), <<https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/patrick-leary-brief-history-illustrated-london-news>> accessed 3 December 2024.

<sup>26</sup> A. King, 'Advertising in the *Illustrated London News*', *Illustrated London News Historical Archive 1842-2003* (Cengage Learning, 2011), <<https://www.gale.com/intl/essays/andrew-king-advertising-illustrated-london-news>> accessed 3 December 2024.

<sup>27</sup> J. Mussell, 'Digitisation' in A. King, A. Easley and J. Morton (eds), *Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-century British Periodicals and Newspapers* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp.20-3.

appeared with a marked change in frequency, as well as the first instance of the inclusion of pictorial elements from the 1890s. The nature of the results based on searching metadata transcripts required further sorting to identify relevant advertisements.

During the periodisation of this research, a legal or industry-wide standardisation term for what would today be considered single-malt Scotch whisky or blended Scotch whisky was contentious, leading to government intervention both in the UK home market and in the US to define Scotch whisky in an attempt to define and protect consumers and the whisky firms.<sup>28</sup> The usage of 'Scotch' to denote whisky with an origin in Scotland emerged in the mid-century to distinguish between whisky with an origin in Ireland. This preceded the adoption of advertising in the *ILN* by firms selling whisky from Scotland.<sup>29</sup> Different firms initially included the word 'Scotch' with an inconsistent frequency and sometimes emphasised their brand name, followed by whisky. For instance, searching for 'Scotch whisky' between 1890 and 1914 yielded 499 results, but by searching 'whisky', there were 1,747 results. The contrast in the number of results did not mean that 'Scotch' did not appear in the advertisement but was missed by a search of the text in the metadata. The limitations of the metadata search required the sifting through the results to ensure the accurate accounting for advertisements for whisky marketed with an origin in Scotland.

In addition to these search modifications, the search used exclusion words to limit results and make the volume of results more straightforward. Repeated words excluded were for known brands of Irish whiskey, such as Kinahan and Bushmills, or for products that frequently mentioned whisky, such as Eno's fruit salt.<sup>30</sup> The exclusion

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<sup>28</sup> *Final Report of the Royal Commission on Whiskey and other Potable Spirits*. Parliamentary Papers, XLIX.451, 1909; *An Act of June 30, 1906, Public Law 59-384, 34 STAT 768, for Preventing the Manufacture, Sale, or Transportation of Adulterated or Misbranded or Poisonous or Deleterious Foods, Drugs, Medicines, and Liquors, and for Regulating Traffic Therein, and for Other Purposes*, Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, NAID: 5716297, 1906.

<sup>29</sup> Advertisements for Kinahan's LL whisky alongside their branded stout beer from Dublin sold by Kinahan's LL whisky, wine and Foreign Spirit Stores, 25 King William Street, Strand appears in the 22 April 1843 issue of the *ILN*. This brand of whisky continues to be advertised but it is 1850 before the distinction appears for 'Scotch' whiskies by wine and spirit merchants.

<sup>30</sup> Terms utilised to restrict results in the *Illustrated London News Historical Archive (1842-2003)* search: 'Dunville', 'Canadian Club', 'Gerolstein', 'Solar', 'Kinahan', 'Jameson', 'Bushmills', 'Diabetes', 'Eno's fruit salt'.



feature for the *Illustrated London News Historical Archive* (1842-2003) is limited to the usage of nine words in the 'terms' box after the initial search term, in this case, 'whisky'; the utilisation of this feature significantly decreased the manual workload. The 'document type' was also selected based on the database's established organisation. The narrow document type helped to limit instances where 'whisky' was utilised in articles and fiction pieces in the magazine. The listed alterations made to the search were precautions to ensure accuracy in documenting the advertisements for Scotch whisky during this periodisation; the author acknowledges that it is not an absolute with the possibility of a small number of advertisements missed. However, the volume of recorded advertisements has made it possible to speak on the adoption of advertising by the Scotch whisky industry in the *ILN* and how this coincided with the efforts to increase consumption and exports.

### Scotch Whisky Advertisements in *ILN* from 1890 to 1899

Before the 1890s, the promotion of Scotch whisky appeared in the *ILN*, typically within advertisements for Christmas hampers or an announcement of the firm's available alcoholic beverages by wine and spirit merchants in London. The firms that advertised these repeatedly were Findlater, Mackie & Co., W. & A. Gilbey and Hedges & Butler. Advertisements appeared from the 1870s for individual whisky brands with trademark names associated with Scotland, such as Glenrosa, Clachan, Glenalbyn, 'Wallace' Monument whisky, Macrae's 'F.B.O.' Scotch whisky and Lorne Highland whisky.<sup>31</sup> These advertisements were in the classified format, with a block of text describing some of the whisky's merits and where it could be acquired. These advertisements for Scotch whisky appeared on pages with other commodities that later became notable brands, such as Greenlees Brother's Lorne Highland whisky, alongside Lea & Perrins' sauce (Worcestershire sauce) and cocoa products by Fry's.<sup>32</sup> The development of Scotch whisky advertisements and the power of the brand name was happening concurrently

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<sup>31</sup> The 'F.B.O.' stood for finest barley only as listed in the advertisement text for Macrae's F.B.O. sold in London by Abbey Willis & Co., wine merchants. The last advertisement for this whisky appeared in the *ILN* on 4 May 1889 in vol. 94, issue 2611, p.578.

<sup>32</sup> 'Lorne Highland Whisky' (1 February 1873) 62:1744, *Illustrated London News*, p.107.

across commodities that appeared on the pages of the *ILN*, making the placement and frequency significant for consumer choice.

Advertisements in the pages of the *ILN* underwent a period of expanded frequency between 1860 and 1885; when they incorporated images, they were typically small, reused stock images. Between 1885 and 1900, advertisements became increasingly sophisticated, with strategic design utilising aesthetic systems for visual communication and text designed to be eye-catching and memorable.<sup>33</sup> The first movement towards incorporating visual elements for Scotch whisky is the advertisement for the Clachan and Glenalbyn Blends in the 13 December 1884 issue, which included an image of the Clachan trademark, which contained a shield, thistles and a lion with a crown.<sup>34</sup> Advertisements remained in the established format described above as a text-based classified format for the rest of the decade. From the 1890s, a discernible change emerged in the advertising of Scotch whisky, characterised by incorporating images, not just trademarks, alongside textual content. This departure from previous practices signified a notable shift in promotional strategies for Scotch whisky, marking a significant moment in advertising and brand identity development.

Wine and spirits merchants continued to advertise Scotch whisky among their offerings. An example from Hedges & Butler for a full-page advertisement of their diverse wine and spirits includes several types of Scotch whisky. In 1891, Hedges & Butler sold their whisky as Old Scotch whisky, a blend of Glenlivet (spelt as printed) and Highland whiskies, as well as Old Scotch whisky and Irish whisky blended and sold in 13-gallon or 27-gallon casks.<sup>35</sup> In this way, Hedges & Butler were selling their procured Scotch whisky under their brand as wine and spirit merchants. In contrast, advertisements emerged from firms using the advertisement space solely for their Scotch whisky offering. Throughout 1891, Greer's ran advertisements in the *ILN* for Greer's O.V.H. Old Vatted Highland whisky; this included a call to action, 'Ask for and drink only Greer's O.V.H.' and directed consumers where to obtain a bottle at Harrod's

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<sup>33</sup> Hedley, 'Advertisements, Hyper-reading', pp.140-3.

<sup>34</sup> 'Clachan and Glenalbyn blends advertisement' (13 December 1884) 85:2382, *Illustrated London News*, p.592.

<sup>35</sup> 'Hedges & Butler' (5 December 1891) 99:2746, *Illustrated London News*, p.743.

and all leading stores in London.<sup>36</sup> The emergence of marketing strategies that included a targeted call to action emphasised the move towards branding strategy and directed consumer appeal.

In a similar format to Greer's Innes & Grieve, Edinburgh, advertised its whisky as Old Uam-Var Scotch. It used the call to action 'The Best. Buy no Other'. It also introduced the tagline 'Used in the palace and the shieling'.<sup>37</sup> The tagline directs the reader to associate two things with the brand: its consumption in the palace, placing Scotch whisky in the royal sphere for taste-making, and in the shieling, which ushers in images of a nostalgic scene of pastoral sheep and cattle grazing in the Highlands of Scotland. This dual aspect of Uam-Var's marketing reflects a tension for brands of Scotch whisky during this periodisation, the need to distinguish the 'Scotch' in Scotch whisky and appeal to consumers beyond Scotland's borders. The conflict Uam-Var's tagline represents between appealing to different motivations to drink Scotch whisky continues to play out in the advertisements that follow with the introduction of pictorial advertisements.

A special issue of the *ILN* ran on 10 July 1893, celebrating the royal wedding of Prince George, Duke of York (later King George V) and Princess Victoria Mary of Teck (later Queen Mary).<sup>38</sup> This event was celebrated across the Empire with publicity and souvenirs to commemorate the union of the future king, including celebration biscuit tins from the brand McVitie's.<sup>39</sup> This was a momentous occasion to turn a widely celebrated social event into a marketing opportunity. In this special issue, the first pictorial advertisement in the *ILN* for Scotch whisky was for the firm John Robertson & Sons Dundee [JRD], represented in Image 1.<sup>40</sup> This is significant for representing a

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<sup>36</sup> 'Greer's O.V.H.' (4 April 1891) 98:2711, *Illustrated London News*, p.454.

<sup>37</sup> 'Old Uam-Var' (16 April 1892) 100:2765, *Illustrated London News*, p.501.

<sup>38</sup> *Illustrated London News Royal Wedding Number*, 10 July 1893.

<sup>39</sup> E. Read, 'By Royal Appointment: HAT Helps Pladis Celebrate the Coronation', History of Advertising Trust, <<https://www.hatads.org.uk/news/227/By-Royal-Appointment-HAT-helps-pladis-celebrate-the-Coronation>> accessed 3 December 2024.

<sup>40</sup> 'Drinking the Bride's Health', *Illustrated London News Royal Wedding Number*, 10 July 1893, p.36.

dynamic image explicitly designed for this event and directing the reader and potential customer to associate the image with the brand.

The advertisement depicts a scene at a dining table with a gathering of men making a toast and wearing uniforms that resemble officers of the Black Watch Highland Regiment. The caption underneath the image links the toast with the royal occasion by saying, 'Drinking the bride's health'. The officers hold thistle-shaped glasses with John Robertson & Sons Dundee whisky bottles on the table. The shape of the glass reminds the consumer of the flower of Scotland, and the use of their brand specifically places their whisky among the wedding celebrations. Using officers of the Black Watch is significant for their connection to Dundee, which JRD was motivated to reinforce with their brand, and for recognising the regiment within a broader Imperial history. Royale suggests



Image 1: *The Illustrated London News, Royal Wedding Number, John Robertson & Sons' Dundee Whisky, 10 July 1893, p.36.*

that the kilted soldiers of Scottish regiments, like the Black Watch, were fundamental in preserving the link of tartan with Scotland and traditional dress.<sup>41</sup> By constructing this image, JRD deliberately promoted multiple associations for the reader to make with their brand, the apparent reinforcement of the 'Scotch' and their export activity. The scene could be happening at any dining room, club, or mess hall, placing JRD's

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<sup>41</sup> T. Royle. 'From David Stewart to Andy Stewart: The Invention and Re-invention of the Scottish Soldier' in I. Brown (ed.), *From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish Culture, History and Myth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp.58-61.

Scotch whisky at the centre of this as an imperial beverage suited for celebrations of this magnitude.

Pictorial advertisements continued to signal to readers and customers the places to associate with drinking Scotch whisky. Innes & Grieve repeated the classified format advertisement for Uam-Var whisky, but in 1895, a quarter-page advertisement with vignettes signalled to consumers the places commonly associated with their whisky.<sup>42</sup> This advertisement seen in Image 2, featured a bottle of whisky with the label; the hierarchy of its size and placement in the centre demonstrated its importance, directing the eyes of the reader to the bottle and the brand name. Behind the bottle are four vignettes, small scenes that depict people and activities associated with drinking Scotch whisky, from top left to right: deer stalking, grouse shooting, a camp of a Highland regiment and fishing.



Image 2: *The Illustrated London News*, Innes & Grieve Ltd, Edinburgh, 2 November 1893, p.565.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Universal Drink' (2 November 1895) 107:2950, *Illustrated London News*, p.565.

Beneath these images is the tagline ‘The universal drink in camp, moor, or loch’, which confirms the places depicted in the illustrations and speaks to its widespread utility as a drink accompanying leisure sport practised by the upper levels of society, which included the army officers. Another tagline on the advertisement proclaims, ‘Highest International awards. Buy no other’. Innes & Grieve utilised the vignettes to demonstrate their whisky’s appeal to strenuous activity associated with Scotland, effectively putting the ‘Scotch’ in their Scotch whisky. However, by bringing attention to their international awards, they are directing the universal aspect of their whisky out of Scotland and a strictly Scottish context. In effect, the advertisements claimed that the traditional associations of Scotch as a stimulant could also apply to universal use in the Empire.

The advertisements by JRD and Innes & Grieve utilised the iconography of the Scottish soldier because they were celebrated and mythologised in abundance in art, books and illustrated pictorials, using an icon already embedded with meaning. MacKenzie argues that advertisements were part of cultural and imperial strategies that projected the Scottish soldier's iconographic status within the Empire.<sup>43</sup> In its frequency as a cultural device, the reader of the advertisement and the *ILN* would associate the whisky brand with the prestige broadcast by the Scottish soldier. Advertisers employed this strategy beyond Scotch whisky across commodities and extended it to regiments across the British military. Hedley refers to this deeper reading of visual and textual devices as a producer of knowledge and explains that it was a broader strategy within the pages of the *ILN* to lead readers to make links between the products advertised and the current events described in the editorial content.<sup>44</sup>

Pictorial advertisements for Scotch whisky continued to pursue themes that portrayed Scotch whisky as a commodity of the Empire. Examples are the influx of advertisements for Pattisons’ whisky from 1896 to 1898. In one advertisement, a caricature of two army officers standing in front of the Union Jack flag and a canon with the tagline ‘in general use’, and another the illustration of a large naval ship at sea

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<sup>43</sup> J. M. MacKenzie, ‘Empire and National Identities: The Case of Scotland’ (1998) 8, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, pp.225-6.

<sup>44</sup> A. Hedley, ‘Advertisements, Hyper-reading’, pp.155-8.

with the text, 'Pattisons' whisky, like a British ironclad, at home in all waters', Image 3, makes direct links to associations of the British Empire, its military and naval capacity.<sup>45</sup> MacKenzie demonstrated that this association was a broader phenomenon within advertisements, a kind of Empire propaganda that produced sentimental and patriotic images, using imperial, royal and military associations to promote tea, biscuits, tobacco and soap.<sup>46</sup> McClintock refers to these advertisers as 'Empire builders', their use of national symbols, from the Union Jack to Britannia, was part of a fetishisation of national symbols reworked to celebrate imperial spectacle.<sup>47</sup>



Image 3: *The Illustrated London News*, Pattisons Ltd, 19 November 1898, p.37.

<sup>45</sup> 'In General Use' (10 July 1897) 111:3038, *Illustrated London News*, p. 59; 'Forging Ahead' (21 November 1898), *Illustrated London News Christmas Number*, p.37.

<sup>46</sup> J. M. MacKenzie. *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp.25-30.

<sup>47</sup> A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.211-22.

In this way, consumers participated in the celebration of the Empire through their choice of commodities. In this case, the Scotch whisky brand reinforced their affiliation.

The introduction of pictorial advertisements for Scotch whisky allowed brands to develop complex meanings for readers of the *ILN*, associating their whisky with recognisable, meaningful symbols that would influence how the consumer felt about that brand. Incorporating these visual elements with taglines and targeted calls to action signifies the changing landscape of marketing for Scotch whisky during this period, highlighting the pursuit of consumer appeal and brand distinction beyond Scotland's borders. John Robertson & Sons, Dundee and Innes & Grieve, Edinburgh, were the most frequent advertisers in the *ILN* during this period, with other firms utilising the medium infrequently or for short runs over a few weeks. In this way, the images employed by JRD and Innes & Grieve represent the overall representation of the industry and Scotch whisky to readers of the *ILN*.

Critics of Scotch whisky advertising, like Weir, spoke of the homogeneity of Scottish iconography, especially tartan, while the examples of advertisements from JRD and Innes & Grieve included figures wearing tartan kilts; their use provided deeper meaning than just a tartan costume. By using Scottish soldiers and activities associated with drinking Scotch whisky, firms targeted consumers connected to Scotland, whether through the military, the diaspora or popular culture. As the decade progressed, they directed an appeal to a broader Imperial identity with an embedded Scottish identity. By the turn of the century, Scotch whisky had become readily accessible throughout the Empire, with advertising focused on its availability to Imperial consumers. As the advertisements moved Scotch further away as a beverage enjoyed in Scotland, the firms with the most significant distribution of Scotch whisky in international markets, that had not promoted at length in the *ILN*, turned to the publication to cement their brands in the minds of readers of the periodical. This change in advertising strategy emphasised the prominence of whisky in the market but created a problem for firms in creating distinct brand identities in a crowded marketplace. The following section examines how advertising changed to solve this problem.



### Scotch Whisky Advertisements in *ILN* from 1900 to 1914

Despite their success, in the first decade of increased Scotch whisky advertisements in the *ILN* the Whisky Barons are noticeably absent. Dewar's appeared once with the 1897 full-page advertisement for *Whisky of his Forefathers*.<sup>48</sup> This was a highly successful campaign, turning the image of an upper-class Scotsman with Dewar's whisky and his ancestors emerging from their portraits in pursuit of a dram, into the first commercial for Scotch whisky.<sup>49</sup> Despite their absence from the *ILN*, Dewar's had been covering significant ground establishing agencies around the world for their whisky and building their brand reputation. Bower notes that through colonial links, Dewar's, along with Buchanan's, Walker's and DCL, were able to establish a secure export future supported by the management of whisky stock levels and investment in efficiencies for bottling.<sup>50</sup> Despite their absence from the *ILN*, Dewar's invested in promotion with an expense in 1895 on showcards of £2,189 and on advertisements £6,258 the total expenditure increased by 1900 exceeded £20,000.<sup>51</sup> While advertisements in *ILN* were not the strategy for expansion utilised by the Whisky Barons and DCL, they became the overwhelming feature of advertisements for Scotch whisky.

From 1900 to 1902, Scotch whisky brands unanimously simplified their advertisements in the *ILN*. These advertisements continued to have an image, in this case, the whisky brand's bottle with a label, but not with sophisticated or aesthetic productions. This new Scotch whisky advertisement design trend blended the traditional classified format with the most protected parts of the brand's identity: the trademarked label and the bottle of whisky. This emphasis on the brand's bottle could be due to concerns over competition and consumer choice. By visualising the bottle alongside the reader's perceptions of the brand emphasised by taglines and calls to action, they could effectively train the consumer on what bottles to select when they saw them. Consumer anxieties around consumable quality contributed to branded commodities' growth. The bottle labels acted as the warrant for the brand's quality and, especially

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<sup>48</sup> 'Whisky of his Forefathers' (30 January 1897) 110:3015, *Illustrated London News*, p.163.

<sup>49</sup> J. Seargeant, 'Dewar's: The Whisky of his Forefathers' (2000) 20, *Scottish Industrial History*, pp.37-46.

<sup>50</sup> J. Bower, 'Scotch Whisky: History, Heritage, and the Stock Cycle', p.5.

<sup>51</sup> Weir, *The Distilling Industry in Scotland*, p.535.

important, around ideas of geographical origin.<sup>52</sup> This format change represented a broader trend among Scotch whisky firms, which most advertising firms from JRD, Innes & Grieve, Dewar's and Buchanan's, printed advertisements in this new format.

The move to focus advertisements for Scotch whisky that emphasised the bottle and label as the integral aspect of promotion continued in the years leading up to the First World War. 1902, however, marked the return of pictorial advertisements designed with aesthetic and imbued with cultural meanings. These were typically quarter-page and sometimes half-page advertisements with eye-catching images. Dewar's and Buchanan's became the most frequent practitioners of this strategy during this period. Examples of these advertisements utilised images that signalled to the reader what the firms wanted them to associate with the brand. In the case of Dewar's, this meant utilising familiar images that appeared within the *ILLN* related to the history of art, such as the *Laughing Cavalier*, the seventeenth-century portrait by Frans Hals, the Sphinx and Pyramids in Egypt and Assyrian relief sculptures, Dewar's wanted their whisky to be associated with age and therefore quality.<sup>53</sup> Buchanan's used graphic images to reinforce their brand label Black and White, with images of black and white animals, moving towards the development of an easily identifiable brand identity.<sup>54</sup>

While Dewar's and Buchanan's favoured images that did not require in-depth knowledge to interpret the meaning of their brands from the advertisements, other firms turned to humorous caricatures to represent their whisky. Greer's and JRD, both released comic images of golfers.<sup>55</sup> Golf connected to Scotland with the sport originating there but represented a modern and more universal sport that, like Scotch whisky, extended well beyond Scotland's borders. Additionally, by appealing to

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<sup>52</sup> S. Schwarzkopf, 'Turning Trade Marks into Brands: How Advertising Agencies Created Brands in the Global Market Place, 1900-1930', Queen Mary, University of London, School of Business and Management, Centre for Globalisation Research working paper, 2018; D. M. Higgins, *Brands, Geographical Origin, and the Global Economy: A History from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp.29-56.

<sup>53</sup> 'Laughing Cavalier' (31 May 1902) 120:3293, *Illustrated London News*, p.809; 'Whisky of Great Age' (1 March 1903) 122:3335, *Illustrated London News*, p.447; 'Pyramid of Giza' (5 March 1904) 124:3385, *Illustrated London News*, p.361.

<sup>54</sup> 'Polo player' (22 November 1902) 121:3318, *Illustrated London News*, p.793; 'Black and white dogs' (15 May 1909) 134: 3656, *Illustrated London News*, p.712.

<sup>55</sup> 'Greer's golfer' (20 August 1904) 125:3409, *Illustrated London News*, p.273; 'The Golfer's favourite' (21 October 1905) 127:3470, *Illustrated London News*, p.589.

comedy, the advertisers were tapping into broader popular culture with the international success of Vaudeville and music hall performers playing Scottish caricatures.<sup>56</sup> These links to the Scotch comic embodied a kitsch aesthetic. They fed into criticisms of Scotch whisky advertising for promoting kailyard and tartanry. Yet these images did not exist to represent Scotland accurately but to use simple associations with mass appeal. These examples represented a shift in focus on advertisements across the Scotch whisky industry that appeared in the *ILN* to simplify their message and associations supporting the brand name. If the previous decade was about convincing the Empire that Scotch whisky was an Imperial commodity; in the new century it was a contest for supremacy of the brand name.



Image 4: *The Illustrated London News, The Distillers Company Ltd, 15 July 1905, p.108.*

The advertisements discussed so far have reflected an industry in expansion, developing images to appeal to readers and providing positive and familiar connotations that encouraged the acceptance of Scotch whisky outside of Scotland. The appearance of the blend of Scotch whisky King George IV marketed by DCL in Image 4, hints at the industry's activity and motivations.<sup>57</sup> By promoting their blend to the export market in the *ILN*, DCL acknowledged the readership of the periodical that extended beyond the home market. Perchard and MacKenzie illustrate that in

<sup>56</sup> P. Maloney, "Wha's like us?": Ethnic Representation in Music Hall and Popular Theatre and the Remaking of Urban Scottish Society' in I. Brown (ed.) *From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish Culture, History and Myth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.129-50.

<sup>57</sup> 'George IV' (15 July 1905) 127:3456, *Illustrated London News*, p.108.

response to competition in the home market, DCL increasingly sold blends of whisky under the brand of the distilleries and firms they acquired, which proved especially important as domestic consumption declined.<sup>58</sup> Daiches refers to the marketing of King George IV as an operation on a small scale that accelerated during the First World War as DCL continued their consolidation of the industry.<sup>59</sup> The choice by DCL to call the blend name is related to the visit of the real King George IV to Edinburgh in 1822, where he famously got a taste for Scotch whisky.<sup>60</sup> This strategy gave DCL's blend a direct link to the past and an almost instant cache of brand equity. Advertisements for the blend appeared in the *ILN* in 1905, and its frequency was increasingly in competition with the Whisky Barons.

Where DCL targeted their advertisement for the export market, James Watson & Co. Dundee promoted Watson's No.10 with illustrations of the modern Scotch whisky drinker with a discerning palette. Watson's is an illuminating example of advertisements during this period because more is written about the brand in the literature after the firm was wound up and relaunched, with their inventory bought in 1923 by Dewar's, Walker and Lowrie, and then reformed in 1928 by DCL.<sup>61</sup> In this advertisement Image 5 for Watson's No.10, public opinion is used to imply the popularity of the brand in London through the usage of text that says, 'Tens of thousands drink Watson's No.10', combined with an illustration of the London skyline under which a procession of men assemble in the graphic zero of the No.10.<sup>62</sup> In addition to this, the copy text underneath proclaims that Watson's No.10 is for 'experienced whisky drinkers' and 'men of refined taste and good judgement'. This is a foil to the advertisements that centred comedic Scotch characters with popular light-hearted appeal; from this advertisement, Watson's No.10 is a serious whisky for the sophisticated Londoner or anyone else who framed London as the centre of good taste.

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<sup>58</sup> A. Perchard and N. MacKenzie, 'Behind the 'Tartan Curtain'', pp.233-5.

<sup>59</sup> Daiches, *Scotch Whisky: Its Past and Present*, p.122.

<sup>60</sup> Craig, *The Scotch Whisky Industry Record*, p.75.

<sup>61</sup> Craig, p.221 and p.230.

<sup>62</sup> 'London Skyline' (11 May 1907) 130:3551, *Illustrated London News*, p.741.



Image 5 The Illustrated London News, Watson's No.10 Whisky, 11 May 1907, p.741.

From 1909 to 1914, the Whisky Baron brands in the *ILN* showed a noticeable dominance through the frequency of their advertisements. Just as the *ILN* proclaimed the ascendancy of the House of Dewar in their London Haymarket headquarters, the advertisements reflected the dominance of these blended houses in the industry to the point that other competitors withdrew from advertising in the periodical. Walker's was also included in this move to dynamic advertisement campaigns after reluctance to adopt the method of promotion, with the Striding Man figure becoming emblematic for the brand, appearing frequently in the *ILN* during this period.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the Whisky Barons, DCL frequently and prominently promoted their Cambus patent still Scotch whisky, in addition to King George IV.<sup>64</sup> While the Whisky Barons seemingly overtook their competitors from the pages of the *ILN*, the firm of Andrew Usher & Co, Distillers, Edinburgh, began an advertising campaign in 1909.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> N. Morgan, *A Long Stride: The Story of the World's No.1 Scotch Whisky* (London: Canongate Books, 2020), p.82.

<sup>64</sup> 'Cambus Patent Still Scotch Whisky' (21 September 1907) 131:3570, *Illustrated London News*, p.431.

<sup>65</sup> 'Usher's Whisky' (18 September 1909) 135:3674, *Illustrated London News*, p.405.

Though Ushers had been absent from advertising in the *ILN*, they were early pioneers of blended whisky and early entrants to international exports.<sup>66</sup> Usher's utilise this history of the firm to promote their whisky in a special New Year's advertisement published on 1 January 1910.<sup>67</sup> The advertisement in Image 6, uses the tradition of singing 'Auld Lang Syne', popularised by the Scottish poet Robert Burns, demonstrating how embedded Scottish cultural traditions were in the Empire. The illustration has men joined with their hands as part of the ritual of singing the song at the New Year. Each figure is dressed in traditional clothing associated with their location in the Empire and is reminiscent of the earlier advertisements for Imperial propaganda. In this case, Usher's is utilising the longevity of their firm as justification for drinking their whisky. With over 50 years of exports to the Empire, the advertisement claims, just as JRD did for their whisky in 1893, that Scotch whisky is the appropriate spirit for celebrations across the Empire.



Image 6: *The Illustrated London News*, Andrew Usher & Co., 1 January 1910, p.29

The choice by Usher's to utilise the design of this image can be interpreted simply as fulfilling a brief to represent the longevity of their firm with their spirits enjoyed by

<sup>66</sup> Daiches, *Scotch Whisky: Its Past and Present*, p.72 and p.97.

<sup>67</sup> 'Auld Acquaintance' (1 January 1910) 136:3689, *Illustrated London News*, p.29.

whisky drinkers across the Empire, printed to celebrate the New Year and their continued success. Yet, this image of personified imperial identities, hand in hand, culturally distinct but unified, represents the development of the industry to this point. The evolution of Scotch whisky advertising in the early twentieth century reflected a shift in marketing strategies and brand promotion. At the beginning of the decade, the emphasis on bottle and label imagery, followed by the resurgence of pictorial advertisements with cultural and aesthetic significance, demonstrated the industry's adaptability to change consumer perceptions and market demands. Whereas early pictorial advertisements for Scotch whisky strove to communicate that Scotch whisky was a spirit for consumption beyond Scotland, in the twentieth century consumers accepted this, so the work of advertisements was to ensure their brand was the one they reached for.

## Conclusion

Utilising pictorial advertisements as a source to examine the Scotch whisky industry reveals the efforts different stakeholders took to represent their product and develop positive associations for their brands. The advertisements reveal ideas about the industry's history that are difficult to quantify by focusing on individual brands and entrepreneurs. Whether designed to imitate competitors or fulfil larger ideas of patriotism, tropes emerged among advertisements that collectively contributed to perceptions of the spirit integrated as a universal and imperial product. The first decade of advertisements for Scotch whisky in the pages of the *ILN* demonstrates a focus on expanding the Scotch whisky industry through acceptance of the spirit as a part of the Empire. Promoting Scotch whisky in this way mirrored contemporary efforts to influence the British public to utilise Empire goods, such as tea, cocoa and soap, within their homes, appealing to sentimental and patriotic desires to be a cohesive British society.

The *ILN* was integral to providing the vehicle for these associations, with advertisements for Scotch whisky integrated into this process. The industry's growth outside of Scotland depended on transforming perceptions of the spirit from a stimulant for the Victorian leisure class to enjoy on sporting holidays to one recognised

and reached for by the middle-class readers of the *ILN* whether in London, or Australia. Yet, as marketing has developed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the memory of advertisements has focused on the overtly Scottish associations. This reveals a tension to represent Scotch whisky as a unique product from Scotland, to justify its market position and to protect it from imitators. Yet the effort of marketers to integrate Scotch whisky consumption into broader cultural use continues, with the challenge to promote Scotch whisky as inherently Scottish and appeal to consumers without affiliation to Scotland and wider Anglo-British culture.

This article examines advertisements for Scotch whisky that signal consumers' ideas of individual brand identities and concurrently ideas that the beverage appealed to an Anglo-centric international market. The literature has demonstrated that the brand's name and the quality and consistency of Scotch whisky propelled the Big Five and DCL to success. This article includes how they communicated these qualities to their consumers. Further, it illustrates the activity of other actors that did not fall into these two camps, revealing competition strategies and the broader changing perceptions of the industry. This article has utilised examples to argue that studying advertisements for this period is worthwhile in contributing to studies of brand development and the rise in Scotch whisky popularity beyond the entrepreneur genius or kailyard images appealing to a nostalgic diaspora. The *ILN* was a significant platform in the decade leading up to the First World War and demonstrates how the brand name and brand identity overtook the 'Scotch' in Scotch whisky, paving the way for the supremacy of the blended brand.



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