

Celtic Finge AGM – 2007 – Drumchork Lodge Hotel, Aultbea

Apologies: Chris Field, Lilah Ford

Fran Cree (Chair) welcomed the group to the Drumchork Lodge. As part of the proceedings, John and Frances (who own the Hotel) had kindly agreed to give us a talk and tour of the distillery attached to the hotel – this is a quite unique facility, and will remain so for reasons that will be clear later.

This being the case, AGM procedures were kept to a minimum:

Chairman's report:

FC simply commented that the year had been a busy one, and that the industry generally was in a relatively busy phase, what with Highland 2007 and other initiatives under way. Clearly spurred onwards by the impending Distillery Visit, she then handed over to James Mould for the accounts.....

Treasurer's report:

Jim Mould had prepared his customarily efficient print outs of funds and figures. These show that the bank balance as at £3761.23 + £2005.15 currently owed to CF from Highland Council for work carried out on T@ related "Seedcorn" projects. (See DG's report following). 85% of the membership are now on Banker's Order payments, which is far more effective in admin terms. Overall, financial costs have exceeded income by £887 across the whole year – JM commented that although this is largely due to the fact that some expenditure from the previous year had spilled over into the current year, this was an area which will be monitored carefully this year in order to claw this back.

Project Co-Ordinator's report:

Douglas Gibson (Co-Ordinator) then ran through the Annual Report which had been completed for the AGM (NB: Full copies of this and previous AR's are available on the website by clicking..... [here](#))

It's all down in black and white for you, so I'll be brief:

- Membership numbers are just under 100 just now
- Please make sure we know your current email address & Please check your website entry
- The "Activities Guide" is now available at just £2.00 each, with accompanying folding handouts FREE – just let me know how many you want if you are planning a marketing campaign at all.
- The "Wester Ross Binocular Trail" proposal is currently awaiting information from Highland Council on statistics to do with road / car park usage across the area
- We now have an "Events" section on the website covering the whole of Wester Ross – does YOUR local hotel, venue, or activity provider know this?
- Proposed for this year are:
 1. *Development of a sustainable funding resource for environmental projects*
 2. *Creation of a fully interactive website covering the whole of Wester Ross*
 3. *Ditto for Activities*

Note: ALL annual reports / AGM details are available on the CF website – these have all the above info in greater details.

The Tourism @ Seedcorn work: This work has included the Events site, Binocular trail, and the seemingly stillborn proposal to develop a “Bedroom Folder” info pack covering the area. This folder info is in the annual report, but the quick explanation is that we went down several dead end alleys with Visit Scotland “Challenge” Funding – too many rules and regs, and just not practical to fit in with their criteria for funding. We tried.....Oh how we tried.....

Next years Committee:

This will be in the form below:

Chairman:	Fran Cree, Melvaig
Treasurer:	James Mould, Lochcarron
Project Co-Ordinator:	Douglas Gibson, Gairloch
Committee Members:	Morag Walmsley, Gairloch Chris Field, Shieldaig Gina Burt, Torridon

<p>NOTE: Important!: Lilah Ford (Kinlochewe) and Joyce Sutherland (Aultbea) are stepping down from the Committee. Nobody from these areas has as yet stepped forward to come on board in their place, therefore please contact either myself or Fran Cree if you feel you can assist. The commitment is approximately 4 meetings per annum + participation in email discussions when required.</p>

** AGM closed 3.20 **

The Drumchork Distillery: John Clotworthy & Frances Oates

A entertaining explanation about the background and then a tour of the distillery took place. This is quite emphatically *not* a multi million £ venture.....the size of the single “still” involved is only 40 gallons for a start!

John explained that when himself and Frances bought the hotel a number of years ago, they had a keen interest in whisky. This gradually developed over time, and they attended a number of events / festivals etc, some of which were in the USA. Through the American visits in particular, they came across the “microdistillery” idea (similar to the current wave of microbreweries we have now over here). On the way back from one of these trips, Frances (I think) commented along the lines of “Why can’t we do one ourselves over here?” Nice idea.....

Except that the nice men from Customs and Excise had other ideas. When they looked into the proposal in more detail, J & F were informed politely and firmly that the minimum still size was 1800 litres – way bigger than they could have looked at. Much trawling around and question asking did not produce anything new, and it looked as though it was a closed case. Taking the case to Charles Kennedy – on the basis that this was a venture that would encourage and develop tourism in the area – produced nothing either, save for CK encouraging them to look for loopholes in the law that if found, he would be delighted to pursue for them.

J & F discovered that as far back as 1824, there were records of small 40 gallon stills, however these ceased soon after that. This was where the loophole appeared! Cust & Ex could not answer the question as to exactly when the size changed, but their view was that this was irrelevant anyway, and that nothing further could be done.

More burrowing around in old records and documents by J & F revealed that the size changed in 1860. It looked then as though nothing more could be done, the law being the law etc. However:

What they then discovered was this:

- The law had been changed in 1860, *but*
- ONLY in England and Wales!
- Not Scotland!

Not even Customs and Excise were aware of this, and basically, they had no option but to then grant the licenses required. And guess what – this legal loophole was closed immediately afterwards!

Therefore this is why the Drumchork is so unique: It is the only legal distillery of that size that is ever likely to be given a license in this country, and not only that, but the distillery uses the exact same equipment – except for the addition of a hydrometer - that was used in all these (mythical?) stills that used to be (supposedly?) all over the place. Not that I believe a word of it.

The distillery itself is just wonderful: Quirky, simple, effective and so on. As mentioned at the beginning, it is not a massive venture – in fact, at present there are no real plans to sell the whisky anywhere else except the Hotel, due to the potential bottling costs (and the productive capacity of one small, hard working still!). However, the distillery is a real selling tool for the Drumchork Lodge hotel itself, and they have a lively trade in packages which sees visitors booking in for a week or so, having the opportunity to distill their own whisky and then take it away in a (*terribly cute looking!*) wooden cask! They can't drink it there and then as it has to mature for about 5 yrs, but you can see the unique attraction to a potentially huge market out there.

So there.

(No pictures I'm afraid – nobody had a camera! And if I have omitted anything, if you were there – please feel free to correct me)

DG