

5. Irish is usually a blend of single malts and grain whiskeys, of different ages and from different woods and, unlike some other whiskies, Irish is vatted for only a few days before final bottling
6. No flavouring or caramels may be added.



## Conclusion

Enjoyment of Irish coffees may sustain an impression that Irish Whiskey is limited in its appeal, lacking in variety and, perhaps, a choice for the young and immature palate but nothing could be further from the truth. No firm records exist but Ireland is agreed by most to have been the birthplace of Whiskey and, to this day, it remains an equal to all, producing whiskeys of outstanding finesse and quality and revealing to those who look hard enough, a rewarding variety of tastes including single malt, pot-still, and grain whiskeys and whiskeys matured in new and old American white oak, Spanish Sherry and French Limousin oak.



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**IRISH WHISKEY  
EXPLAINED**

‘Of all wine, Irish wine is the best’  
Peter the Great



## Background

Whiskey is as Irish as the Shamrock and the Harp and was supposedly discovered by the forces of Henry II when, as long ago as in the 12th century, they invaded and conquered Ireland. Certainly by the sixteenth century whiskey distilling and consumption were commonplace throughout Ireland.


Elizabeth I of England was very fond of 'Irish' and Sir Walter Raleigh was known to be keen to take a cask or two on his travels.' Irish' was even the choice of the Russian Czar, Peter the Great and his Court. By the end of the 19th Century there were reputed to be more than 2000 stills in Ireland and only the circumstances of history and Irish resistance to change have since conspired to deny Irish Whiskey the success and recognition it deserves.



## Beginnings

In 431 AD, the barbarian hordes descended upon the Holy Roman Empire, turning Europe into a cultural and religious theatre of darkness. Many monks were forced to flee their monasteries and came to Ireland, hoping it to be unreachable even by the Goths, Visi-Goths, Vandals and Huns. Some had come from Spain, where they had become familiar with the process of distillation, used by the Arabs in their production of perfumes and they wasted no time introducing their skills to the Irish.

Through their influence, it is commonly believed that the 6th and 7th centuries in Ireland represented the world's first Golden Age of Whiskey. When the barbarians were finally defeated, the monks were able to return to Europe, taking with them, not only their Holy Scriptures but also bottles of their Irish Whiskey. The reputation of 'Irish' spread far and wide and the future for Irish Whiskey looked good.



## But the Decline of Irish Whiskey is well documented...

1. In 1826 a Scots distiller, working in Ireland, patented the process of continuous distillation and in 1838, Aeneas

Coffey, a French born Irishman improved the process. However the Irish took the view that adulterating whiskey in this way was not good and that producing fully flavoured whiskey in the traditional pot-still would continue to be best favoured. Unfortunately for the Irish, this was not to be the case. Andrew Usher, a Scotsman and agent for The Glenlivet, perfected the process and distillers in Scotland, not Ireland, began to produce a lighter style of blended whiskey, mixing traditional malt with grain spirit. The lighter, cheaper Scotch began to grow at the expense of Irish.

2. In the middle of the 19th century a Capuchin Friar from Co. Cork, Friar Matthew, decided alcohol to be the demon drink and that consumption in Ireland was too high. Encouraged by his crusade, temperance societies closed down more than one third of public houses.
3. In 1872 the Phylloxera bug destroyed vines in France and when supplies of Cognac dried up, it was the new Blended Scotch and not Malts or Irish that began to fill the demand for a drink to replace Cognac and Soda.
4. From 1919 until 1933 Prohibition in America denied the Irish a market in which they had held a share as great as 75%. The Scots and Canadians managed to maintain supplies of sorts during these years and so when The Great Experiment came to an end, tastes had swung to these countries' lighter whiskies.
5. The Irish War of Independence in 1916, resulting first in partition and then civil war from 1919 -1921 caused disputes with Britain over the repatriation of land rents, lasting from 1923 - 1933. During this time all opportunity for sale was denied in Britain and throughout her Empire.

For these unfortunate reasons of circumstance alone, Irish Whiskey went into free fall while first Scotch Blends and then Malts became the whiskies of choice around the world.



## Restoration?

Towards the end of the 19th century only around 160 distilleries remained. By 1920 numbers had dropped to 70 and by 1966 to 4 and then 2 when Jameson, Powers and Cork Distilleries combined to form Irish Distillers, and to

only 1, when Bushmills joined them in the early 1970s. By 1989 the Pernod-Ricard Group had bought Irish Distillers and all the international marketing resources were committed to Jameson, leaving other blends for domestic consumption alone.

Recently with the purchase of Tullamore Dew by Cantrell & Cochrane, the reopening of the Cooley Distillery in the North and focus, by Irish Distillers, on Midleton, Irish Whiskey is regaining recognition for its variety and quality and all signs indicate that this process will continue to gather pace.



## The Special Characteristics of Irish Whiskey

Irish remains truly distinctive, a Whiskey like no other, using numerous different grain formulae and production processes and distilled in a climate matched by no other country. Bushmills and Cooley are situated in The North and experience the damp and wet weather so typical of Scotland whereas at Midleton, down in the South, the giant stills stand in hot and humid warehouses, with the warm Gulf Stream flowing nearby and the occasional palm tree swaying in the breeze.

In Ireland it is the art of the distiller and the production process that influences the final whiskey most of all, not the weather or the wood as with most other whiske(y)s.



## Irish Whiskey is Unique

1. The main grain in 'Irish' is barley, often a combination of malted and unmalted barley. Maize and wheat are little used.
2. Generally the grain is not dried over peat meaning that the flavours of the grains are not 'smoked' as in Scotch.
3. With rare exception Irish Whiskey is triple distilled.
4. Irish Whiskey uses a variety of woods for maturation, initially using new or little used wood and then perhaps, sherry, rum or port casks for later years.