



# The Distilleries of Campbeltown: The Rise and Fall of the Whisky Capital of the World

By David Stirk

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Starting with the early origins of Campbeltown, David Stirk relates in *The Distilleries of Campbeltown* how the town grew from a small settlement into a Royal Burgh that depended on the herring fishery before whisky became the main trade in the town and its associated villages of Dalaruan and Dalintober. He shows how certain families such as the Colvilles, Armours and Mitchells were to be central to this trade for over a century. Ultimately the town's prosperity waned with the rise of the blending trade from the 1860s and the resultant preference for Speyside and Islay whiskies over their Campbeltown counterparts, the depression, prohibition in the USA and the post-WWI rationalisation orchestrated by the Distillers Company that took many distilleries out of production for ever. This decline is recorded by way of newspaper reports and correspondence between interested parties and is perhaps most poignantly represented by the suicide on 23 December 1930 of Duncan MacCallum, aged 83, once a leading distiller in the town, when he drowned himself in Crosshill Loch. Yet out of that dark past, something of a resurgence has gradually been made as Springbank and Glen Scotia have managed to keep going and now Glengyle is producing again. The result is that Campbeltown can now boast more working distilleries than exist in the entire Lowland producing area. This is the first proper in-depth look at the whisky industry in Campbeltown and it is accompanied with period colour OS maps showing the distillery locations in the mid-1860s along with numerous previously unpublished turn-of-the-century archive photographs of the town from the MacGrory collection.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Who hasn't heard of the comic music hall song "Campbeltown Loch I Wish You Were Whisky" and wondered what story lay behind these famous words? *The Distilleries Of Campbeltown* sets out to explain how Kintyre's main town became the whisky capital of the world; Beginning with the Gaelic-speaking clans of Irish origin, who began to colonise Kintyre during the first millennium, David Stirk relates how the town grew from small beginnings into a royal burgh which depended on the herring fishing before whisky became the main trade; He offers no compelling evidence that the Irishmen from the Glens of Antrim brought the art of distillation with them but supports a growing belief that the MacBeatha, or Beaton family, hereditary physicians to the MacDonald Lords Of The Isles, were responsible for spreading it for medicinal purposes several centuries later; If the exact date when whisky, as we know it today, was made in Campbeltown for public consumption has been lost, it is on record that a present of aquavita (Latin - the water of life) a distilled spirit flavoured by the plant called curmei/ in Gaelic, or wild liquorice, was being sent by the 9th Earl of Argyll, who owned the whole of Kintyre, to friends as early as 1667; The beverage must have been a great success because soon farm rents in the form of spirits were being paid to the Duke by the burgesses of the town. Trading ships, encouraged by the safety of Campbeltown's sheltered loch, began to arrive from England, Ireland, the Clyde and farther afield, and soon the town boomed and its distilleries flourished; Ultimately the town's prosperity waned with the emergence of the blending trade and a preference for Speyside and Islay whiskies; The Depression, prohibition in America and the post-First World War rationalisation orchestrated by the Distillers Company who took many of the smaller distilleries out of production altogether led to its decline; This is the first in-depth work on the history of whisky distilling in Campbeltown. It is well written, well researched and accompanied by numerous unpublished photographs and a range of contemporary maps and plans showing the locations of the town's many distilleries in the mid 1860s. David Stirk has skilfully drawn his information from newspapers and numerous other little-known sources; This is a reference work which ought to be read not only by whisky lovers the world over, but genealogists and local historians as well as every resident of Kintyre who can justly take pride in their area's contribution to the Scottish whisky trade; Iain Thornber, --Scots Magazine

#### About the Author

David Stirk was born in Ripon in 1976 and has visited most of Scotland's distilleries by his mid-twenties, He contributes to Whisky Magazine and is the author of *The Malt Whisky Guide*. He worked as a brand ambassador for William Cadenhead Ltd, the independent bottlers based in Campbeltown, and now runs his own whisky-bottling concern.

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