

Whisky Appreciation

A look back at the journey we have made so far, and the whiskies we have sampled ... sadly some of these being short-lived 'editions' that are no longer available, but plenty that continue to be there to buy at the bar or from supermarkets and more specialist stores.

1. Location, Location, Location ... The Scottish Whisky Map - August 2025

Back at our first meeting in August 2025 we made good use of the selections at our base, the Open Arms Inn, to look at lightly-aged whiskeys, characteristic of different whisky regions of Scotland. Talked about how location can affect the typical type of whisky from an area (water, use of peat for malting, climate etc.), and also how flavours can be 'mapped' onto four quadrants of the whisky flavour map, depending where they fall on the light to rich scale, and the delicate to peaty/smoky scale, and what different tasting experiences you tend to get in each of these quadrants.

Whiskies sampled:

1 – <u>Glen Scotia Campbeltown Harbour</u> – ‘sea spray and gentle smoke’ a traditional young, maritime, bourbon-cask whisky, from the Campbeltown regions, no age specification 40%	<i>Nose: sea salt, flamed heather, toffee, iodine</i> <i>Taste: fudge, apple, brine, herbaceous</i> <i>Finish: dry smoke</i>	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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2 – <u>Cardhu Gold Reserve</u> - ‘an easy drinking exponent of the soft, sweet, approachable Speyside style’, unpeated malt, soft water, aged in toasted oak barrels, no age specification, 40%	<i>Nose: stoned fruits, toffee, apple, ginger</i> <i>Taste: biscuity oak, apple, some cinnamon</i> <i>Finish: gentle oak and caramel</i>	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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3 – <u>Glenkinchie, 12 yr old</u> – a Lowland whisky – ‘the perfect aperitif for a warm evening’ – bourbon casks, water from a spring on site, and taller stills giving a purer spirit. 40%	<i>Nose: rural, meadows/hedgerows, almonds</i> <i>Taste: fresh, stewed fruits and honey, becoming oaky</i> <i>Finish: medium body with barley and freshly mown grass</i>	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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4 – <u>Jura, 12 yr old</u> – an Island whisky – ‘an after-dinner dram’ – unpeated malt, hard water from loch, maritime influence, aged in bourbon barrels and finished in sherry casks. A nice all-rounder with a bit more punch than earlier tastings. 40%	<i>Nose: nutty barley, cinnamon, melon</i> <i>Taste: fudge, pear, chocolate, peppery malt</i> <i>Finish: sherbert lemons and sultanas</i>	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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Extra info on next page: *The Malt Whisky 'Flavour' Map* (generic 4 way rating on Body, Richness, Smoke and Sweetness) versus 'Mapping by Location' into defined Scottish regions. Tasting notes mainly from 'The Whisky Exchange' website.

Malt Whisky Categories: Can be broken up into different types in different ways:

1. By Production Location - Map to Right:

Lowland, Highland, Speyside, Islay and Cambeltown - varying in climate, fuel sources, water hardness, traditional working methods, etc. – each with its own typical type of whisky produced. Island as highland style with coastal hints.

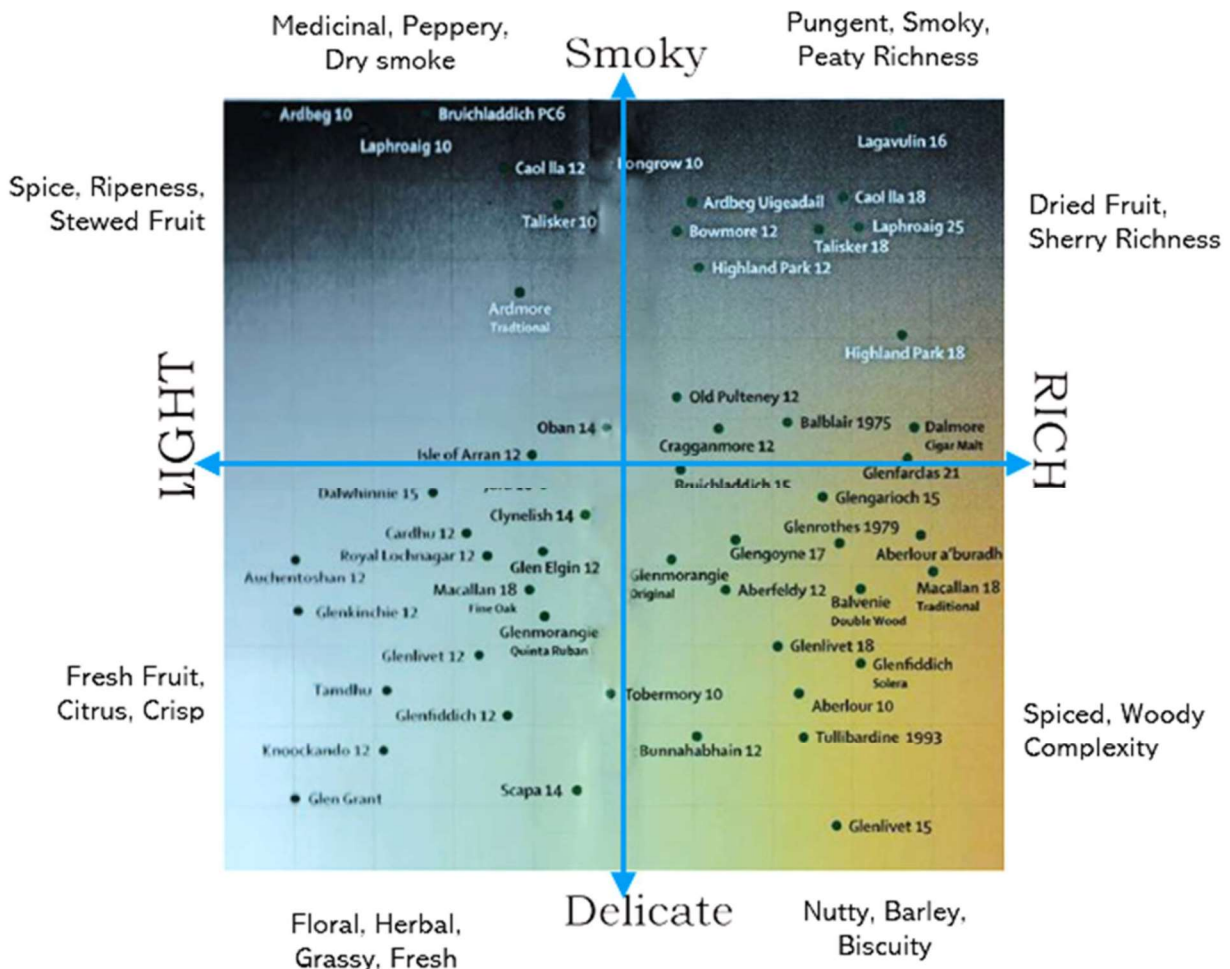
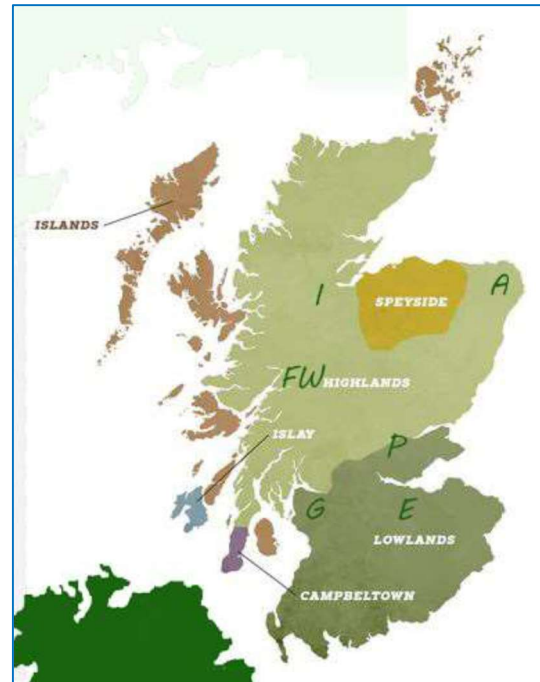
2. By flavour characteristics – Map Below:

Aroma and taste coming from the ingredients and different stages of production and maturation. (Drafted by drinks company Diageo so not all whiskies included.)

Light whiskies get flavour mainly from the fermentation and distillation stages, while **Rich** whiskies get more flavour from the maturation process. **Smoky** whiskies have more discernible levels of smoke/peatiness from local water and malting processes, while **Delicate** whiskies lack this.

3. Scoring on three measures purely on end result:

Rating in terms of **Body, Richness, Smokiness and Sweetness**. Relates to the flavour map, but is more widely used by all distributors. Smokiness covers both peatiness and charred wood influences, Body having to do with oiliness and mouthfeel



2. Traditions and Innovations

In October 2025, we moved on to some more complex flavours, and on to exploring how you can get quite different types of whiskies from those you might expect from a particular area; and how variety in flavour comes from different factors such as malt sources, finishing casks, shape of stills, temperature, and much, much more. How fermentation gives not just alcohol but many different fruit acids etc. – hence why you get “fruity” flavours generated; and how in the barrel (for a minimum 3 years, often longer) you get colour and more variety of flavours being introduced. Also thinking about another two terms used to classify whiskies – Richness which relates to how complex the range of nose and tastes have become with ageing, and Body which is to do with mouthfeel of does it feel mainly like a purer gin-like liquid, or are there other more oily or thickening elements there too.

1 - Cragganmore 12, Classic Speyside (part of classic malts collection). A good aperitif, in the malty middle of the whisky map, smooth but complex, finished in sherried casks. 40%.	Nose: Aromatic, Floral, Heather, smoked almonds, hay Taste: Rich, Honey, Stone Fruits, Nuts, Biscuit Finish: malty, woodsmoke, good length, peppery spice	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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2 - Bowmore 12, Classic Islay - from the oldest distillery on the island, classic characteristics coming from use of peat fires to dry out the malted grain, traditional pot stills, etc. But after aging process becoming rounded to give other flavours alongside the classic Islay peatiness.	Nose: coastal, smoke, ash, lemon, bergamot, hay, heather Taste: honey, vanilla, perfumed smoke, briny. Dark peat and oily sweetness Finish: smoky and prolonged, seaspray, lemon	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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3 - Bruichladdich – Innovative new brand, also from Islay but made in highland style - aka “the classic laddie” in a distinctive turquoise bottle, deliberately breaking expectations.	Nose: Bright, floral, green apples, pear drops, barley sugar, sea air Flavour: sweet malt, ripe orchard fruits, creamy toffee, oak spice Finish: long and refreshing, lingering malty sweetness and vanilla	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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4 – <i>members choice: to go more peaty or move away from peaty whiskies as preferred.</i>										
A – Port Charlotte – a different variant from the same distillery as the laddie !! Selecting different malt but using the same stills, to give a classic Islay variant, in matching shaped, equally distinctive. black bottle.	Nose: Bold, peatily smoky, roasted nuts, charred wood, vanilla and citrus zest Flavour: Rich and full bodied, smoky bacon, dark chocolate and toffee, balanced with citrus fresh apples and oak spice, for a good balance of sweet and smoky Finish: warming with earthy peat, toasted oak and briny freshness	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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B – Dalwhinnie Winters Gold – back to a Highland Style, from a distillery at high elevation in Cairngorm region, distilled only in colder winter months for a slow processing time.	Nose: Oak spice, pear skins, golden syrup and gristy malt Flavour: Very Honeyed with warming pepper spices, cinnamon Finish: Allspice, Nutmeg, smoky malt. When drunk chilled, the cinnamon and peppercorn linger.	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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3. Ageing, Racking and Blending

In December 2025 we started to look at ways the basic whisky might be improved or varied after the initial production stages. The basic product of the distillation process is a clear spirit, but by law it only becomes “whisky” after a minimum of 3 years in an oak barrel to let the spirit react with the wood, adding colour and developing a richer range of tastes. The barrelling effect can be increased by the time in the main storage barrels, barrel selection and by re-racking in smaller barrels obtained from making other spirits and wines. Plus different whiskies are often blended to combine taste qualities.

1 – Deanston Virgin Oak -- Highland (near Perth!) – young whisky decanted into unused, but deliberately charred, American Oak in the finishing stages of its maturation No age specification, 46.3% bottling	Nose: Heady virgin oak, lemon zest, toasted malt, barley sugar, apple, nutmeg, and sandalwood on nose, Taste: sweetness, candied fruit, vanilla toffee plus heather honey Finish: a satisfying light spice, burst of honeyed malt and oakiness	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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2a – Ledaig with Rioja finish (the peaty option) – a smoky variant from Mull’s Tobermory Distillery, made with heavily peated barley and finished in hand selected Rioja Red Wine Casks. 46.3%. No Age Spec.	Nose: turkish delight, candied orange peel, leather, black pepper and dark chocolate Taste: notes of almond, raspberries, vanilla, cinnamon and cut grass over rich waves of savoury peat smoke.	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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2b - Jura in Rum Cask – 40%, No Age Spec. Jura produce a ‘cask editions’ range using various different barrels for finishing. Still a young whisky, coloured and filtered to improve its appearance.	No detailed tasting notes found for this one, just an example of merging the basic whisky with additional flavours from the rum residue in the barrel used for finishing. Promoted as having “Layers of Tropical Fruit, sweet citrus and a hint of vanilla spice”.	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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3 – Isle of Skye Malt Blend – 12 Years Old – 40%. A blend with high malt content, taken from islands and highlands distilleries (trade secret what the mix is). No component whisky is aged less than 12 years	No detailed tasting notes, but recommended for notes of dried apricot, gooseberries and a lingering peat smoke that is softened with a pleasing mint choc-chip character. (Just to show that “Blended” is very much NOT always a warning to dodge a bottle.)	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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4 – Shackleton – a blended whisky with a story – ‘The Spirit supplied to the 1907 British Antarctic Exhibition’ recreated by a master blender from an old sample retrieved from Antarctic. Originally based on MacKinlay’s whisky, long discontinued, so the taste had to be experimentally recreated from current day malts.	Nose: Vanilla, toffee apple, brioche, honey/marmalade, ginger cake Taste: : Treacle toffee, Demerara sugar and sweet sultanas, glazed pineapple, freshly baked crusted bread Finish: Hot mulled wine, praline chocolate and oolong tea with a final whisper of gentle bonfire smoke and crème brûlée Rich and Sweet.	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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We did talk about the distilled spirit legally not being able to be sold as 'whisky' until it had at least 3 years in a cask. Plus had a taste of a spirit from a whisky distillation, pre the aging - strong, very fruity, colourless, interesting but not whisky.

4. More about different expressions, from different ‘finishing’ methods.

Further examples, following on from last month’s selections, looking at more whiskies which are put in barrels selected or prepared in some way to pick up added flavours

<u>Tamnavulin with Port Cask finish</u> a Speyside distillery that offers a non-peaty whisky, often bottled young, but with a wide selection of finishes. No age spec, 40%. This one gives wine-like influences. Mahogany colour	Nose: Ripe red berries, plums, dark chocolate, sweet biscuit and spiced orange. Taste: Berry compote, dried fruits, caramel, nutty finish	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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<u>Loch Lomond Steam and Fire</u> – 12 yr old, aged first in bourbon casks, then finished in heavily charred casks, where the charcoal finish of the inside of the barrel can react with the whisky to give both purification and more wood smoke flavours. Pale colour	Nose: demerara sugar, fudge, cinnamon Palate: stewed fruit, orange, pears, coffee, dark chocolate Finish: vanilla and biscuits	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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<u>Aberlour, Speyside, 12yr old double wood</u> – an example of a classic Speyside whisky with sherry cask finish, for a more rounded and sweeter finish.	Nose: Fruity, apple, malty Palate: real sherried character, hints of chocolate, honey, spice medium bodied, viscous mouth feel Finish: medium	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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<u>Dalwhinnie, 12 year old</u> – the effect of retaining in barrels for a longer period, to develop a much more rounded quality spirit, with more depth and variety in the taste.	Nose: Clean and fresh, with heather honey, pears, a touch of toffee and a soft floral note. Palate: Bright and fruity, but also rich, with notes of steamed syrup pudding and sponge cake, with a little cinnamon and nutmeg. Finish: Just enough spice to match the fruit. Lovely balance.	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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5. Ireland and American Options –March 2026

Starting to move outside of Scotland, to get to different methods of whisky production

Auchentoshan – a lowland scotch whisky but from a distillery founded near Glasgow by Irish refugees in 1825. In common with Irish and other lowland whisky, made with unpeated malted barley, distilled three times, to soften the flavour and body of product. 40%	Nose: Crème Brulee with a burst of citrus and nuttiness, and a touch of green leaf Palate: Smooth and sweet with hints of tangerine and lime Finish: Gingery and slightly drying with a pleasant lingering nuttiness.	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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Teeling Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey 46% – traditional Dublin style, made with a mix of malted and unmalted barley, which gives a creamy result and mellow sweet and fruity taste.	Nose: vanilla, stewed apple, cinnamon, yogourt, banana milkshake Palate: Notes of toasted barley, salted caramel, dark fruit, winter spice and nuts. Finish: a hint of toast	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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Woodford Reserve Kentucky Straight Bourbon whiskey : 43.2% USA style corn whiskey (aka maize but not the sweet corn variety, over 51%, plus malted barley or wheat), aged in new Oak casks. Initially sweet, buttery and fresh, get far more complex after time in barrel.43.2%	Nose: Heavy with dried fruit, hints of mint, oranges, cocoa, plus tobacco and vanilla. Palate: Rich, chewy, rounded and smooth, with complex citrus, cinnamon and cocoa. Toffee, caramel and spice notes too. Finish: Silky smooth, almost creamy, and long, warm, satisfying tail.	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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Bulleit '95' Kentucky Rye Whisky – many ryes (at 51 rye taste similar to bourbon, however at 95% rye this is more like Canadian whiskies which have more spicy and herbal notes	Nose: cherries and vanilla, with subtle notes of leather and tobacco Palate: hot at first, the spices coming to the forefront. This is followed by peaches, more cherries and a little bit of orange zest Finish: A smoky finish, with cinnamon, allspice and some sweetness	<table><tr><td>Body</td><td>Richness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Smoke</td><td>Sweetness</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>	Body	Richness			Smoke	Sweetness		
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6. May 2026 – Visit to a different pub (Swan and Railway) with a wide range of whiskies May

Pub stocking a range of whiskeys from all over the world. Including Indian, Japanese, various blended selections, as well as Scotch, Irish and USA selections. Good feedback for Green Spot Pot Still Irish, Nikka by the Barrel Japanese blend, Connemara Peated from Ireland, and Isle of Raasay (a blend of scottish malts aged in a wide variety of casks). Less keen on the Indian Amrut, or Sheep Dog peanut butter whiskey liqueur!