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The three distillations of Belfast's whiskey industry; The rise, fall, and renaissance from the 1860s to present day

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History

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the Irish whiskey and distilling industry of Belfast from the period of its initial boom in the late nineteenth century, to its decline in the twentieth century, and its current reemergence and renaissance it is experiencing today. The dissertation looks at the social impact distilleries had on the city of Belfast by drawing on primary sources, including director minute books, letter books, and day books of Belfast and Ulster distilleries, contemporary newspaper reports, parliamentary papers, and pictures from the archives and myself. In addition to the primary sources, secondary literature surrounding the subject are used and considered throughout.

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Contents

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Introduction

Irish Whiskey (*usquebaugh*) has been enjoyed by millions of people across the world and on the island of Ireland since it was first introduced around the fourteenth century.[1] It continues to be linked to Irish identity as much as Guinness, sheep, and traditional music. Yet, this vibrant historical industry almost faded in the twentieth century. Producers such as Jameson and Bushmills, common on pub and off-license shelves today, survived; but for countless others, their names are lost to the history books. The tumultuous events of the two world wars, the revolutionary period followed by civil war, and the economic depressions of the twentieth century shook Irish society to its core, and the whiskey industry was not immune. This was particularly evident in cities like Belfast whose physical and economic growth depended on industry. It is curious then that as we approach the first quarter of the twenty-first century that Irish whiskey has not just made a comeback but has had a renaissance of sorts. It is not only thriving in the transnational markets but domestically in cities like Belfast through its contribution to tourism.

This dissertation seeks to investigate the social history of Belfast's whiskey industry from its "golden age" in the late stages of the nineteenth century to its decline in the twentieth century. By looking at specific past distilleries, it is possible to see where the industry influenced Belfast's landscape, employment, entertainment, and government. The dissertation will also examine the renaissance that is happening today and how Belfast's whiskey history is represented as a form of heritage and tradition.

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[1] Samuel Morewood, *An essay on the inventions and customs of both ancients and moderns in the use of inebriating liquors: Interspersed with interesting anecdotes, illustrative of the manners and habits of the principal nations of the world. With an historical view of the extent and practices of distillation* (London, 1824), pp 336-337.

Historiography:

Scholarly studies of Irish whiskey began to emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century but there are traces of literature on the subject before this.[2] Samuel Morewood's *Inebriating Liquors,* published in 1824, is one of the first comprehensive studies of liquors starting from the early cultivation of the grape to distillation across the world. With a section dedicated towards Ireland's history regarding Aqua Vitae (*usquebaugh*), Morewood claimed that the first use of Irish whiskey was in the fourteenth century for remedies of sickness but was also so strong and well liked that warriors would indulge in it before battles.[3] He continued to explain the duty, licensing and technological advances that became attached to the Irish distilling industry due to the Crown's growing interest in its profitability. Morewood argued 'the establishment of manufactories, the encouragement of the industry, the opening of markets in remote districts […] would tend much to the improvement of the people, and by [their] employment, serve to eradicate many of those causes of discontent' long associated with Irish whiskey.[4] Half a century later, in 1887, Alfred Barnard produced a detailed account of each distillery he visited throughout the United Kingdom.[5] Similar to Morewood, he gave a brief history of distilling but then diverted into a description of each distillery including its production methods and annual output. In the north of Ireland, he mentioned ten distilleries including the oldest licensed distillery of Bushmills dating back to 1784, which had offices and warehouses in Belfast at the time. He also described Belfast's newest and most modern distillery, The Irish

[2] Edward B. McGuire, *Irish whiskey; a history of distilling, the spirit trade, and excise controls in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973); Malachy Magee, *1000 years of Irish whiskey* (Dublin, 1980); John Irvine, *Uisce beatha: the evolution and archives of the Irish whiskey distilling industry* (Dublin, 1985).
[3] Morewood, *Inebriating liquors*, pp 336-337.
[4] Ibid., p. 367.
[5] Alfred Barnard, *The whiskey distilleries of the United Kingdom* (1887).

Distillery, whose output was said to be two million gallons per annum making it one of the largest producers on the island.[6]

There is a long gap in literature relating to Irish whiskey after Barnard's detailed account of distilleries in the late nineteenth century. Edward B. McGuire would not only reignite literature of Irish whiskey in 1973 with *Irish Whiskey* but be referenced and looked to by future works of literature that followed.[7] An expert on excise taxation, he provides a detailed study of Ireland's distilling industry through substantial research in government legislation and hearings from the eighteenth century to the 1970s. However, he does not exclude the social aspects of Irish whiskey, but rather highlights the more colorful encounters including illicit distillation, the invention and continuation of the Coffey patent still alongside the whiskey blending battle that would ensue amongst Irish and Scottish distillers. Scholarship in the decades that followed built on McGuire's work by focusing solely on history of Irish whiskey production and its place in Ireland's society and economy.[8]

However, it is important not only in retrospect but as a comparison to look at scholarly works on Scottish distilling. R.B. Weir provided a number of studies on the Distillers Company Ltd. of Edinburgh, exploring their competition and eventual buyout of the United Distillers Ltd. headquartered in Belfast.[9] With these works, he not only gives in depth knowledge on the patent still process but also on how it was utilized by both Irish and Scottish distillers stating that it was 'confined to large-scale distillers' and the 'nature of their investment decision was either to

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[6] Ibid., 432-433; Ibid., pp 428-429.
[7] Edward B. McGuire, *Irish whiskey; a history of distilling, the spirit trade, and excise controls in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973).
[8] Magee, *1000 years of Irish whiskey*; Andy Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union' in David Dickson and Cormac Ó Gráda (eds), *Refiguring Ireland* (Dublin, 2003).
[9] R. B. Weir, 'In and out of Ireland: The Distillers Company Ltd. and the Irish whiskey trade 1900-39' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, vii (1980), pp 45–65; R.B. Weir, 'The patent still distillers and the role of competition' in L.M. Cullen and T.C. Smout (eds), *Comparative aspects of Scottish and Irish economic and social history 1600-1900* (Edinburgh, 1977), pp 129–144.

convert their premises for patent still production or to extend their distilling capacity by adding a patent still.'[10] In other words, the patent still further industrialized whiskey production.

This highlights the significance of Ireland's industrial economy, an area of relevance to this dissertation. As with Irish whiskey, the industrial history of Belfast is still in its early stages and although works do acknowledge the importance of the food and drink industry, more focus is directed towards the industries of linen, shipbuilding, and engineering. Philip Ollereshaw argues 'northeast Ulster had more in common and maintained much closer contact with industrial regions of Britain' compared to the rest of Ireland which is evident throughout the industrialization of the nineteenth century.[11] In this sense, it is understandable then that the Scottish and Irish whiskey industries grew in a similar manner as R.B. Weir suggests. Belfast, however, holds a unique niche with its linen and shipbuilding industries. Henry Patterson argues that 'as a major port and consumption center Belfast had by the end of the [nineteenth] century developed a group of consumer goods industries.'[12] W.A. Maguire's *Belfast* explores the city's economic and industrial growth during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[13] His work shows how Belfast became responsible for well over half the total whiskey exported from Ireland alongside other significant export goods.[14] These industries' survival was dependent on the export market economy which would decline in the twentieth century due to declining demand and market changes. Maguire states 'just when Belfast had become a capital city […] changes in international trade began to undermine the industries that made it great.'[15]

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[10] Weir, 'The patent still distillers', P. 138.
[11] Philip Ollerenshaw, 'Industry, 1820-1914' in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An economic history of Ulster 1820-1939* (Manchester, 1985), P. 101.
[12] Henry Patterson, 'Industrial Labour and the Labour moment 1820-1914' in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An economic history of Ulster 1820-1939* (Manchester, 1985), P. 165.
[13] W. A. Maguire, *Belfast* (Keele, Staffordshire, 1993).
[14] Ibid., P. 66.
[15] Ibid., P. 137.

The decline of Belfast's distilling industry has been explored in relation to Ireland, Scotland and the United Kingdom but there is an absence of scholarly work on the impact it had on the city. Madeleine Humphrey writes about the decline of the whiskey industry but positions her focus on the Republic of Ireland.[16] Andy Bielenberg, a economic historian of Ireland's place within the industrial revolution, provides some discussion of the whiskey industry in his article 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union'.[17] Split into three chapters, he covers the industry on the island from its emergence to its response of market integration and competition within the United Kingdom to the factors that eventually led to its decline. He points to the fact that 'oversupply in the UK market reach[ed] critical levels' leading to conflicts of interest with its Scottish competitors eventually all but collapsing the northern Irish distilling industry.[18] He also makes note of a missing piece of historiography on what was 'the nature of the whiskey exported from Ireland since the 1870s, notably from Belfast.'[19] This missing piece will be investigated within this dissertation. Although the economics of the industry is significant, little has been explored regarding how the distilling industry socially affected Belfast.

Works on Belfast's social history trace back to 1877 from George Benn's *A history of the town of Belfast*;[20] however it wasn't until more recently that studies of Belfast's social history have started to emerge. Beckett's 2008 edited collection, *Belfast: The making of the city* covers unique aspects of the city including popular entertainment, politics within the skilled class, and the consumer cultures of periods including the Edwardian period. Brenda Collins states that 'no

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[16] Madeleine Humphreys, 'An issue of confidence: the decline of the Irish whiskey industry in independent Ireland, 1922-1952.' in *The journal of European economic history*, xxiii, no. 1 (1994), pp 93–114.
[17] Andy Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union' in David Dickson and Cormac Ó Gráda (eds), *Refiguring Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), pp 290–315.
[18] Ibid., P. 300.
[19] Ibid., P. 301.
[20] George Benn, *A history of the town of Belfast from the earliest times to the close of the eighteenth century* (Blackstaff Press ed., Belfast, 2008).

matter how much Belfast was dependent on world markets for its existence, its character was determined by events which were internal to Ireland.'[21] S.J. Connolly's *Belfast 400* is a more recent sizable work that has chapters covering Belfast from prehistory to its modern landscape.[22] Olwen Purdue's edited collection attempts to steer away from the sectarian shadow that's engulfed Belfast by instead focusing on social and economic development.[23] She states that the 'networks that made up the fabric of Belfast's social and economic activity reach much further than the physical boundaries of the city' referring to its importance to both the global trading network and internal network of the countryside.[24] This is a thread that this dissertation will look to follow by investigating the social networks of the distilling industry in Belfast and the north of Ireland from the nineteenth century to the present.

With the social history of Belfast only recently bourgeoning, little has been focused on the distilling industry. As mentioned above, it remains mainly a part of economic history. There are some works of note though that are changing this. Initially, the distilling industry has been examined in the context of work on other social developments such as the temperance movement. Elizabeth Malcom's extensive study on the movement in Ireland argues 'drinking patterns differ widely and almost as characteristic of a nation as its language.'[25] Belfast became an epicenter of the temperance response thus there were drastic implications on the public as well as the alcoholic industries within and outside of Belfast. Recent scholarship has begun

[21] Brenda Collins, 'The Edwardian City' in J.C. Beckett *et al*., *Belfast: the making of the city* (Belfast, 2008), P. 167.
[22] S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Belfast 400: people, place and history* (Liverpool, 2012).
[23] Olwen Purdue, *Belfast: the emerging city, 1850-1914* (Dublin, 2013).
[24] Ibid., P. xx.
[25] Elizabeth Malcolm, *'Ireland sober, Ireland free': drink and temperance in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1986), P. ix.

exploring the connection between drink and society in Ireland but has maintained a wide scope rather than focusing on specific cities.[26]

One area that has received some attention is illicit distillation and selling, both highlighting interactions between illegal distillers, excise authorities and police. K.H. Connell, for example has explored the relation of *poitín* (the term for illegal whiskey) with the peasant and rural societies of Ireland.[27] There is also a chapter in McGuire's *Irish Whiskey* dedicated to illicit distillation where he states 'in one sense it has a social value' due to the proudful linkage it has attained with certain Irish societies.[28] Brian Griffin has covered the other side focusing on the police force of Belfast and their involvement with illicit selling and drunkenness.[29]

Moving away from this historical approach, the recent emergence of *new* distilleries, which are opening at a rate unseen since the mid-nineteenth century, is attracting scholarly attention across a number of disciplines. James Beeson writes about the market and investment that Irish whiskey is receiving citing the global market and transnational events as main catalysts.[30] Sylvain Tondeur explores the reemergence of the industry but goes beyond the impressive economic numbers stating 'Irish whiskey is becoming more than an alcoholic drink. It is sold as a piece of Irish history and culture, working on the notions of 'heritage' and 'traditions.''[31] In this light, whiskey has the potential to make a significant contribution to tourism. Scotland's whisky industry has capitalized on this for some time and Karl Spracklen has

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[26] Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Drink and society in twentieth-century Ireland' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 115C (2015), pp 349–369; James Kelly, 'The consumption and sociable use of alcohol in eighteenth-century Ireland' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 115C (2015), pp 219–255.
[27] K.H. Connell, *Irish peasant society* (Dublin, 1996), pp 1-50.
[28] McGuire, *Irish Whiskey,* pp 431-432.
[29] Brian Griffin, *The bulkies: police and crime in Belfast 1800-1865* (Dublin, 1997).
[30] James Beeson, 'What's behind the Irish whiskey revival?' in *Just Drinks*, 2022 (https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/what-s-behind-irish-whiskey-revival/docview/2693031781/se-2) (13 May 2024).
[31] Sylvain Tondeur, 'The Irish Whiskey Renaissance: A Revolution of Sorts?' in *Dublin Gastronomy Symposium* (Dublin, 2016), P. 177.

emerged as a leading scholar of this phenomenon.[32] The final chapter of this dissertation will explore current operating distilleries in Belfast and how they not only sell their products but the heritage that they seek to identify with. Mark McGovern states that visitor centeres attached to distilleries 'constitutes a particular form of heritage tourism and further evidences the link made between the consumption of Ireland as tourist destination and the drinks industry.'[33] The reemergence of Irish whiskey is intentionally tied to its ancestral roots and Belfast is the latest city that is a part of this twenty-first century renaissance of Ireland's whiskey industry.

Structure and methodology:

This dissertation looks to fill the void of the whiskey industries' impact on Belfast's social history. It will be split into four chapters investigating different time periods and socioeconomic developments within the industry in the city and, more broadly, across Ulster. The first chapter will set the context of the dissertation showing how distilling changed from the early nineteenth to the mid-nineteenth century while explaining types of distillation. The next chapter is the largest and explores the emergence and success of Belfast distilleries in the latter half of the nineteenth century through director books, letters & correspondence, and images from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and the National Library in Dublin in addition to newspaper articles and parliament papers relating to the status of the spirit industry of Belfast and Ireland. These sources will support the argument that distilleries were more than a part of economic networks but also impacted social networks within Belfast and its countryside.

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[32] Karl Spracklen, 'Dreaming of drams: authenticity in Scottish whisky tourism as an expression of unresolved Habermasian rationalities' in *Leisure Studies*, xxx, no. 1 (2011), pp 99–116; Karl Spracklen, 'Bottling Scotland, drinking Scotland: Scotland's future, the whisky industry and leisure, tourism and public-health policy' in *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, vi, no. 2 (2014), pp 135–152.

[33]Mark McGovern, '"The cracked pint glass of the servant": The Irish pub, Irish identity and the tourist eye' in Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor (eds), *Irish tourism: image, culture and identity* (Clevedon, 2003), P. 95.

The third chapter, drawing on similar sources of distillery director and minute books alongside street directories, is shorter but investigates the decline of the whiskey industry in Belfast within events of the twentieth century. It explains why the industry collapsed and what happened to the companies, properties, and workers within Belfast. It bridges the second and final chapter by showing that until recently there was no activity outside of Old Bushmills regarding whiskey distilling in Northern Ireland. The final chapter uses oral interviews with a tour guide from Titanic Distillers and brand manager from McConnell's Distillery along with available data exploring the reemergence of distilleries in Belfast and their connection with heritage and tourism. The chapter will argue that these distilleries once again are influencing Belfast society by not only selling and making whiskey but also sharing its heritage, drawing on Belfast's historical and, possibly, continued significance to the Irish whiskey industry.

This dissertation will briefly touch on the types of whiskey and processes in the first chapter. However, the main focus of the dissertation is looking at the social implications distilling had and continues to create for the public. It will explore Belfast as a port of export for nearby distilleries and the consequences the industry had on citizens within the industrial city. Other distilleries that existed throughout the north of Ireland will also be looked at regarding their connections with Belfast. Within this scope, this dissertation will investigate how society perceived, benefitted and gambled on Belfast's whiskey industry from the late nineteenth century when the whiskey boom was in full swing to the comeback it is now enjoying through further globalization and tourism. It will closely look at the ups and downs distilleries have and are continuing to go through within domestic and transnational events impacting the society of Belfast.

Chapter 1: Background of Irish distilling in the early nineteenth century

A need for change:

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Irish distillers had to navigate a complex web of legislation that specified what was and was not allowed during distillation. For example, distillers could not adapt their stills with steam or new technologies and had a requirement that their stills had to be 200 gallons or more. The method of excising at that time was applied on a basis of what was the maximum output distillers *could* make in a 28-day period regarding their stills.[1] These requirements pressured distillers to make whiskey in bulk and consequently disregarded the quality before quantity. Due to the demanding circumstances under which licensed distillers had to work, only 51 distilleries were left by 1806.[2] This had significant impact on Ulster society as it encouraged the production and consumption of illegal whiskey. As a result of the legal and economic pressures on distillers, legal whiskey, or 'parliament whiskey' as it was known then, was second best to the preferred illicit distilled whiskey known as *poitín*. Many of these illicit distillers were located in northwest Ulster. The numbers are difficult to estimate but in 1814, 1,696 fines were issued for illicit distilling in the Northwest making up 47 per cent of all fines issued that year in Ireland.[3]

Illicit distillation had two main socioeconomic implications. The first calls attention to two separate classes of society; the lower/middle and the upper. The first was the relationship between the illicit distillers and the low to middle class consumers. In Belfast, the price of parliament whiskey was guessed by Arthur Chichester to be around 11s a gallon in 1816 while

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[1] Irvine, *Uisce Beatha,* P. 3.
[2] J. Nettleton, *The manufacture of spirits* (London 1895), P. 8.
[3] *Account of Fines imposed for Illicit Distillation on Townlands and Districts in Ireland* 1813-14, H.C. 1814-15 (109) vii, 358.

the general price for illicit whiskey was at 7s - 6d a gallon.[4] This disparity in price would have had an impact on Belfast's consumer preference and the legal industry within the city. Morewood gives evidence that in February 1818, James Shaw was the only recognized distiller in the town of Belfast highlighting that the society of Belfast was not a major producer at this time but rather consumers.[5] Landlords in the countryside of Ulster were the upper class of society that *poitín* had affected. Landlords constantly looked for ways to raise rents, however if they raised them too much then the lower classes would not be able to afford the rent. Monetary gains illicit distilling brought not only allowed for rents to be paid but allowed rates to increase. Thus, landlords became collaborators rather than enforcers of illicit distillation. Andy Bielenberg points out that: 'landlords were reluctant to intervene since the sale of illicit spirits was often the only way rent payments could be raised in marginal agricultural districts.'[6] This forced the hand of parliament to change tactics from imposing fines due to the margins of excise they were losing through illicit distilling. The second socioeconomic implication would extend out of the 1823 Distillery Act.

The 1823 Distillery Act allowed distillers to freely develop their stills and distill as slow as they wanted because the new excise regulations focused on the process rather than the potential quantity of spirit distilled. In short, excises were applied to the wash at 2s per proof gallon (ppg), the low wines at 2d ppg, and finally the actual spirit distilled at 3d ppg.[7] The act helped the little man in the distilling industry and increased competition both in Scotland and Ireland where the legislation was applied.[8] It wasn't just the little man that benefited; the

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[4] *Second report from Select Committee on Illicit Distillation in Ireland: with an appendix of minutes of evidence*, H.C. 1816 (490) ix, 15.
[5] Morewood*, Inebriating liquors,* P. 344.
[6] Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union', P. 293.
[7] Morewood, *Inebriating Liquors*, pp 359-360.
[8] Weir, 'The patent still distillers', P. 135.

established distilleries could now add more and larger stills without incurring further levies allowing for increased productivity of a quality spirit. The increase of spirit production is evidenced in the return on gallons of spirits distilled (see table 1.1). In a three-year period, the number of legal gallons distilled increased by nearly six million. The act had successfully reignited the legal whiskey distilling industry. Samuel Bruce was one who saw the potential in the changing industry when he decided to convert a brewery into Comber Distilleries Co. located only a half hour outside of Belfast.[9]

Table 1.1: Number of gallons of whiskey produced in Ireland 1823-1825

Year	Number of Imperial Gallons distilled	Number of Imperial Gallons charged with duty
1823	2,844,677	3,590,376
1824	6,361,248	6,690,315
1825	8,835,027	9,262,744

Source: Return of Number of Gallons of Spirits distilled and charged with Duty in Ireland 1800-52[10]

These changes in excise and regulation also brought changes to the social and economic network surrounding the distilling industry. Most notable was the increased role of the excise officer. McGuire states that the 'excise officer had become intimately concerned in every stage of distillery activities' creating an increased connection between government officials and distillers.[11] Alongside excise officials, there were licensed dealers, grocers, and traders who

[9] Alfred Barnard, *The whiskey distilleries of the United Kingdom* (1887), pp 430-431.
[10] *Return of Number of Gallons of Spirits distilled and charged with Duty in Ireland*, 1800-52, H.C. 1852-53 (547) xcix, 549.
[11] McGuire, *Irish Whiskey,* pp 64-65.

completed the network of connecting distiller to consumer. Officials now had to visit sites whenever new methods were being applied to stills in addition to their regular duties. They had to show up after being given an eight-hour notice to oversee unlocking of any fastenings between stills and vessels making sure there was no fraudulence.[12] The role of the excise official was no longer a formality of taking stock and providing permits. They had to adapt to new tools like the hydrometer and saccharometer in addition to new jobs like recording in a minute book the date and hour of brewing and distilling along with inspecting any vessel that were being used.[13] One such excise official would revolutionize the whiskey industry entirely after a visit to Carrickfergus distillery.

Aeneas Coffey would be the man responsible for the future successes of the spirit industry in both Ulster and Scotland. Born in Calais, Coffey made his way over to Ireland and worked his way up from Surveyor of Excise to Inspector General of Excise. By 1928, he retired from the Civil Service and decided to open his own distillery and store in Dublin. However, this venture was not successful but his invention, revolved around a continuous working still that could cool itself, was monumental.[14] Coffey was not the only one at the time who attempted to invent such a still. In Belfast one of these many inventions was adopted in 1834 foreshadowing the future of the spirit industry within the city.[15] Coffey patented his still in 1830 which would be called a column still but the majority of the industry would go on to call it 'the patent still'. Although not perfected till later, Coffey's patent still brought many advantages including one continuous process compared to the timely multi-process of the pot still. It also produced a pure spirit around ninety per cent alcohol already rectified which saved money by reduction of fuel

[12] Morewood, *Inebriating Liquors* P. 359.
[13] McGuire, *Irish Whiskey,* P. 223.
[14] J. J. Kerr, 'Aeneas Coffey and his Patent Still' in *Dublin Historical Record*, ix, no. 1 (1946), pp 32-33.
[15] McGuire, *Irish Whiskey,* P. 39.

needed. Byproducts were also recoverable instead of seen as waste which provided further revenue. What should be recognized and is evident in the future of the patent still industry is that being almost pure alcohol, it was not palatable with some even going as far as to say it's not whiskey at all.[16] That may be so, but it did not deter distillers from adopting it.

It is important to give a brief explanation of the difference between pot still and patent still distillers when speaking of the industry. Pot still is the more traditional method where three distillations, which is uniquely Irish due to the world mostly uses two, are used to produce the spirit. Barley is used giving a variety of whiskies such as single malt (malted barley) or pot still (a mixture of malted and unmalted barley). Patent still, as described above, was a continuous quantitative method that used grain. The spirit produced is blended with small quantities of pot still whiskey which gives it its mild flavour. Belfast would have its share of both pot still and patent still distilleries.

The emergence of the distilling industry in Belfast did not solely rely on Coffey's patent still. Rather it was a culmination of technological advancement and the character of Belfast from its industrial nature and strategic importance as a port. Irish whiskey was traditionally a home market product that favored areas like Dublin and Cork who cornered the market at a much earlier stage.[17] Due to the abundance of illicitly distilled whiskey in Ulster during the first half of the nineteenth century, there was never much of a demand for legal distilling in Belfast due to the demand was fulfilled either with Irish whiskey from distilleries outside Belfast or with the cheaper *poitín* from the countryside. There were also other profitable ventures of industry that had established themselves in Belfast such as linen, shipbuilding and engineering. These

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[16] Kerr, 'Aeneas Coffey and his Patent Still', pp 34-35.
[17] Andy Bielenberg, *Ireland and the industrial revolution: the impact of the industrial revolution on Irish industry, 1801-1922* (London, 2009), P. 34.

industries changed the landscape of the city as well as increased the population from around 37,000 in 1821 to 174,000 in 1871 with a majority being under 20 years of age.[18] What all these industries shared, however, was they were export driven. The growing industrial nature of Belfast alongside the export trade thus gave rise to other industries which would come to include distilling.

Exports from Belfast distillers, for the majority, revolved around grain whiskey from patent stills with a large share going to Scottish blenders that bought in bulk at good prices to be used in their Scotch whisky.[19] Bielenberg shows that the Irish distilling industry became dependent on the export market stating that 'by 1900, output had risen to a peak of 14.5 million gallons, of which over 71 percent was made in patent stills.'[20] Considering that patent still whiskey was not palatable, it can only be concluded that this whiskey was being used for blending purposes. This blending did not only happen in Scotland but also within Ireland where many distillers would start as spirit merchants or blenders capitalizing on an evolving industry. This change of direction for the Irish distilling industry would have several consequences; first positive and then detrimental, nearly all but collapsing the industry. It highlights the connection the industry, especially in Belfast's endeavors, had with Scotland. This connection became increasingly significant from 1858 onwards.

The last piece of the puzzle to fall in place which would unlock Belfast as a distilling capital was the standardization of the distilling industry across the United Kingdom. In 1858 'full internal free trade in spirits within the UK was achieved when the duty on spirits was

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[18] Ibid; The linen industry opened labour opportunities to many women of the city. It also influenced neighborhoods that would be built in and around linen halls. When agriculture industry began to take a turn for the worse in the rural areas, population shifted towards urban centers where work was plentiful. The shipping industry would also impact Belfast by improving its harbour over the century and expanding Belfast's municipal borders to include neighborhoods sprouting around the shipyards.
[19] Ibid., P. 94.
[20] Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union', P. 297.

harmonized at 8s per proof gallon' later increased to 10s in 1860.[21] In other words, now that duty was equal across England, Scotland, and Ireland, export trade was allowed without additional expenditure, thus opening entire new markets abroad. All of this was happening as internal attitudes across Ireland were changing as well. Temperance movements (to be discussed in chapter 2), depressed conditions resulting from the Great Famine, along with increased beer consumption was driving down the home market for spirits which only fuelled the need for the distilling industry to take advantage of the free trade. It just so happened that Belfast was strategically set for such trade and with the patent still facilitating industrialized output, many Ulstermen were eager to enter the trade.

[21] Weir, 'The patent still distillers', P. 131.

Chapter 2: Boom city; Distiller's social footprint on industrial Belfast 1861-1920

The genesis of Belfast's whiskey industry must be placed after 1860 once free trade was established in the United Kingdom. The distilleries that emerged separated themselves from their predecessors by primarily focusing on export production. Distillers not only brought substantial revenue into the city from export capital but would have an impact on the landscape, employment, entertainment, philanthropy and government of Belfast. This chapter seeks to understand the extent of that impact by focusing on a society that grew more rapidly than any other city in the British Isles in the second half of the nineteenth century becoming one of the 'last industrial revolution cities.'[1]

Before introducing the new distilleries that were established in Belfast, it is crucial to understand why the home market was replaced by the export market. By looking at how many gallons of spirit were charged for duty regarding home consumption, one can see the drop off. In 1851 ~7.5 million gallons were charged for home consumption while in 1861 ~4.3 million gallons were charged. This drop of nearly three million gallons came at a time where the population of Ireland fell from 6.5 million to 5.7 million.[2] One key reason to this drop in consumption throughout Ireland was higher duties were being placed on spirits to bring uniformity across the United Kingdom. The rate of duty increased by 7s - 2d per proof gallon between 1851 and 1861. At the same time, beer consumption would increase three-fold between 1851 and 1871 due to lower prices.[3] Another key factor that was particularly prevalent in Belfast

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[1] Leslie Clarkson, 'The city and the country' in J.C. Beckett (ed.), *Belfast: the making of the city* (Belfast, 2008), pp 153-165, P. 159.
[2] *Return of the quantities of British spirits charged with duty for consumption in England, Scotland, Ireland, and the United Kingdom*… 1800-67, H.C. 1867-68 (466), lxiv, 305.
[3] *Return of Number of Gallons of Spirits, Barrels of Beer and Bushels of Malt entered for Home Consumption*…, H.C. 1871 (336), lxxi, 552.

was the rise of the Temperance movement. Led by Presbyterians in Belfast, there were two main movements: abstinence and tee-totalism. Abstinence was mainly aimed at spirit consumption but was not fully prohibitionist. Tee-totalism on the other hand was in favor of complete prohibition of alcohol.[4] Both of these wings of the Temperance movement made many attempts to encourage Belfast's local population to abstain from drinking. Although it cannot be labelled as the sole reason for the reduction in spirit consumption within Belfast, it can be factored into the change of society's drink preference away from whiskey. It is within these changes in society that distilleries begin to emerge in Belfast and surrounding areas. The impact these distilleries would have on society was far more progressive than in the past and would start with the changes they made on the layout of the city itself.

The distilleries and changing landscape

Arguably the most renowned Belfast distillery to emerge in the nineteenth century was Dunville & Co. Ltd. Founded by John Dunville in 1825, the company originally entered into the tea business but, seeing the potential in the whiskey trade, they switched to becoming whiskey blenders. Eventually they would build their own distillery in 1869 that would include a partnership with James Craig, the father of the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.[5] This distillery would become known as the Royal Irish Distilleries. The distillery produced both pot still and patent still whiskey. When Alfred Barnard visited Belfast prior to his books release in 1887 as part of his tour of whiskey distilleries around the United Kingdom, Dunville's had three traditional pot stills.[6] By 1870, though, they were, according to Philip Ollerenshaw, one of the

[4] Malcolm, *'Ireland sober, Ireland free'*, pp 82-86.
[5] Maguire, *Belfast*, P. 66.
[6] Barnard, *The Whiskey Distilleries*, P. 427.

main producers of patent still whiskey and is supported by the installation of a patent still.[7] The two principal brands of the company were "V.R." and "Dunville's Three Crowns" which are described as mild flavour whiskies.[8] Their output would continuously increase and by the close of the century would amount to 1,452,111 gallons stocked in their warehouses (see table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Stocked gallons by Dunville & Co. from 1879-1899

Year	Stock (in gallons)
1879	928,907
1889	1,231,696
1899	1,452,111

Source: Private Journal of Dunville & Co. Ltd., 1879-1905[9]

The distillery on the edge of town became a part of Belfast's rapidly expanding footprint which would become a city when Queen Victoria bestowed a charter in 1888.[10] Situated between Royal Victoria Hospital on the Grosvenor Street and the Central Junction of the Great Northern Railway, it covered about seven acres of ground.[11] The distillery's influence can be seen in the fact that it would eventually be surrounded by streets appropriately named Distillery Street, Little Distillery Street, and Excise Street.[12] As the distillery and surrounding area grew, housing and businesses expanded alongside the Grosvenor and Falls Roads. The distillery was not the only

[7] Ollerenshaw, 'Industry, 1820-1914' P. 86; McGuire, *Irish whiskey*, P. 125.
[8] Volume of Newspaper, 1816-1922 (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland [PRONI], Papers of Alexander Clarke, D2519/B/1, P. 251).
[9] Private Journal Dunville & Co. Ltd., 1879-1905 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/3/1).
[10] Appendix 1: Map showing location of Royal Irish Distillery.
[11] Barnard, *The Whiskey Distilleries*, P. 426.
[12] *Belfast and Ulster Directory* (Belfast, 1877).

property Dunville & Co. owned. Most of their warehouse and offices were more centrally located within the city.

Figure 2.1: The Royal Irish Distillery on the edge of Belfast c. 1900

Source: PRONI Photograph of Royal Irish Distilleries 1900[13]

Their office premises, 'fitted up and decorated in a most princely style', were located on Calendar Street and Arthur Street which were at the commercial heart of Belfast.[14] Calendar Street was held from November 1861 and Arthur Street was acquired by William Dunville (John

[13] Photograph of Royal Irish Distilleries, 1900 (PRONI, Messrs J. & W. Charley & Co Ltd., Linen manufacturers and Bleachers, Dunmurry, Co. Antrim, D2242/7/20).
[14] Barnard, *The Whiskey Distilleries*, P. 427.

Dunville's son) in 1869. Eventually these two premises would be connected in one larger building, with the frontage being on 25-29 Arthur Street after it was decided that the original houses should be pulled down to make way for new offices.[15] This highlights that the whiskey industry was not only responsible for the erection of new buildings but also for the tearing down of old ones, thus changing the landscape of Belfast even further. In addition to the offices, 15-18 Calendar Street contained bonded stores and 11 Alfred Street along with 12 Adelaide Street contained more warehouses, yards, and stores estimated to cover 13 acres.[16]

Next was The Irish Distillery also known as the Connswater Distillery. Close to completion when Barnard visited, he states 'the only firms having an interest in the concern being Messrs. Kirker, Greer & Co., Limited; Messrs. Mitchell & Co., Limited; and James Wilson & Son Distillers, all of Belfast.'[17] These firms, like Dunville & Co., were limited companies and incorporations. This allowed for companies to acquire further finances and rely on stakeholders to improve and expand their businesses. Mitchell & Co. of Belfast Ltd. was incorporated on 22 May 1883 (see figure 2.2). Prior to the distillery, they were wholesale wine and spirit merchants. When they formed a liability company it was explained that 'it has been agreed between the parties here to that a company shall be formed with limited liability to purchase, take over and carry on the said business.' Thus, they were granted £100,000 divided into 10,000 shares where the Mitchell brothers each took 3,900 shares giving them majority stake in the company.[18]

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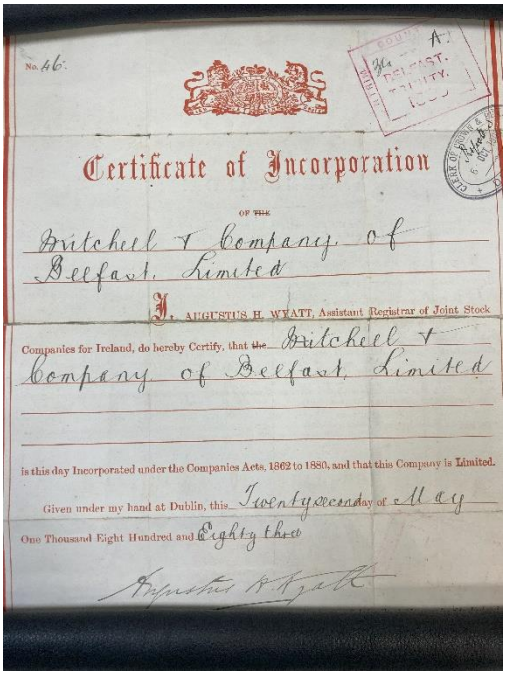
[15] Appendix 1: Map showing location of Royal Irish Distillery.
[16] Private Journal Dunville & Co. Ltd., 1879-1905 (PRONI., Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/3/1 pp 106-111); Barnard, *The Whiskey Distilleries*, P. 427.
[17] Barnard, *The Whiskey Distilleries*, P. 429.
[18] William Charles Mitchell agreement to form a limited liability company, 28 March 1883 (PRONI, Kirker, Greer & Co, Mitchell & Co, F & D Burns papers, D2510/4/1).

Figure 2.2: Certificate of Incorporation for Mitchell & Co. of Belfast Ltd.



No. 46.

Certificate of Incorporation

OF THE

Mitchell & Company of Belfast, Limited

I, AUGUSTUS H. WYATT, Assistant Registrar of Joint Stock Companies for Ireland, do hereby Certify, that the Mitchell & Company of Belfast, Limited

is this day Incorporated under the Companies Acts, 1862 to 1880, and that this Company is Limited.

Given under my hand at Dublin, this Twenty second day of May One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty three

Source: Mitchell & Co. of Belfast Ltd. Certificate of Incorporation, 1883 from PRONI[19]

Within this avenue, limited liability became a convenient way to secure capital for new expansive ventures which distillers and blenders took full advantage.[20] They could move from rental of property to full ownership. Mitchell & Co. would become owners of properties along Tomb Street including their main building at 84 Tomb Street with the entrance at 86 Tomb Street. Other property owned along this street could be used as they saw fit and in addition to running their blending business, they rented out parts of their property.[21] Mitchell & Co. biggest impact on Belfast would be its investment into the Connswater Distillery.[22] Barnard gives insight that the distillery covered over twelve acres of land from the riverside and states that 'it is certainly

[19] Mitchell & Co. of Belfast Ltd. Certificate of Incorporation, 1883 (PRONI, Kirker, Greer & Co, Mitchell & Co, F & D Burns papers, D/2510/4/2).
[20] Dunville was the largest with a nominal capital of £500,000, see *Bielenberg, Ireland and the industrial revolution: the impact of the industrial revolution on Irish industry, 1801-1922* (London, 2009), P. 92.
[21] William Charles Mitchell agreement to form a limited liability company, 28 March 1883 (PRONI, Kirker, Greer & Co, Mitchell & Co, F & D Burns papers, D2510/4/1).
[22] Appendix 2: Map showing Connswater Distillery.

the newest and most modern' with a still house that is 'said to be the finest in the north of Ireland containing two Coffey stills and the traditional pot still.'[23] Quantity was a priority of this distillery due to the main firms all had interest in the grain whiskey wholesale export market; an aspect that would determine their fate alongside many northern Irish distilleries.

Another distillery that would back up to the eastern side of the River Lagan is J. & J. McConnell's Cromac Distillery (see figure 2.3). This was on the Ravenhill premises which was leased by the McConnell brothers at a term of 500 years from 1 November 1898 which included all land on the west side of Ravenhill Road.[24] The McConnell brothers propelled their family business, that was kept alive by their mother after their father's untimely passing, to new heights when they formed a limited liability company financing a brewery in addition to their distillery. McConnell's also owned stores and warehouses in the city on Dunbar Street and Corporation Street. They produced pot still whiskey which was either sold as their brand product or used in blends outside their company. The whiskey supplied by McConnell's was valued in 1912 'for Irish whisky at proof to two over proof 6s - 6d per gallon or 16s - 6d per case of 12 bottles.'[25] The fluctuation of the cost of whiskey and its production is outside the scope of this chapter but it is important to understand how much value was placed upon not only the whiskey but the products, including grain and barley, that made it. This becomes even more apparent when disaster struck McConnell's not once but twice through fires that would devastate parts of Belfast and the company.

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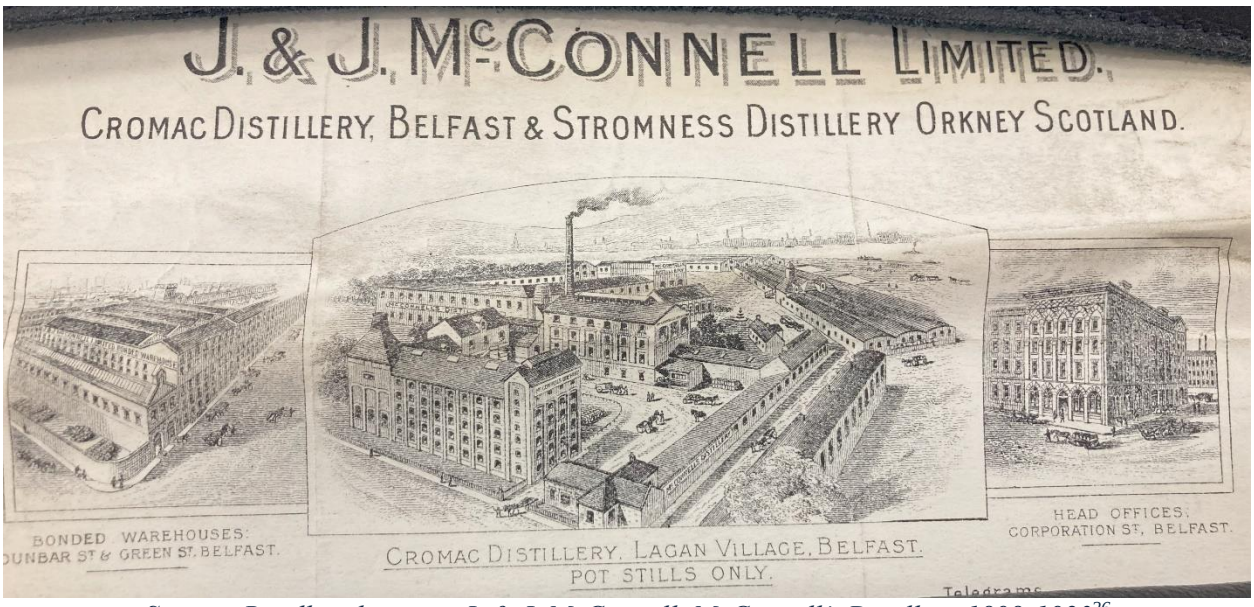
[23] Barnard, *The Whiskey Distilleries*, pp 428-429.
[24] Copy Draft Lease of McConnell's Distillery Ltd., 1898 (PRONI, Papers of L'Estrange & Brett, Solicitors, D1326/19/25); Appendix 3: Map showing Cromac Distillery.
[25] Bundle relating to J. & J. McConnell, McConnell's Distillery 1898-1923 (PRONI, Papers of L'Estrange & Brett, Solicitors, D1326/19/2).

Figure 2.3: Letterhead of checks presented by J. & J. McConnell Ltd. showing Cromac Distillery



Source: Bundle relating to J. & J. McConnell, McConnell's Distillery 1898-1923[26]

The first fire was at the Cromac Distillery in 1907. The fire believed to have started in the millhouse and as firefighters worked on containing the blaze, the roof fell through which created a 'glow of the conflagration [that] could be seen for a considerable distance on both sides of the Lagan, and it was attracted the attention of quite a number of spectators.'[27] Machinery and stock within the mill and mash house were destroyed causing financial stress to J. & J. McConnell but fortunately it did not 'interfere with the ordinary course of [their] business.'[28]The second fire, however, was more devastating to not only McConnell's business but businesses in proximity of the bonded warehouses. The fire happened on 20 April 1909. Two men were on the third floor working when a whiskey barrel 'fell to the floor […] went through the woodwork and the beam into the second floor, where it came into contact with a gas jet.' The fire that resulted was

[26] Bundle relating to J. & J. McConnell, McConnell's Distillery 1898-1923 (PRONI, Papers of L'Estrange & Brett, Solicitors, D1326/19/2).
[27] *Belfast News Letter [BNL],* 4 Dec. 1907.
[28] *BNL,* 5 Dec. 1907.

reported to have done ‘damage to an enormous extent both to building and stock, the latter comprising some half a million gallons of whisky and other spirits.’[29] The fire spread along Corporation Street where another newspaper reported ‘the flames soon spread to the premises of Messrs. David Allen and Sons, printers and lithographers; John Clarko and Co., Ltd., druggist; and many other small business places making the firemen’s work a herculean task.’[30] This fire calls attention to the fact that the whiskey industry, like many other industries at the time, did not always benefit the landscape of Belfast but rather had potential to gut it and impact other livelihoods.

The last two distilleries in close proximity to Belfast were Avoniel Distillery and the upper and lower distilleries of Comber Distilleries Company. Avoniel’s offices and distillery were on Avoniel Road, and they were incorporated on 12 July 1892. The distillery was built in 1882 and produced grain whiskey from its patent stills. Nearby to Connswater Distillery, houses and other businesses grouped together forming new areas of housing on the east side of the Lagan River.[31] One advert in 1894 refers to nineteen labourer houses at a yearly rent of £15 - 15s – 0d and free from municipal taxation that is ‘immediately adjoining the city boundary and close to the works of the Owen O’Cork Mills, the Belfast Ropework Co, Ltd., the Bloomfield factory and the Avoniel and Irish Distilleries.’[32] This highlights that the distilling industry along with other industries influenced housing developments in Belfast and that being in close proximity was worth adverting for potential renters.

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[29] Newspaper cutting of *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 April 1909 (PRONI, J. & J. McConnell’s Distillery/Springfield Spnning Co. Papers, T2334/1).
[30] *Evening Herald*, 20 April 1909.
[31] Appendix 4: Map showing Avoniel Distillery.
[32] Rental, particulars and conditions of sale of nineteen labourers’ houses, 15 June 1894 (PRONI, McConnell & Co. Paper, D2964/C/B/27).

The upper and lower distilleries of Combers Distilleries' Company were located approximately 10 miles outside of Belfast.[33] The upper was a brewery that was converted into a distillery by a John Miller in 1825 making it one of the older established distilleries. William Byrne and Arthur Griffithin converted the lower distillery from a paper mill. Miller eventually acquired the lower distillery in 1860 after an infamous court battle that ensued when William Byrne was detained due to financial difficulties and debts. When released he fought to get it back but was so financially crippled, Miller ended up purchasing it and then sold both to a Samuel Bruce in 1871.[34] Comber Distilleries had heavy trade with Belfast and their main product was Old Comber. Comber stuck to the traditional pot still method that found favor amongst many in Belfast and Ireland. Water was invaluable to distilling and during the late nineteenth century Belfast and its surrounding towns often had recurring crises in the supply of water.[35] Comber, which derives from an Irish word meaning 'the meeting of water', had to pay a high price for water rights to be used with their distillery. In letters exchanged between the distillery and a nearby business there is mention that for other businesses to use the water Comber was reserved to 'charge McDonald a stiff price' and 'reserve ourselves the power to withdraw this privilege at anytime that we may choose to do so.'[36] This is an interesting insight that distilleries were gatekeepers to such sources like water, and were powerful enough to negotiate its usage.

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[33] Appendix 5: Map showing Upper and Lower Distilleries of Comber.
[34] Joseph Bigger, 'How Comber Found Fame' in Volume of Newspaper, 1816-1922 (PRONI, Papers of Alexander Clarke, D2519/B/1); Barnard, *The Whiskey Distilleries*, P. 431.
[35] Maguire, *Belfast*, P. 76.
[36] Day book of Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd., June 1905- Nov. 193 (PRONI, Comber Distillery Papers, D1808/2/1)

Figure 2.4: Letterhead of Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd.

Source: Letter Book of Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd., 1891-1918[37]

The last and oldest licensed distillery that had connections to Belfast is the Old Bushmills Distillery. Although a license was granted to distill in 1608 by King James I, it was not until 1784 that a legally recognized distillery was established. Although all the distilling for their pot still whiskey was and still is done in the town of Bushmills, the company had offices and warehouses in Belfast. These offices along with warehouses and bond stores were on Hill Street with the addition of a warehouse property at Gordon Street. Barnard states the fine offices consisted of a 'board room, sampling room, secretary and general offices.'[38] An interesting fact about Old Bushmills is that it was wound up and sold multiple times. 1880 and prior the company was known as the Bushmills Old Distillery Co. Limited but after being wound up and

[37] Letter Book of Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd., 1891-1918 (PRONI, Comber Distillery Papers, D1808/1/1).
[38] Barnard, *The Whiskey Distilleries*, P. 433.

transferred the company from 1891 adopted the familiar name we see today, the Old Bushmills Distillery Co. Limited. These windups and transfers were financially driven, which allowed for increased operations. One important business deal done by the new owners was drawing up contracts with dealers. Many distilleries sold off their product to wholesalers or retailers who took care of delivering the product to consumers. One contract was made up with John McKenna & Sons Wine and Spirit Merchants and Grocers who became the principal retailer of Bushmills whiskey in Belfast.[39] This highlights the expansive network of the whiskey trade that went beyond the distilleries and often many who worked in these networks found themselves at distilleries at some point.

The driving force of Belfast's whiskey industry

The distilling and whiskey industry of Belfast not only changed the landscape for those who lived there but also provided employment and revenue for stake holders. Starting at the top, directors were in charge of daily operations and held annual general board meetings and extraordinary general board meetings. The general meetings covered expenses, profit reports, along with other dealings of the business such as repairs needed and appointment of directors to vote at local government elections. Extraordinary meetings covered circumstances that were either unusual or in need of immediate attention. One such example was when the directors of Dunville's had an extraordinary meeting on 12 October 1917 over the standing of the company during the First World War. The Minister of Munitions first asked distillers to increase output as much as possible but shortly after the distilleries were ordered to cease distilling altogether. Within the meeting the directors pointed to this fact for the decline in production and how it was

[39] Bundle of Case Papers and Correspondence relating to Old Bushmills Distillery Co. Ltd., 1894-1901 (PRONI, Papers of L'Estrange & Brett, Solicitors, Belfast, D1326/5/27).

'not very favorable' for the industry. In fact, the following year, Dunville's directors decided to not pull a license to distill which led to a court decision by the Board of Conditions and Excises compelling them to even though prohibition of distilling was still in place.[40] Another reason for an extraordinary meeting could be on a decision of whether to wind up a company when hard times were pressed upon the distilleries. Comber had a meeting in this regard on 10 December 1917, although it either passed to new ownership or was disregarded since Comber did not officially close its doors until 1953.[41]

Within the general meetings, happier news was often shared in addition to the regular proceedings such as trading profits and retirements. McConnell's annual general meetings held on June 30th give a glimpse into these proceedings. On 30 June 1918, it is recorded that they had a trading profit of £8556 - 4s - 2d which brought them to a profit of £19,442 and in the following year their profit rose further to £11,250 - 12s - 6d giving evidence that shareholders were still making money off of distilling companies towards the end of the First World War.[42] These shareholders were both local and international often holding their own shareholders general meetings. Mitchell & Co. of Belfast Ltd. shows shareholders residing in Belfast, Donegal, Downpatrick, Dublin, Glasgow, Liverpool, Montreal, and Connecticut USA.[43] Although shareholders were not directly involved with the works of the distilleries, they were attentive to the wellbeing of the companies. For those who were directly involved, a particular standard of dedication is evidenced. In a directors general meeting there are mentions when workers retire. One such example was an Alexander Milligan of Dunville & Co. who started as an apprentice in

[40] Directors minute book Dunville & Co. Ltd., 1904-31 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/1/1, pp 76-82).
[41] Letter book of Comber Distilleries, 1891-1918 (PRONI, Comber Distillery Papers, D1808/1/1).
[42] Bundle relating to J. & J. McConnell, McConnell's Distillery 1898-1923 (PRONI, Papers of L'Estrange & Brett, Solicitors, D1326/19/2).
[43] Register of Mitchell & Co. of Belfast Ltd., 1921-1951 (PRONI, Registry of Companies, COM/40/1/M/78A)

1875 and became in charge of the duty-free warehouses. He retired in 1912 resulting in 37 years with the company.[44]

Workers like Alexander Milligan made up the driving force that actually ran the distilleries of Belfast. Wage books from the distilleries give an idea of who these workers were and what trades were a part of the distilling industry. One such wage sheet from Comber Distilleries highlights that the distillery hired coopers, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, carters, brewhousemen, salesmen, maltmen, grainsmen, storemen, silohousemen, enginehousemen, stillmen, kilnmen, labourers, message boys, and bottling woman. For the week ending 4 April 1908 coopers stood tall making 5s - 7d per day (see figure 2.5) while most of the other trades made between 2s - 4d to 4s - 2d a day. At the bottom was the message boys making only one shilling a day and bottling women making two shillings a day.[45] Wage differences were similar to that seen in other industries of Belfast and it was often the skilled workers like coopers that could be labelled as the labour aristocracy. This largely had to do with unionization and labour representation committees, which were unique to Belfast, setting it apart from the rest of Ireland.[46] Although there was a huge discrepancy in pay between different jobs, it is worth noting that women were a part of the work force and were looked after. They received a £5 Christmas bonus at certain distilleries just as a majority of the men did.[47] Women were also leaders in such companies. Regarding McConnell's, the brother's mother Eleanor McConnell is considered the matriarch of the business, holding it for twenty years and 'brought it from a small spirit dealer and grocer to a business that had five locations in and around Belfast.'[48]

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[44] Directors minute book Dunville & Co. Ltd., 1904-31 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/1/1, P. 55).
[45] Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd. Time Book, 4 April 1908 - 6 Sep. 1913, (PRONI, Comber Distillery Papers, D1808/11/1); Salaries book, A.A. Watt & Co. Ltd., 1916-1934 (PRONI, Papers of A.A. Watt & Co. Ltd. Spirit merchants, Londonderry, D1506/1/8/1).
[46] Patterson, 'Industrial Labour', P. 167; Ibid., P. 179.
[47] Salaries book A.A. Watt & Co. Ltd., 1916-34 (PRONI, Papers of A.A. Watt & Co. Ltd., D1506/1/8/1).
[48] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK3).

Figure 2.5: Coopers, carters, and storemen at Dunville's Royal Irish Distilleries c. 1890-1910

Source: Photo of Dunville & Co Ltd. Yard 1890-1910 from National Library of Ireland[49]

During the First World War, Belfast distilleries, like many industries, continued to pay those who enlisted and made promises of employment upon return. In a general meeting of Dunville & Co. on 8 October 1914, it is recorded that W.H. Graingers, a spirit store clerk, joined the 11th Battalion Royal Irish Rifles. It was determined he would continue to receive seven shillings weekly during the war and a job would be held for him if permissible. Also recorded was a George Miller, an apprentice, who joined up and would receive five shillings weekly.[50] It is evidenced that distillers did keep their word in retainment of former employees although they would have to 'begin again where [they] left off' and often were 'advise[d] to remain on in the

[49] Dunville & Co Ltd. Yard/barrels/bottles 1890-1910 (National Library of Ireland, Mason Photographic Collection, M3/19).
[50] Directors minute book Dunville & Co. Ltd., 1904-31 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/1/1, P. 63).

army if possible.' The distilleries would retain them if they chose to do so evidenced by a letter to a Cpl. E.W. Campbell stating they 'would be prepared to put you on our salaried staff but […] could not possibly give any undertaking of a permanency.' In the same letter it was suggested he find something more curtailed to his experience and were ready to offer him £30 to be released from any duties to the distillery.[51] Belfast distillers clearly valued their workers but at times there were clashes between the employer and the employee.

These clashes can be found in court records with the plaintiff either being the actual employee or companies that covered liability. Claims often came from the work within the distillery itself. Agnus McNeil, a master sweep, was burnt severely when cleaning out a soot chamber while Matthew Gardiner fell into a liquor vat that wasn't covered all the way forcing him to light work and reducing his salary significantly. Claims were made for £200 in compensation and by knowing it went to court shows that distilleries often did not want to claim responsibility.[52] At other times, employees that travelled or even lived outside of Belfast sought claims against the distilleries. These employees were travellers either selling whiskey stock or shares of the company. McConnell's hired such men including a Richard Gottshalk who was appointed to sell the company's whiskey for a term of five years selling in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Austria, and Hungary.[53] Another agent of McConnell's was Hugh Henry McGrady who was entrusted with selling shares in England. McGrady brought a claim against McConnell's due to what was deemed as "withheld information" when dividends on shares dropped from 10 per cent in 1904 to 4 per cent in 1907.

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[51] Private letter book A.A. Watt & Co. Ltd., 1895-1922 (PRONI, Papers of A.A. Watt & Co. Ltd., D1506/1/11/2)
[52] Patriotic Assurance Co. v Irish Distillery Ltd., 1889-1904 (PRONI, L'Estrange and Brett Papers, D1905/4/24); Matthew Gardiner v Irish Distillery Ltd., 1905 (PRONI, L'Estrange and Brett Papers, D1905/2/48B/11).
[53] Bundle relating to J. & J. McConnell, McConell's Distillery 1898-1923 (PRONI, Papers of L'Estrange & Brett, Solicitors, D1326/19/2).

He wanted the shares he bought to sell to English clients bought back at the price he paid, and McConnell's declined. The court case eventually fell in favor of McGrady giving evidence that distilleries were not always insusceptible by such claims.[54]

The men and women who worked for and within these distilleries were manifold and each had their own story within Belfast's distilling industry. During the golden era of Belfast's whiskey industry, money was flowing in sales, salaries, shares, and claims which employees benefited from. It is worth noting that the distillation process is a seasonal process, and some employees may have only been hired during the "on-season". Some may not have financially benefitted year-round from the distilleries, but *all* benefited, including their neighbors in Belfast, of the philanthropy and entertainment provided by the owners and directors of the distilleries.

Giving back to Belfast

The wealth that industrial Belfast brought to individuals left a hierarchy where the elite stood on top, including industrialists such as William Pirrie of Harland & Wolff and Andrew Mulholland of York Street Flax Spinning Co. The distilleries had their own barons of industry including two who would acquire a million pounds each.[55] This amount of wealth left a responsibility where the elites felt the need to provide or give back to the working and middle classes. The Dunville's would lead the charge starting with William Dunville, the second chairman to the company. William would set up the Sorella Trust named after his late sister.[56]

The Sorella Trust would go on to improve the wellbeing of Belfast's citizens first by funding improved housing projects. This revolved around the Grosvenor Road nearby the Royal

[54] Papers relating to McConnell's Distillery v Hugh Henry McGrady, 1907-1908 (PRONI, Papers of L'Estrange & Brett, Solicitors, D1326/19/3)
[55] Maguire*, Belfast,* P. 110.
[56] Sorella means sister in Italian.

Irish Distilleries. The project looked to improve current housing and build better suitable houses for the working class. Road names surrounding these projects would adopt the Dunville name and in 1888, the street connecting Grosvenor Street to Dunville Street would be named Sorella Street.[57] The trust expanded beyond housing projects and improved the educational wellbeing of those who wished to attend the Municipal Technical Institute or Queen's College. This was done by establishing the Sorella and Dunville Local Exhibitions alongside two scholarships. The scholarships to attend Queens College concentrated on the studies of Mathematical or Physical Science and Natural Science. The scholarships were 'tenable for 2 years of the value of £45 for the first year and £100 for the second.' The exhibition awards were another avenue provided to students by the Sorella Trust. It 'brought [educational opportunities] directly within the reach of young people no matter how poor they may be.'[58] Dunville Art Exhibitions of 1905 had eight competitors (three females and five males) that came from Belfast, Dublin, Portadown, Co. Donegal, and Holywood. The submissions to these exhibitions included drawings that were done by freehand while others had to be completed from memory. Some contestants were considered also for the scholarship and had to have a 75% or above mark to be considered.[59] It is evidenced that William Dunville valued education alongside the wellbeing of the working class through his actions. His nephew and successor, Robert Grimshaw Dunville, would continue that charity when he became chairman.

R.G. Dunville furthered the Sorella Trust by offering £8,350 of his own money in 1890 for the purpose, he states in a letter to Lord Dufferin, to 'open a small park which I have given to

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[57] *BNL,* 3 Jan. 1888; 'Sorella Street' in *Belfast Street names* (https://www.belfaststreetnames.com/sorella-street/) (31 July 2024).
[58] Foundation of Dunville Art Exhibition with Sorella Trust, 1908-09 (PRONI, Belfast College of Technology, BCT/6/14/2); Deed establishing Sorella Trust, 19 Nov. 1873 (PRONI, Legal papers relating to the Sorella Trust, D/3466/1/1).
[59] List of competitors for Dunville Art Scholarship and Dunville art exhibition, 1905 (PRONI, Technical Instruction File, ED/4/47).

the city.'[60] The money he gave allowed for funding within the trust to be further directed towards academia. The land would be named Dunville Park and contained five acres later enclosed and layered out with a fountain and a park-keepers house costing R.G. Dunville an additional £5000. On opening day, thousands showed up, a majority amongst the working class. Later that day Lord Dufferin gave a speech highlighting the impact the park would have:

> It is in the conviction that Mr. Robert Dunville […] has conceived the idea of his magnificent donation to the city – a donation which will perpetuate his name to many generations; since he will have placed at the disposal of a large section of our industrious workers the means of breathing the fresh air of heaven, and of seeking peace, repose, and refreshment within the precincts of a beautifully-situated pleasure grounds as are to be found in any city in Ireland.[61]

John Gray states 'what people chose to do reveals a good deal about social change', and providing a park for the working class gave Belfast an avenue for entertainment to enjoy the outdoors.[62] Outdoor parks were celebrated by the working and middle classes of not only Belfast, but industrial cities across the United Kingdom due to it provided an escape from the smells, sights, and sounds of industrial work that had engulfed such cities like Belfast.

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[60] Letter from R.G. Dunville to Lord Dufferin, 1891 (PRONI, Dufferin and Ava Papers, D1071/H/B/D/288).
[61] *BNL* 11 Sep. 1891.
[62] John Gray, 'Popular entertainment' in J.C. Beckett *et al*., *Belfast: the making of the city* (Belfast, 2008), P. 99.

Figure 2.6: Dunville Park c. 1890

Source: Picture of Dunville Park, Belfast, Co. Antrim from National Library of Ireland[63]

Another prospect of entertainment for the working and middle classes was sports. Football had been growing in popularity by the end of the nineteenth century. The Distillery Football Club was formed in November 1880 playing their first game that same year. The pitch the team would eventually play on was provided by Dunville & Co. and within sight of the distillery on York Road. The opening practice involved a 'large muster of members' including 'several Scotchmen who have played the game in Glasgow and other places' further solidifying the undeniable connection Scotland had with the Belfast distilling industry.[64] Distillery F.C. pitch would be used to trial and select an Ireland national team to play against Scotland with ticket prices listed at 6d for regular entry, 3d for schoolboys, and ladies could attend free.[65] Another sport that was connected to Dunville & Co. was cricket. Unlike the football club, several

[63] Dunville Park, Belfast, Co. Antrim (National Library of Ireland, The Eblana Photograph Collection, EB_1515).
[64] *BNL,* 22 Nov. 1880.
[65] *BNL,* 12 Jan. 1884; The club still exists today, now based in Lisburn but they continue to honor their heritage sponsored by the Echlinville Distillery who have the rights to produce Dunville whiskey.

employees of Dunville actively played and in 1879 a club was formed by Robert Baxter named after the company's headline whiskey - V.R. Distillery Cricket Club.[66] The club would not only play the game for spectators but sponsored other amateur sporting events in Belfast. These events, often in the form of track events, attracted large crowds of spectators and had numerous entries by locals.[67]

Another way distilleries provided social entertainment in Belfast was through expos and exhibitions where distillers could show off their goods and trade to the public. One such exhibition was the Belfast Industrial Exhibition in 1895. The *Belfast News Letter* listed the awards that year and stated that a ceremony to hand them out 'promises to be a very interesting one, as this will be the closing day of the exhibition there should be a large attendance of the public.' Dunville's was awarded 'three gold medals for "V.R." whisky, models of plant used at the distilleries, and for excellence of exhibits.'[68] Mitchell & Co. was also at the exhibition. An article gives evidence on what Mitchell & Co.'s exhibit and others would have looked like:

> The visitor attention is at once drawn to a handsome show stand of polished mahogany, with carved pillars, support a loft canopy, bearing the name of the firm […] On the stand are placed in admirable order the product of this enterprising firm – casks of old Irish whisky (the casks made in their Tomb Street cooperage), branded cases of bottled whisky, such as they make up for their extensive trade at home and abroad […] A leading feature in Mitchell & Company's exhibit is the endless variety of forms they have in advertising. Their chromo-litho show-curd designs are works of art, tastefully mounted and richly

[66] Jill Holroyd and Miles, 'The Dunville Family of Northern Ireland and Dunville's Whisky' in *Dumville.org* (http://www.dumville.org/whisky.html) (20 July 2024).
[67] *BNL,* 11 May 1885.
[68] *BNL,* 01 Nov. 1895.

> framed; beautiful plate-glass mirrors, with fetching illuminated lettering in gold, silver, and colours; miniature polished oak show casks, with carved lettering, filled in with gold and colours, and fitted with silver taps.[69]

It is clear that the distilleries did not spare expense, and it must have been a spectacle for judges and visitors alike in Belfast. The distilling industry and their proprietors thus not only provided employment and new buildings to the people of Belfast but outlets for the public to progress and be entertained. Progress was achieved through trusts which allowed for housing development and educational advancement. Entertainment came in the form of parks, sports, and exhibitions enjoyed by the public of Belfast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Belfast's distilling industry had one final role in shaping life within the city. Government and religion were always at the forefront of Belfast society and the distilling industry was anxiously involved. Whether it was for their own benefit of the industry or wider repercussions of society, distilleries had a presence and voice that was felt within Belfast.

The tightrope of religion and politics

Belfast's distilling industry was set apart from the other great industries as it was subject to opposition due to the nature of its product. Whiskey was an intoxicating liquor and during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was widespread advocacy against such drink coming from both religious and political circles. In Belfast, the Irish Temperance League was established in 1858. Primarily a Protestant establishment, their focus was prohibition against intoxicating liquors. Initially they only focused their efforts towards Belfast publicans, but there

[69] *BNL,* 22 May 1895.

was a fear from distillers that their attention could shift to the source of the product.[70] In the end, no legislation was suggested until the establishment of Northern Ireland due to two main factors: firstly, that spirit drinking was decreasing and being replaced by beer drinking, and secondly because of the revenue spirits generated through excises and exports.[71] Tensions still remained under the surface during the golden years and distilleries knew they had to walk a tight rope to not attract the attention of the Irish Temperance League or other religious institutions.

Relations distilleries had with religious institutions fluctuated during the golden era of Belfast industrialization. On one side, donations were made to such churches by distillers including the charitable William Dunville who donated £1 on an annual subscription to the Catholic Institution for the Deaf and Dumb.[72] In Dublin, renovations for Christ Church were actually financed and maintained from the Roe distillery.[73] On a more contentious side, distillers occasionally flexed their power against religious institutions. In 1868, St. Malachy's Catholic Church installed the largest bell turret in Belfast. A mighty triumph for the church and Belfast Catholics alike; however, it would create conflict when Dunville & Co. complained. Around 1907, 'it was found that the maturing whiskey on the premises of Dunville's Distillery, which stood opposite the church […] was souring.' Somewhere along the investigation, it was pointed out that possibly the bell was interfering. James Craig, son of director and partial owner of Dunville's (and first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland), brought over blankets to muffle the sound to test the theory and from there on out, the whiskey did not sour.[74]

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[70] Malcolm, *'Ireland sober, Ireland free',* P. 151; Ibid., P. 157.
[71] Ibid., P. 225.
[72] *Freemans Journal,* 13 Oct. 1863.
[73] Malcolm, *'Ireland sober, Ireland free',* P. 291.
[74] Jim O'Hagan and Fr. Martin Graham, *St. Malachy's Restored* (2009), pp 15-16.

The distilleries of Belfast also intersected with local politics due to the social and political networks of which their directors were a part of. It is evidenced that at general board meetings of the directors, appointments were made for directors to vote at local government elections.[75] With inside knowledge and networks made, it was not uncommon for affluent industrialist to enter into politics. One such man was Charles C. Connor, a director and main shareholder of Old Bushmills. He became Mayor of Belfast from 1889 to 1891 and would go on to be a member of parliament from 1892 to 13 July 1895.[76] He would attend and support many societies of Belfast during his tenure as mayor including Belfast Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals where he granted usage of the Town Hall for meetings.[77]

Figure 2.7: Charles C. Connor – Mayor of Belfast from 1889 to 1891

Source: Portrait of Charles C. Connor from Belfast City Hall[78]

[75] Directors minute book Dunville & Co. Ltd., 1904-31 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/1/1, P. 128)
[76] 'Charles Connor' in *Members of Parliament after 1832* (https://membersafter1832.historyofparliamentonline.org/members/7501) (2 July 2024).
[77] *BNL*, 4 April 1889.
[78] Charles C. Connor, Mayor of Belfast (1889, 1890 & 1891), Belfast City Hall, Belfast.

Politically, the distilling industry of Belfast focused mainly on local matters during the golden era. The directors and proprietors at this time were the industrial aristocrats of Belfast. They not only shaped the city physically with their warehouses and distilleries but provided employment, housing, relief, and entertainment to the public of Belfast. At times their aspiration and successes led them to cross paths with religious and political institutions. The names of these distilleries and barons of the industry were drank in pubs, talked about in the streets, read in newspapers and adverts, and voted upon in elections. Their voices and presence were stamped into the society of Belfast. Through all this jubilation and success, neither the distilleries nor the public would see the storm approaching. The first signs began to show themselves at the start of the twentieth century. The voices and presence of the Belfast distilleries would shift from local concerns to the national and international stages when their industry became threatened on all sides.

Chapter 3: A victim of unfavorable circumstances during the twentieth century

Trouble brewing:

The twentieth century would not be kind to Belfast's distilling industry. Arguably this was through no fault of their own, but rather a consequence of many obstacles that created what can be described as the perfect storm.[1] This storm would wreak havoc upon Belfast's whiskey industry, all but wiping away any traces of the once powerful industry that imbued Belfast society. It all started at the opening of the twentieth century. Overproduction of patent still whiskey became a major issue not only in Belfast but across the United Kingdom due to the rapid nature of production patent stills provided.[2] Quotas were placed in Scotland and parts of Ireland in the late nineteenth century to attempt to counter this issue. This included the reluctant William Higgins of Avoniel Distillery whose quota was set by the United Kingdom Distillers Association at 200,000 gallons when his distillery was capable of 850,000 gallons.[3] Quotas, however, did not fix the problem of over production. In the north of Ireland, more patent distilleries were built which brought in more production to the oversaturated market.

The next solution by the patent distillers was amalgamation. In Scotland, the Distiller Company Ltd. (DCL) was formed bringing many Scottish distillers under its umbrella to control production further. In Belfast and across Ulster, there was an amalgamation resulting in a 1902 merger of Watt & Co. in Derry, The Irish Distillery Ltd., and Avoniel Distillery forming the United Distillers Ltd. (UDL).[4] This attempt to get a step up on the patent whiskey production and export market would not only prove futile but would create strife with the DCL of Scotland.

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[1] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK4).
[2] Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union', P. 299.
[3] Weir, 'The patent still distillers', P. 141.
[4] Bielenberg*, Ireland and the industrial revolution,* pp 92-95.

Soon after the merger, London Court decreed 'that patent still or grain whiskey is not entitled to be sold as Scotch whiskey.'[5] Through one sweeping piece of legislation, the main market for the UDL and other patent distillers, such as Dunville & Co. was temporarily halted. The UDL along with the DCL were alarmed and made their voices heard at meetings in London eventually leading to the decision being overturned. This, however, highlighted that Scotch and blending was significant to both the UDL and the DCL resulting in competition between the two.

What can be described as 'a conflict of interest' between the UDL of Ireland and the DCL of Scotland led to an exchange of shares in 1905 that temporarily increased prices of Irish patent spirit.[6] In the meantime traditional Irish pot still whiskey was holding its own but the market was contracting quickly in favor of Scotch. The likes of McConnell's, Comber, and Bushmills were concerned by contracting markets but, unlike the patent still whiskey distilleries, their business was not solely reliant on the export market. Local markets continued to be valuable customers for these distilleries alongside export markets in North America. Comber had an important customer in Kinahan & Co Ltd of Dublin. In September 1906, Kinahan's ordered 2187.7 gallons of Old Whiskey at a price of £399 - 8s - 4d and 1591 gallons of new whiskey at £414 - 1s - 2d. Three years later they ordered 4822 gallons of new whiskey at £743 - 7s - 6d showing a continuous clientship and the reliance on customers in cities such as Dublin.[7]

Unfortunately, both pot still and patent still distilleries would face hardships as a result of the First World War. The war disrupted export trade and gave rise to further political upheaval within Ireland. Shipping lanes for export became hazardous, forcing a reliance on the United Kingdom market which was slowly favoring Scotch due to preference of taste and advertising

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[5] *Evening Echo,* 17 March 1906.
[6] Bilenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union', P. 300.
[7] Day Book of Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd June 1905-Nov. 1913 (PRONI, Comber Distilleries Papers, D1808/2/1).

within the English market.[8] In 1915, the Immature Act was passed forcing a three-year maturation requirement on distilled spirits, raising costs tied in stock and halting sales of new age whiskey further crippling the patent still trade. It also curbed production. Dunville & Co. were limited to 250,000 gallons per year for the next three years creating distress amongst the directors.[9] Distilling was eventually prohibited altogether in the closing stages of the war. Although this would ease the saturation and allow stock values to rise with maturity, it impacted on the livelihoods of those who worked in the distilleries. Comber had 63 workers and 3 pensioners in May 1916 but only 13 workers listed on their payroll in May 1918.[10] Within the same time frame, the company produced 144,406.8 gallons for the distilling season of 1916-1917, but nothing for 1918-1919 until they were allowed to distill again in March producing 43,100.3 gallons from March to June of that year.[11] The patent distillers of the UDL felt the impact of the Immature Act further as they were unable to sell any new stock from the previous three years to blenders. Pot still distillers in Belfast and Ulster hoped to take advantage of increased prices once wartime restrictions lifted but would be blindsided by an increase in tax duty of 58s per proof gallon and a sudden closure of the southern Irish and American markets.[12]

Political turmoil:

Andy Bielenberg states that 'despite these problems the war provided some respite for the Irish distilling industry', and that production was not as badly disrupted as it was in Scotland.

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[8] D.S. Johnson 'The Northern Ireland Economy, 1914-39' in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An economic history of Ulster, 1820-1940* (Manchester, 1987), P. 185.
[9] Director's Minute Book. Dunville & Co. Ltd. 1904-31 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/1/1).
[10] Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd.: Wages Book Sep. 1913- Dec. 1919 (PRONI, Comber Distilleries Papers, D1808/11/2).
[11] Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd: Period Book Nov. 1914 -March 1925 (PRONI, Comber Distilleries Papers, D1808/14/1).
[12] Madeleine Humphreys, *'*An issue of confidence: the decline of the Irish whiskey industry in independent Ireland, 1922-1952*.' in The journal of European economic history,* xxiii, no. 1 (1994), P. 97.

Scotch stocks were replenished by Belfast and Irish patent whiskey and distillers were once again making profits.[13]However, this uplift was overshadowed by the political tensions within Ireland that would escalate to civil war. While the First World War was raging, a battle of its own emerged in Ireland over the issue of Home Rule. Irish Republicans rose in violent insurrection against forces of the Crown on Easter 1916 initiating a chain of events that would eventually lead to a War of Independence, the partition of Ireland into two states, and, subsequently, a bitter Civil War in the south. This deepened sectarian violence in the north. Belfast's society and industries would be affected by this political turmoil when domestic markets suddenly became barred.

A political boycott of goods from Belfast was implemented by the south between 1920-22. D.S. Johnson argues that this boycott 'illustrates the importance of the south as a market for northern goods and thereby demonstrates that folly of the division of the country.'[14] Johnson's argument is only furthered when the United States ratified the eighteenth amendment establishing a nationwide prohibition of all alcohol. Almost overnight Belfast and numerous other distillers lost a substantial export market. By 1920, Belfast distilleries had lost two markets they most desperately needed. In addition to losing markets, physical assets were also lost when the Dublin Docks Board bonded stores were destroyed. Dunville & Co. reported on 10 October 1922 that due to this destruction, they had suffered a loss of 131,389 proof gallons equaling £22,445 - 12s - 5d.[15] With political disarray and market closures in Ireland, the Belfast distillers became reliant on Scotland and England as export markets. Unfortunately, the DCL of Scotland had only strengthened their hold on the market, curbing any big sales for Irish blended whiskey.

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[13] Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union', P. 302.
[14] D.S. Johnson, 'The Belfast Boycott, 1920-1922' in K. H. Connell, J. M. Goldstrom and L. A. Clarkson (eds), *Irish population, economy, and society: Essays in honour of the late K.H. Connell* (Oxford, 1981), P. 287.
[15] Director's Minute Book. Dunville & Co. Ltd. 1904-31 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/1/1)

All this turmoil mounted pressure on the UDL and in 1922, DCL bought out UDL for £2,996,000 controlling all Belfast patent whiskey production save Dunville & Co.[16]

End of an era, beginning of a new state

With the creation of Northern Ireland and partition of the island in 1921, distillers' long fear of the abstinence lobby came to reality when there was a push for the new state to introduce prohibition. Dunville & Co., who was holding out better than other Belfast distilleries, was a part of the anti-prohibition council. They not only were a powerful voice and presence in the council but also financed it. A check valued at £500 was given towards the funds of the council on 11 April 1921.[17] Although prohibition was never implemented, duty was drastically increased, something that would financially constrain the Belfast distilleries. The duty was raised from 50 shillings to 72s - 6d per proof gallon on 20 April 1920 raising prices of the whiskey and thus losing further markets, such as the working class, who no longer could afford it.[18] These high taxes would take a toll and distilleries had to make tough choices just to survive. Dunville & Co. had to sell 5% of their "free state stock" and lease the Distillery Football club ground in 1927. Large repairs were also put off and, by the time they were gotten around to in 1929, the distillery was in a sorry state. The extent of this was highlighted by a director's comment: 'the outlay on repairs was heavy, both patent stills were in such a state that the small still was capped and nothing put in its place.'[19] By July 1930, 'Directors [were] instructed practically to shut up the

[16] Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union', P. 303; Bielenberg, *Ireland and the industrial revolution,* P. 96.
[17] Private ledger Dunville & Co. 1879-1903 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/4/1).
[18] *Twelfth report of the commissioners of His Majesty's Customs and Excise*… 1921, H.C. 1921 (1435) x, 68; Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union', P. 302.
[19] Director's Minute Book. Dunville & Co. Ltd. 1904-31 (PRONI, Dunville Distillery Records, D2132/1/1).

distillery, reducing staff to caretakers' giving employees three months' salary.[20] Distilling had ceased at the Royal Irish Distillery.

Closed Doors:

Historians argue that most distilleries in Ireland were out of commission by 1929. However, out of commission did not mean out of business. That ultimate stage came in the form of being wound up or liquidated by the directors. The DCL did stop operation of all UDL distilleries by 1929 but they also played a part in winding up the Belfast distilleries in their role as directors. By 1929, Avoniel Distillery was no longer manufacturing any product but had an extraordinary meeting of directors where a special resolution was passed on 22 January 1930 beginning preparations to be wound up; this was passed as a voluntary wind up confirmed 4 March 1930. A liquidator, James Scott, was assigned and the return of the final wind-up was on 11 January 1935.[21] The Irish Distillery Ltd at Connswater had also ceased manufacturing by 1929 after a fire broke out that proved to be too expensive for the DCL to consider repairs.[22] They went into liquidation the following year and sent notice for all debts by customers to be settled on or before 21 April 1930.[23] The remaining stock was either pushed into blends or redistilled for yeast and manufacturing alcohol.

McConnell's never fully recovered after the great fire of 1909, but they did show resilience attempting to ride out the storm. Unfortunately, with partition and prohibition in the

[20] Ibid.
[21] *Irish Independent,* 24 April 1929; Avoniel Distillery 1921-45 (PRONI, Department of Commerce, COM/40/1/A/36).
[22] *Irish Independent,* 24 April 1929.
[23] *BNL,* 28 March 1930.

United States and Canada closing off invaluable markets, J. & J. McConnell Ltd entered liquidation in 1931. In regard to stock, notice was given in the *Belfast News Letter:*

> on or after the said 1st day of November next, proceed to sell all such goods, if any, as may not have been removed in compliance with the terms of the foregoing notice, and will hold any balance of the price […] of sale and the storage charges, for the owners of such goods respectively.[24]

The rest of stock that belonged to the company was bought by Old Bushmills' owner and director Samuel Boyd in 1935. This supports the argument that the 1930s and not the 1920s should be the period associated with the official collapse of the industry due to the fact that stock and debts still had to be handled.

Although Dunville & Co. closed their Royal Irish Distillery doors in 1930, they survived past prohibition in the United States when the Twenty First Amendment repealed the ban on alcohol in 1933. Robert Dunville, the last Dunville chairman, had died suddenly in 1931 but directors were still in place to act in 1933. It was, once again, the United States, along with lack of urgency from the United Kingdom's Parliament, that dealt the final blow. The United States passed legislation that went into effect in the summer of 1936, where a certificate of origin had to be produced for a spirit to enter the country. Within this legislation was a clause which is best explained in a meeting referring to the Finance Act of 1933: 'where a certificate of origin was needed in the export trade, such as certificate could not be granted for Scotch whiskey unless the whiskey were produced entirely in that country.'[25] In other words, no spirit that was part Scotch

[24] *BNL,* 21 Aug. 1931.
[25] Finance Bill 1933, (PRONI, Department of Commerce, COM/62/1/642A).

and part Irish whiskey would be allowed to enter the United States. Heated debates raged over this issue and eventually the courts ruled against its fiercest opponent, Jameson, stating that Scotch whiskies with Irish or Northern Irish grain whiskey cannot be sold as Scotch due to the British Excise authorities had declined to certify the mixture of half Scotch and half Irish whiskies as "Blended Scotch Whisky".[26]

While all this was going on, Dunville & Co. was contemplating resuming operations of distilling but was waiting on a decision from either Parliament or the United States to grant access of inter-country blended whiskies.[27] Due to the prolongment of the issue, Dunville decided to enter into voluntary liquidation in 1936 'selling up at a profit rather than risking its assets in what looked like an unpromising future.'[28] Jameson acquired Dunville's stock at either 6s - 8d per proof gallon or 7s - 6d per proof gallon giving evidence on why Jameson may have been so enraged by the court's decision.[29] The last great distilling company in Belfast city declared solvency on 3 December 1936 and promised that 'staff of the company will be adequately compensated for the loss of employment.'[30] Thus, the workers and citizens of Belfast would not see another active distillery in their life time leaving only memory of what had been.

Comber Distilleries outlasted all the giants of Belfast. *The Wine and Spirit Trade Review* has them listed as one of the only three working distilleries left in Northern Ireland in 1939.[31] Company records show they were still in production prior to and after the Second World War; making 60,768.5 gallons in the 1937/38 season and 33,664.4 gallons in the 1951/52 season.

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[26] *BNL,* 31 Nov. 1938.
[27] Finance Bill 1933, (PRONI, Department of Commerce, COM/62/1/642A).
[28] Bielenberg, 'The Irish distilling industry under the Union', P. 303.
[29] Finance Bill 1933, (PRONI, Department of Commerce, COM/62/1/642A).
[30] Bundle of Deeds, Case Papers… 1936-42 (PRONI, Papers of L'Estrange & Brett, Solicitors, Belfast, D1326/6/40).
[31] *Irish Independent,* 24 April 1939; *The Wine and Spirit Trade Review,* 13 Jan. 1939.

However, the following season ends abruptly at only 8,596.1 gallons.[32] The Second World War would prove to not only reduce production for Comber and other Northern Irish distilleries but would wreck destruction on Belfast. Through this destruction and decay, the distilleries of the city would be repurposed or be torn down slowly erasing the industry from the physical landscape and the memories attached to it.

World War II and contraction of Irish distilleries

As companies closed their distillery doors and went into liquidation, the buildings they occupied would change hands over time and in cases be completely removed from the landscape. McConnell's Cromac distillery was located on Ravenhill Road and would remain in street directories until around 1939. In 1943 it was only listed as 'Occupier, H.M. Govt.' By 1951, the buildings and ground found new life with Hanna & Browne Ltd., House Furnishers and Textile Colours Ltd.[33] It was not uncommon for distillery premises to be repurposed. The Connswater distillery of Irish Distillery Ltd. is continuously listed in street directories up until 1932 as being on Connswater Street. It however is no longer listed by 1939 and in 1943 at the intersection of Yukon and Mersey Street (the back side of where the distillery was) shows Gallaher Ltd. Bonded Warehouses, a well-known tobacco manufacturer in its day.[34] Dunville's Royal Irish Distillery remained listed in street directories until 1951 where it lists Murray, Sons, & Co. Ltd bond store and a corporation pumping station in its place. It is worth noting that by 1943 the pumping

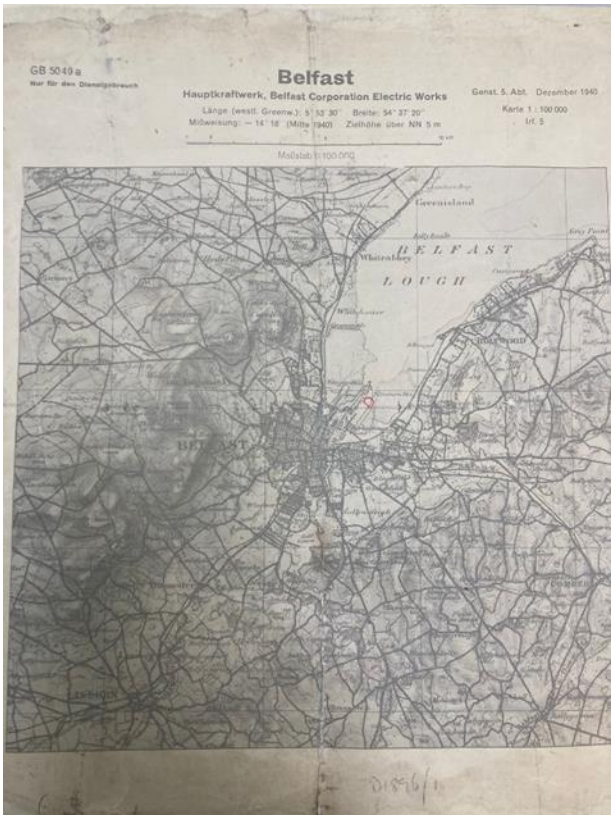
[32] Comber Distilleries Co. Ltd. Period Book: Nov. 1914 – March 1925 (PRONI, Comber Distilleries Papers, D1808/14/1).
[33] *Belfast and Ulster Directory* (Belfast, 1943); *Belfast and Ulster Directory* (Belfast, 1951).
[34] *Belfast and Ulster Directory* (Belfast, 1943).

station and Ruddell, Harvey & Co. timber merchants were listed alongside Dunville's showing that the change didn't happen overnight but was a gradual process.[35]

Changes to the distilling industry and Belfast's landscape also came in rapid violent air attacks. During the Second World War, the Luftwaffe of Nazi Germany bombed Belfast in April and May 1941 (see figure 3.1). Corporation Street and Tomb Street near the river Lagan bore significant damage which hosted Mitchell and Co's head offices, duty paid cellars, and warehouses. 44 to 72 Corporation Street are listed as vacant in 1943 and through personal communication it is known that this was due to 'enemy action' forcing the company to move to Avoniel Distillery's premises and selling the property in 1944.[36] Their bond store on Tomb Street was also listed as being vacant in 1943 leaving only their cooperage and stores in the city center. Bushmill's Gordon Street premises, which consisted of warehouses and bonding stores, also suffered war damages and is listed as vacant in 1943.[37] Their main offices on Hill Street were partially destroyed but remain in the street directories.

[35] *Belfast and Ulster Directory* (Belfast, 1943).
[36] Register of Mitchell & Co. of Belfast Ltd., 1921-51 (PRONI, Registry of Companies, COM/40/1/M/78A); *Belfast and Ulster Directory* (Belfast, 1943), P. 145.
[37] File of correspondence, valuations, and plans relating to Old Bushmills Distiller Company Ltd., 1948-54 (PRONI, McConnell& Co. Papers, D2964/J/404); *Belfast and Ulster Directory* (Belfast, 1943), P. 256.

Figure 3.1: German map showing bombing target of Belfast



Source: Map of Belfast showing the German bombing target from PRONI[38]

The war not only physically crippled Belfast's distilling industry but financially as well. In a correspondence during the 1949 Festival of Britain, Bushmill's communicated that they 'have not reached the pre-war level of export but a great recovery has been made from the comparative trickle which was all that going out during the last stages of the Second World War.' This is supported by a report within the exhibition at the festival showing that there was a decrease of 642,000 proof gallons of Northern Ireland Whiskey exported from 1939 to 1945 with a decline in profit of £568,000 (see table 3.1).[39]

[38] Map of Belfast showing the German bombing target at the Belfast Corporation Electric Works, 1940 (PRONI, Map and photograph showing German bombing targets in Belfast, D1896/1).
[39] Ulster Farm and Factory Exhibition, 1949-51 (PRONI, Department of Commerce, COM/4/B/21).

Table 3.1: Quantity and value of proof gallons in Northern Ireland 1935-1948

Year	Quantity (,000 Proof gal)	Value (£---,000)
1935	378	452
1936	658	883
1937	440	603
1938	345	461
1939	671	620
1940	413	532
1941	217	312
1942	63	94
1943	44	76
1944	19	36
1945	29	52
1946	44	82
1947	110	227
1948	78	170

Source: Ulster Farm and Factory Exhibition, 1949-51[40]

In 1953 Comber Distilleries, unable to cope with the financial strain, closed their doors leaving only Old Bushmills and Coleraine (owned by Bushmills) as operational distilleries in Northern Ireland. Bushmills continued to produce their pot still whiskey but the physical presence of the company in Belfast slowly faded when the head offices were replaced by Belfast

[40] Ulster Farm and Factory Exhibition, 1949-51 (PRONI, Department of Commerce, COM/4/B/21).

Corporation Executive Officers Dept of the Police Committee sometime between 1967 and 1968.[41] In 1972, Old Bushmills joined the Irish Distillers, a conglomerate consisted of Cork Distilleries Co., John Jameson & Son, and John Power & Son leaving all Irish whiskey on the island in one set of hands. By 1975, distilling was left to the new Irish Distiller's Middleton distillery in the Republic of Ireland and Old Bushmills distillery in Northern Ireland with Coleraine being phased out by 1978. By the end of the twentieth century, the only signs of Belfast's once great distilling industry were left to name sakes (Dunville Park and Distillery FC), rare bottle releases, memorabilia, and bottles of the remaining brands of Irish whiskey in pubs and off-licenses.

[41] *Belfast and Northern Ireland Directory* (Belfast, 1968).

Chapter 4: Innovation and heritage: a new era of Belfast whiskey in the twenty first century

Beginnings of a new era:

The market for Irish whiskey is still dominated by the larger brands that survived the collapse of the twentieth century. These large brands must be applauded for preserving the industry. Their diligence paved the way for the up-and-coming distilleries who seek to leave a mark of their own. These new distilleries, however, require innovation if they are to compete with the bigger brands. This innovation involves introducing new techniques alongside preserving tradition. Before exploring Belfast's impact within this new era, it is important to know where and how this revival or renaissance of Irish whiskey began.

From 1972, all production of Irish Whiskey was in the hands of Irish Distiller Limited thus controlling the two distilleries that remained in operation on the island (Middelton and Old Bushmills). This changed in 1987 when John Teeling opened Cooley Distillery in County Louth. Eventually the Cooley Distillery was sold, but Teeling's legacy would only grow when John Teeling's sons opened Teeling Distillery in 2015 which was the first new distillery in Dublin in over a century. Adam O'Connell argues that this was at a time when there was a 'cultural shift among consumers towards supporting local, independent businesses, along with a growing interest in the provenance and story of the products consumed.'[1] This culture shift is apparent today and is supported by an interview with Titanic Distillery tour guide Luka Gribbin who stated that 'people like a unique experience in a sense and so not always just buying big brands' but 'people like all these micro-breweries and I think that that concept is kind of spreading more

[1] Adam O'Connell, 'The story of the Irish whiskey renaissance' in *Master of Malt*, 2024 (https://www.masterofmalt.com/blog/post/the-story-of-the-irish-whiskey-renaissance.aspx/) (15 July 2024).

and more to spirits.'[2] These experiences Gribbin is referring to are tours and tastings provided by the distilleries at visitor centers. Mark McGovern argues that visitor centers and tours attached to breweries and distilleries 'constitutes a particular form of heritage tourism and further evidences the link made between the consumption of Ireland as a tourist destination and the drinks industry.'[3]

It is difficult to determine when the Old Bushmills distillery first added a visitor center due to my requests for an interview being left unanswered. However, newspapers show that in 1985 Old Bushmills received the Carnegie Interpret Britian award which was given 'for facilities which help the public to enjoy and understand places they visit.'[4] A tour for visitors still exists today but has been revamped with the addition of the 1608 bar, kitchen and café, and gift store. The tour focuses on the production element showing where the magic happens and how Old Bushmills whiskey was and continues to be made on the same site for the past four hundred years. Teeling sets a new template for many distilleries by not only showing how they produce their Irish whiskey but also tapping into the history of Dublin's distilling industry. Distilleries are thus not only on-site producers of the spirit but are places that share the past with the public. This is a significant and emerging influence the distilling industry has on society. One argument is that the innovation and renaissance is a result of bold experimentation and mixing of Irish whiskey to introduce new audiences.[5] Robert Caldwell believes the renaissance of the whiskey is partial to the 'ability to straddle the two worlds of whiskey –leaning on its history and tradition,

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[2] Appendix 6: Interview with Luka Gribbin (LG7).
[3] Mark McGovern, '"The cracked pint glass of the servant": The Irish pub, Irish identity and the tourist eye' in Michael Cronin and Barbara O'Connor (eds), *Irish tourism: image, culture and identity* (Clevedon, 2003), P. 95.
[4] *Belfast Telegraph,* 21 Sep. 1985.
[5] Sylvain Tondeur, 'The Irish Whiskey Renaissance: A Revolution of Sorts?' in *Dublin Gastronomy Symposium*, 2016.

whilst also embracing innovation and experimentation.'[6] In agreement and to further Caldwell's argument, Irish Whiskey distilleries have reinvented themselves not only through production, but also as places of past knowledge. The true renaissance is thus a result of distilleries merging with the heritage sector and tourist industry. This gives distilleries the ability of 'pulling on the heart strings' of the industry's past for marketing purposes in addition to being an authority of presenting that past to the public.[7]

The authentic experience:

Scotland's whisky distilleries, having already gone through a renaissance of their own, bring insight on how and why relying on notions of heritage and tradition is important not only to the distilleries but society itself. Karl Spracklen shows in his research that in 2009, '1.27 million people went through the doors of distillery visitor centres, 8% of all visitors to Scotland, altogether spending £28.4 million in local economies.'[8] Arguably, these visitor centers attract tourists by using the idea of authenticity. Distilleries in Scotland are thus recognized as Scottish through their use of symbols and signs that reflect Scottishness. An example of such symbols are kilts, Celtic music, and rural backdrops. Spracklen sums it up by saying:

> tourists visiting Scotland do not want to see a big factory on an industrial estate on the edge of Glasgow: to be authentic, the home of whisky needs to be a ramshackle old

[6] James Beeson, 'What's behind the Irish whiskey revival?' in *Just Drinks*, 2022 (https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/what-s-behind-irish-whiskey-revival/docview/2693031781/se-2) (13 May 2024).
[7] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK5).
[8] Karl Spracklen, 'Dreaming of drams: authenticity in Scottish whisky tourism as an expression of unresolved Habermasian rationalities' in *Leisure Studies*, xxx, no. 1 (2011), P. 106

building by a river or the coast, where the tourist can hear ghost stories and tales of old workers stealing new spirit by poking a straw through the bung of a barrel.[9]

By labeling themselves as authentic, Scottish distilleries sell themselves as an experience. Visitors are symbolically and literally consuming Scotland in a sense. Distilleries in Ulster use authenticity in a similar manner. Old Bushmills is out near the Giant's Causeway and is in the small town of Bushmills with the river still running through it giving an authentic rural Irish feeling. On Old Bushmills' website they advertise themselves as 'a few miles from Ireland's rugged north coast' where you can 'explore the landscape and terrain that imbue our whiskey with its legendary character.'[10] Spracklen labels this as existential authenticity where the 'meaning and purpose of tourism become a quest for an activity that fulfils – albeit fleetingly– our search for identity, place and teleological satisfaction through the journey, the pilgrimage.'[11]

Belfast distilleries and urban industrial heritage

In Ireland, unlike Scotland, however, many of the distillery experiences are located in urban areas such as Dublin, Cork, and now Belfast. So how do these Irish distilleries create an authentic Irish experience within urban areas? It is by tapping into the heritage and history of the industry and city itself that still gives the ghost stories, the tales of industrial work, and a journey through time. Belfast's two new distilleries and visitor centers attempt to create this authentic experience by not only sharing the past of Belfast's distilling industry but also by using the city of Belfast itself as an authentic approach to their brands.

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[9] Ibid., P. 111
[10] 'About the Distillery – Bushmills Irish Whiskey' in *Bushmills* (https://www.bushmills.eu/about-the-distillery/) (23 July 2024).
[11] Spracklen, 'Dreaming of drams', P. 103

The first distillery to open in Belfast in nearly 90 years is Titanic Distillers located at Thompson Dock next to the HMS Caroline and Titanic Experience Museum (see figure 4.1). On their website, they drive this point to the center of their brand by stating 'hear the story of Belfast's whiskey tradition, why it disappeared and how it has returned with the city's first working distillery in almost 90 years.'[12] However, this is not their only use of heritage. Luka Gribbin, a tour guide with the distillery since May 2023, explains that the distillery opened to the public in April 2023 then received their license to distill in July 2023 completing their first batch and casking on site in December 2023.[13] With the distillery open to the public before distilling began, it was important to have a tour that would bring visitors through the doors alongside instant revenue. The name 'Titanic Distillers' set the perfect segway. Gribbin explains that before the distillery, there were walking tours of the docks in place. He states that 'when we came along then, we kind of have taken this building and as part of that then we took responsibility for the dry dock itself as well, being able to provide tours of the dry dock.'[14] Thus, the distillery in a way has tied itself to a Belfast icon.

[12] 'Titanic Distillers' in *Titanic Distillers* (https://www.titanicdistillers.com/) (23 July 2024).
[13] Appendix 6: Interview with Luka Gribbin (LG1, LG2); 'Titanic Distillers' in *Titanic Distillers* (https://www.titanicdistillers.com/) (23 July 2024).
[14] Appendix 6: Interview with Luka Gribbin (LG6).

Figure 4.1: Titanic Distillers at Thompson Dock

Source: Photos by author of dissertation

The distillery visitor experience gives options to visitors that include just the dock tour or a combination of the dock tour and the distillery. On their website for the dock and distillery tour, a description is included stating 'how the pumphouse which was once famed for its feat of engineering, has now become home to our distillery.'[15] Gribbin admits that there are visitors who are interested in the Titanic side of things rather than the whiskey but also states that 'there a quite a few people who come over here […] on a whiskey tour of Ireland and do all the distilleries.'[16]

The variety of tours thus gives visitors the choice and by merging these together, the distillery has reworked itself to more than just a place of spirit production but a center of heritage. Gribbin briefly describes the combined tour as 'a journey through time' where they:

[15] 'Distillery expereinces' in *Titanic Distillers* (https://www.titanicdistillers.com/pages/experiences) (23 July 2024).
[16] Appendix 6: Interview with Luka Gribbin (LG5).

> Start with the history, talk about the dry dock, our industrial heritage or whiskey heritage and we head into the distillery and that's the pump house as well. So, we talk about how the pump house used to work and do a tour, talking about how the building used to work and make our way back to where we were at the start of the tour and then we move on to the present […] talk[ing] about the whiskey side of things […] and then we get around to tasting the whiskey.[17]

Another unique aspect of the whiskey renaissance is its attraction for younger people. Sylvian Tondeur explains that by targeting younger drinkers and giving its product a trendy edge, a 'gateway' or 'entry-point' is created for higher more complex whiskey.[18] This can be achieved by the use of mixed drinks which Pernod Ricard strategically did with Jameson and ginger ale. However, it can go beyond just mixed drinks but through imbuing the drink with society. Tourists and locals alike can find Titanic whiskey at pubs and sporting events in Belfast such as the Belfast Giants ice hockey team. Gribbin also points out that they have 'sponsored a couple of music festivals and supply music festivals with our drinks.'[19] In essence, Titanic Distillers not only ties themselves to the older industrial heritage of the city but to the modern Belfast culture. The link made between Titanic Distiller's whiskey and the city of Belfast produces a cultural product selling itself as a piece of Belfast.[20]

It is too early to determine the numbers on sales of tours and whiskey by Titanic Distillers but what can be seen is the investment is there. Partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund under the Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme, the company

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[17] Appendix 6: Interview with Luka Gribbin (LG4).
[18] Tondeur, 'The Irish Whiskey Renaissance', pp 176-177.
[19] Appendix 6: Interview with Luka Gribbin (LG7).
[20] Tondeur, 'The Irish Whiskey Renaissance', P. 177.

achieved the goal of becoming a visitor attraction and an economic boost for Belfast in both employment and industry.[21] Achieving this goal has propelled the whiskey industry back into the spotlight as a worthy investment for Belfast. Less than a year later, Titanic Distillers was joined by another distillery, one that has direct ties to Belfast's distilling past.

The Belfast Distillery Company acquired the McConnell's name and brand, opening McConnell's distillery in April 2024. This is the same McConnell's that owned the Cromac distillery back in the nineteenth century. On the current company's website, they advertise 'McConnell's was the name that delighted whisky-lovers around the world for over 150 years. Now the legend is reborn. Pride in Belfast and its whisky heritage is our reason for being.'[22] The investment into this new distillery by the company is nothing short of impressive. £22.3 million was privately invested with the expectation of creating 49 new jobs and plans to host 100,000 visitors each year. This was helped along when Department of Communities and Invest NI provided an additional £1.9 million in support of the project.[23]

The result is a state-of-the-art distillery and visitor center in an unused wing of the old Crumlin Gaol (see figure 4.2). Sarah Kennedy, brand ambassador for the company since 2020, gives insight into the reasoning of choosing the Crumlin Gaol, another Belfast icon. Kennedy states in an interview:

> Whenever we took ownership of the brand, we knew we had to build the distillery in Belfast. And we identified this building as a building that was sitting needing re-

[21] Connor Beattie, 'Investment for growth and jobs' in *Titanic Distillers* (28 March 2023) (https://www.titanicdistillers.com/blogs/news/investment-for-growth-and-jobs), (23 July 2024).
[22] *McConnell's Irish Whisky* (https://intl.mcconnellsirishwhisky.com/) (23 July 2024).
[23] Nicola Carruthers, 'Belfast Distillery invests £22.3m in whiskey project' in *The Spirits Business*, 2022 (https://www.thespiritsbusiness.com/2022/08/belfast-distillery-invests-22-3m-in-whiskey-project/) (23 July 2024).

> generation. We didn't take a greenfield site that we had to build a new building on […] We knew that we weren't going to build it on the Ravenhill Road because that site doesn't exist anymore. So, we wanted to find a location in Belfast because Belfast is at the root of our identity.[24]

Figure 4.2: Entrance to McConnell's Distillery and visitor center

Source: Photo by author of dissertation

In a similar manner to Titanic Distillers, McConnell's ties itself with a historical piece of Belfast. However, unlike Titanic Distillers, McConnell's distillery has a link with a former distillery and brand of Belfast's whiskey industry. When asked 'does the history associated with the distillery have an impact on marketing and outreach of the company', Kennedy replied: '100% […] it plays into this renaissance, and back into the underdog and seeing the origin spirit

[24] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK3).

grow in Ireland again, because it is an Irish spirit.'[25] Not only is the history pressed into McConnell's marketing campaign but also in their visitor experience at the distillery.

As a visitor enters the distiller, the story of its foundation is shared right away before a tour even starts by displaying a timeline of the company. Highlights of this timeline include the matriarch, Eleanor McConnell, the fires in the early nineteenth century, and prohibition which is part of the perfect storm that ended the original company (see figure 4.3). In regard to heritage, Kennedy stresses that there is a focus that goes beyond the brand's history. As distilleries merge into the tourist industry, they become authorities on the history, and how they tell it plays a massive role within the Irish whiskey industry as a whole. The tour covers 'the brand itself and the history that's unique to McConnell's' but more importantly how it is connected within the context of the industry as a whole including its decline which Kennedy says is 'about PESTL analysis' (political, economic, social, technological, and legal).[26]

Figure 4.3: McConnell's timeline in visitor center

Source: Photos by author of dissertation

[25] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK5).
[26] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK4).

Not every visitor is going to have knowledge of the Irish whiskey industry, so it is crucial for distilleries to tell the story and place their brand in that story. This is part of the evolution where 'Irish whiskey is becoming more than an alcoholic drink. It is sold as a piece of Irish history and culture.'[27] This responsibility of sharing the industry's history reaps rewards. Mark McGovern argues that tying oneself to heritage, visitors' limitations go beyond just consuming Irish heritage on site, but at home where distilleries are 'exporting the ambience.'[28] In other words, as distilleries like McConnell's and Titanic Distillers connect themselves to the heritage of Belfast and the Irish whiskey industry they are selling their product as an authentic piece of Ireland. As part of the resurgence of distilleries Kennedy says:

> whenever we tap into the origin of anything like a mezcal or tequila or Irish whiskey, Scotch whiskey, rum, cognacs, people really love to know where their spirit came from. They want to know that the origin is correct. They want to know a lot about the spirit […] I just think the story of *uisce beatha*, the water of life, Irish whiskey, the fact that it went into demise and now it's up and coming again, people love that, people love that history and that heritage.[29]

That desire for knowledge and love of history drives distilleries to invest in visitor centers that connect the public to the past. That public audience is manifold. Currently McConnell's gets a lot of walk ins or FIT (free independent travelers). These visitors are not only international but locals alongside visitors from the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Kennedy states

[27] Tondeur, 'The Irish Whiskey Renaissance', P. 177.
[28] McGovern, '"The cracked pint glass of the servant"', P. 89.
[29] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK6).

that ‘next year is going to be more international, because whenever we opened, we had missed the application for the cruise ships coming in.’[30] This highlights further convergence with the tourist industry by connecting with such companies as cruise ships. It also furthers the responsibility these distillers have to the public due to international visitors may lack knowledge or have preconceptions of Belfast or Irish whiskey.

Kennedy admits that ‘there’s an element of responsibility of re-igniting the story in the right way and focusing on points of what were significant about the brand.’[31] This responsibility extends not just to the brand, but also the city of Belfast. Kennedy stresses that it is their responsibility to tell the story in the correct way ‘because it’s to do with industrial heritage and the footprint that Irish whiskey played on our industrial heritage, and on the income that was generated through export to our Island.’[32] Sharing the industrial past to the public has become possible due to it is being sought out by the public. It is undeniable that this is largely in thanks to the recent renaissance of distilleries merging with the tourist industry and accepting that responsibility to tell the story in the correct way.

As we move past the halfway point of 2024, Belfast continues to become significant for the Irish distilling industry once again. In July, Belfast hosted its sixth annual whiskey week, ‘driven by people who are passionate, not just about whiskey, but about Belfast and what it has to offer.’ During this week there was ‘telling of Ulster’s whiskey story’ alongside opportunities to ‘experience the city, the culture of the city, the people, the food, and experience that laugh […] referred to as the craic.’[33] That same craic that many must have enjoyed during the golden years of the industry. Paul Kane, director of Belfast’s whiskey week, sums this reemergence, this

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[30] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK5).
[31] Appendix 7: Interview with Sarah Kennedy (SK7)
[32] Ibid.
[33] *The Irish News,* 15 July 2024.

renaissance perfectly saying ‘my passion lies with the history of whiskey, the legacy it has. I do genuinely believe that Belfast was built on more than just ships’ and he continues ‘I think it was built on people who made very good whiskey. Who shipped it all around the world and put Belfast on the map.’[34] Time will only tell how far Belfast’s whiskey industry will go this time around, but what is apparent is that distilleries once again are influencing Belfast society.

[34] Ibid.

Conclusion

As this dissertation shows, the whiskey industry of Belfast was and still is more than just a part of an economic network. Distillers have influenced Belfast socially from their beginnings in the nineteenth century to today. By exploring how the Belfast whiskey industry imbued society and vice versa, one gets a unique lens into the industrial history of Ireland. By forging their own path, Belfast distilleries differed from other distilleries in the south of Ireland. This set them on a route that led to a booming initial success only to be followed by difficulties and constraints that resulted in their near-erasure from Ireland. Fortunately, through innovation and intentional connections to heritage, a comeback and renaissance is currently in progress which once again has placed Belfast in the spotlight for the Irish whiskey industry.

The initial success of the industry relied on the uniqueness of Belfast's connection with Great Britain, focusing on export or adopting the Coffey's patent still. This provided success stories of companies such as Dunville & Co., McConnell's, Mitchell's & Co., Old Bushmills, and Comber Distilleries. The rewards of these successes were not exclusive to the owners and directors of the company. The distilleries reshaped the landscape of Belfast by building new industrial plants and office buildings while offering employment to the men and women who called Belfast their home. Entertainment and philanthropy were also provided in the forms of parks, scholarships, sporting venues and teams, alongside exhibitions. These were all accessible to the citizens of Belfast who sometimes returned their gratitude by voting for the barons of the industry into roles such as mayor.

This golden era of success proved to be short-lived. Many Belfast distilleries tried to ride out the storm but the tumultuous events that included the First World War, the war of Irish Independence, the Civil War that followed, prohibition, and the Second World War proved to be

too much. Old Bushmills would be the only distillery to survive in Northern Ireland which eventually joined forces with Jameson and Powers in the Republic who were owned by a multi-billion-pound company. Eventually, Bushmills closed their offices in Belfast leaving no active distilling company within the whiskey industry left in Belfast. An industry that had done so much for the city of Belfast was all but forgotten to society as buildings were repurposed or torn down.

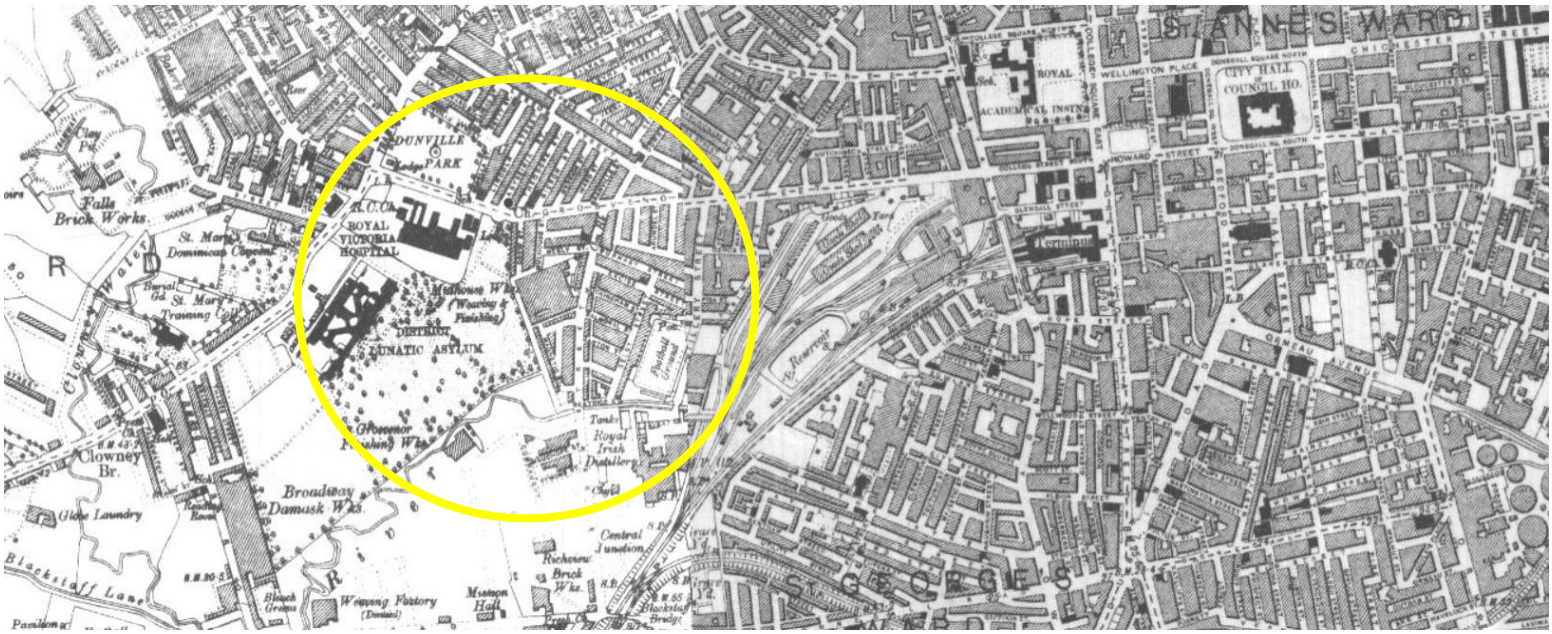
Miraculously, the Irish whiskey industry is making a comeback with successes that have not been seen since the nineteenth century. Heavy investment has not only extended the market of the old brands but has paved the way for new distilleries to emerge. This reemergence is more than just a comeback though, it is a renaissance. Distilleries have tied themselves to the tourist industry by leaning heavily into the heritage of the Irish whiskey industry. In 2023, Titanic Distillers opened their doors in Belfast which had not seen a distillery in over ninety years. This was followed by McConnell's Distillery in 2024 putting Belfast back on the map of Irish whiskey. As part of the renaissance, both Titanic Distillers and McConnell's have gone beyond the sole purpose of making whiskey. They have become responsible for not letting the public forget about the industry's roots that once ran deep in Belfast. By merging with the tourist industry, distilleries now share the industry's history alongside their brand's products creating appeal to a wider range of consumers and markets. These new markets with the power of heritage are forging a path of unknown potential for the industry that is once again in Belfast.

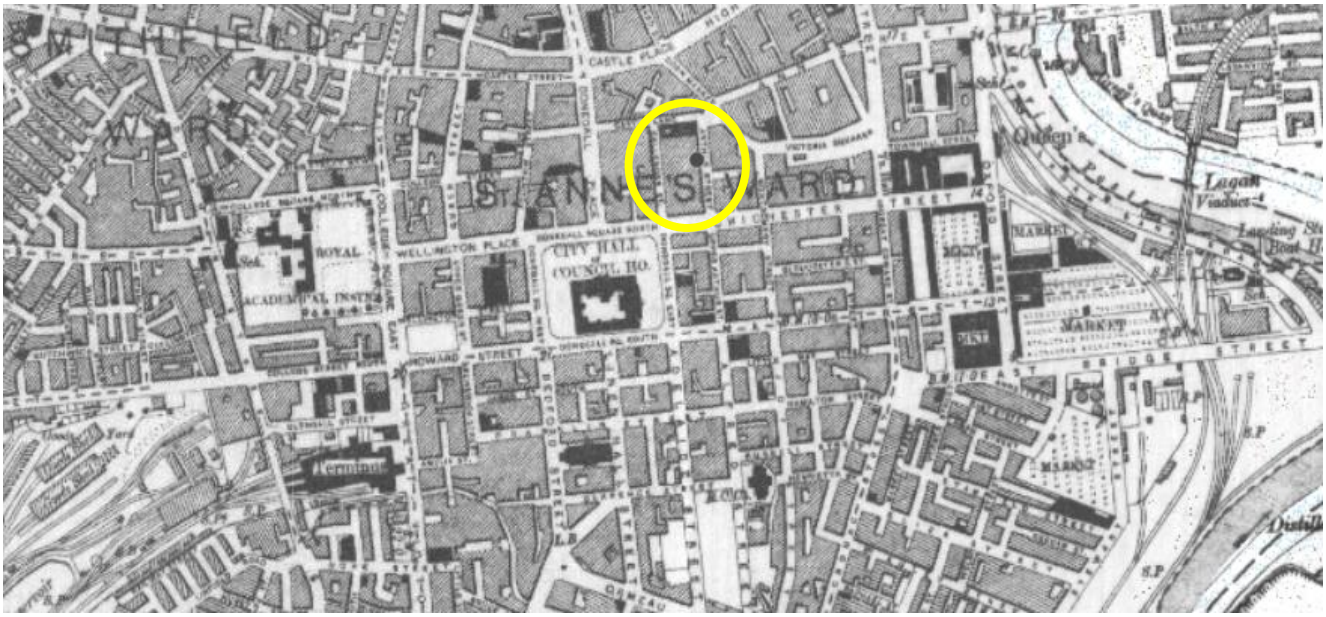
More research, beyond the scope of this dissertation, could examine the precise economic and commercial impact of the Belfast distilleries through the numerous records in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland. This dissertation, however, has shown and proven that Belfast's distilling industry was and is an important part of Ireland's whiskey story. That importance is in thanks to its social ties. Through its ups and downs, Belfast distilleries have and

are continuing to imbue society. The distilleries and whiskey industry undeniably impacted Belfast society etching themselves into their rightful place amongst the social history of Belfast.

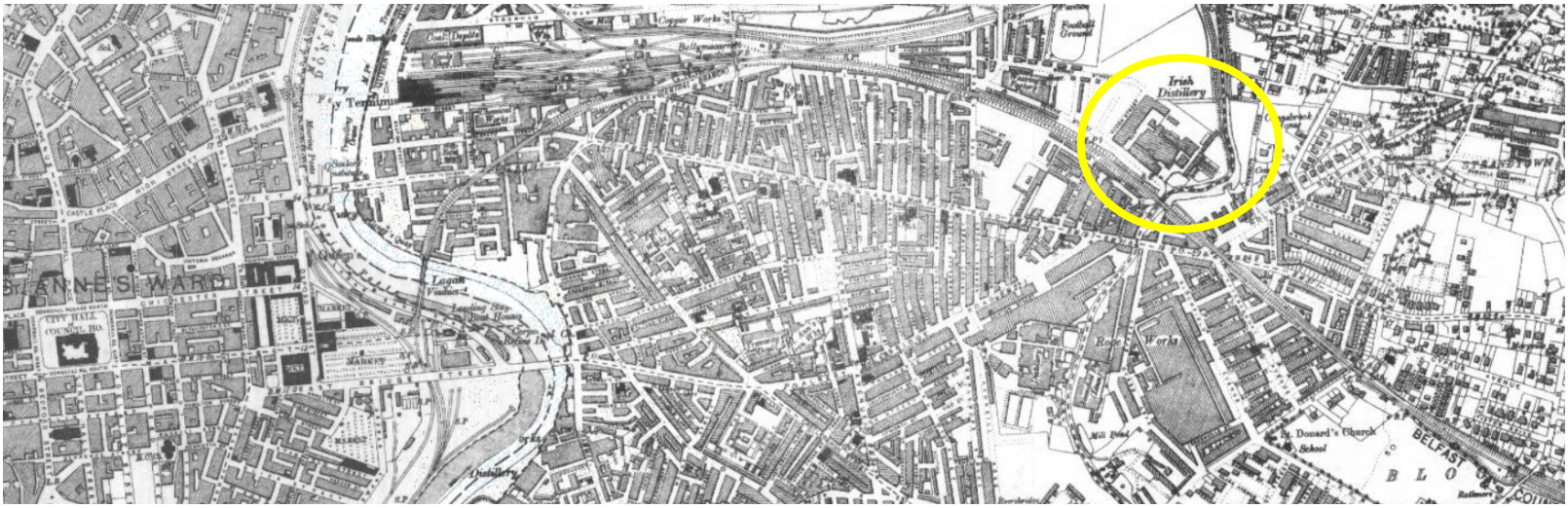
Appendices

Appendix 1: PRONI OSNI Historical Third Edition (1900-07) map showing location of Royal Irish Distillery, football ground, and Dunville Park (first) and office/warehouses (second)

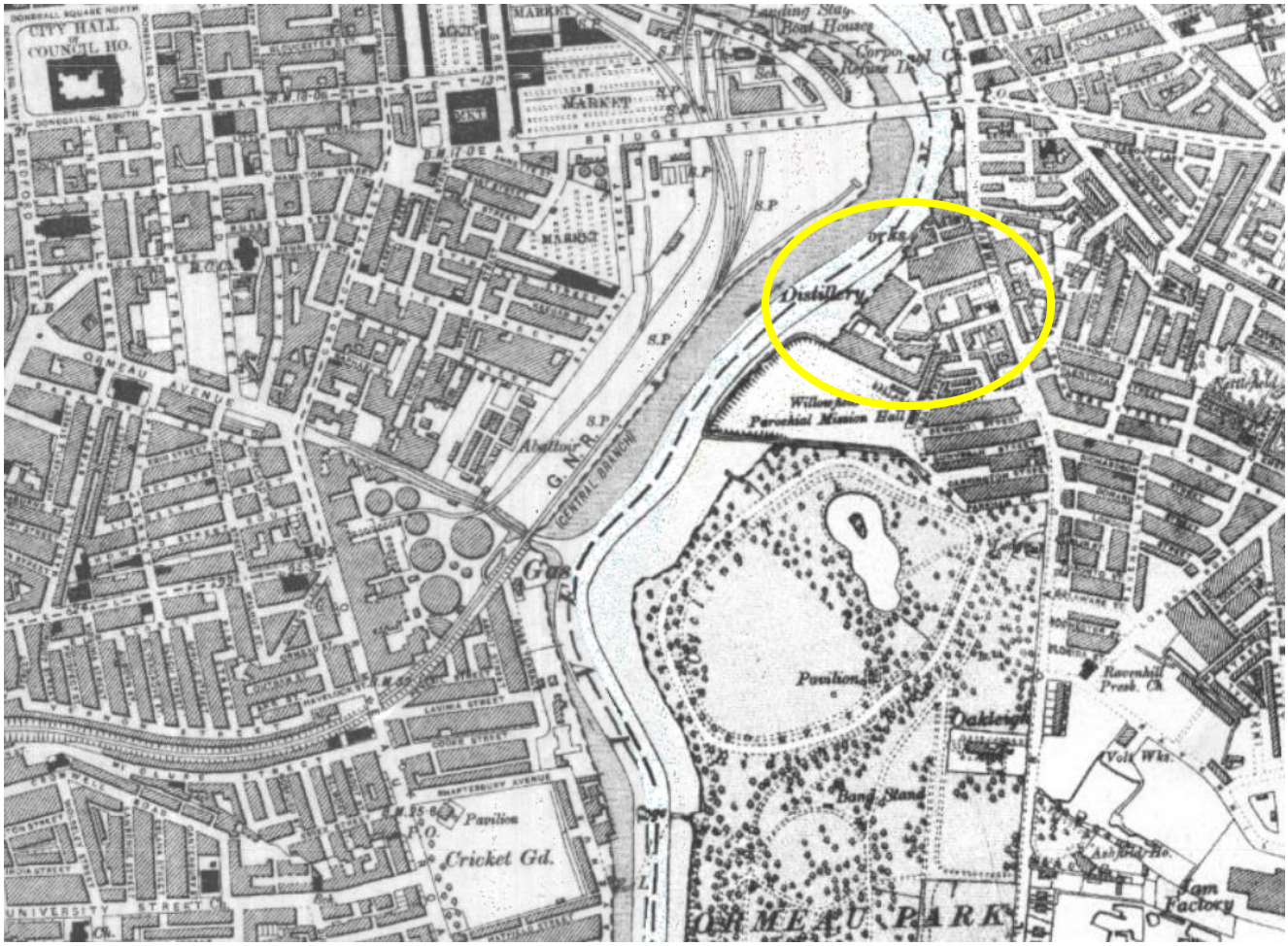




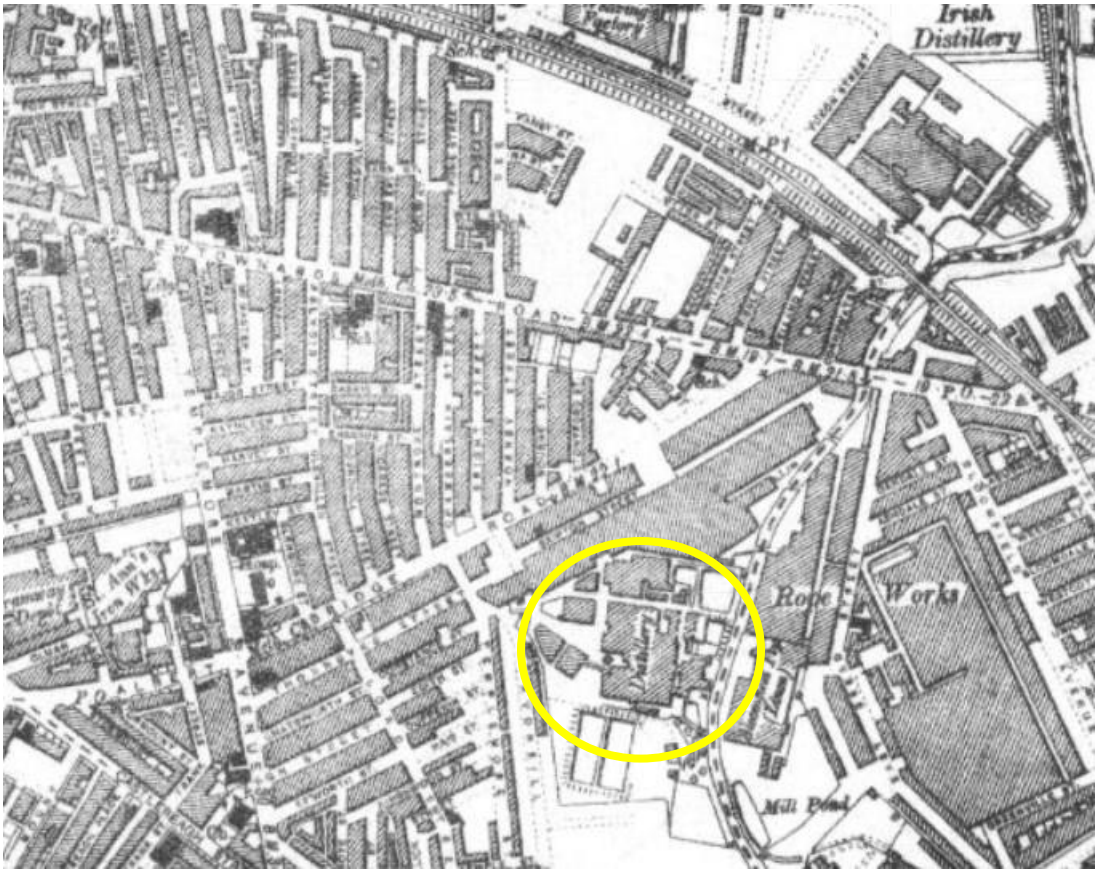
Appendix 2: PRONI OSNI Historical Third Edition (1900-07) map showing location of Irish Distillery (Connswater Distillery) on the east side of the river Lagan



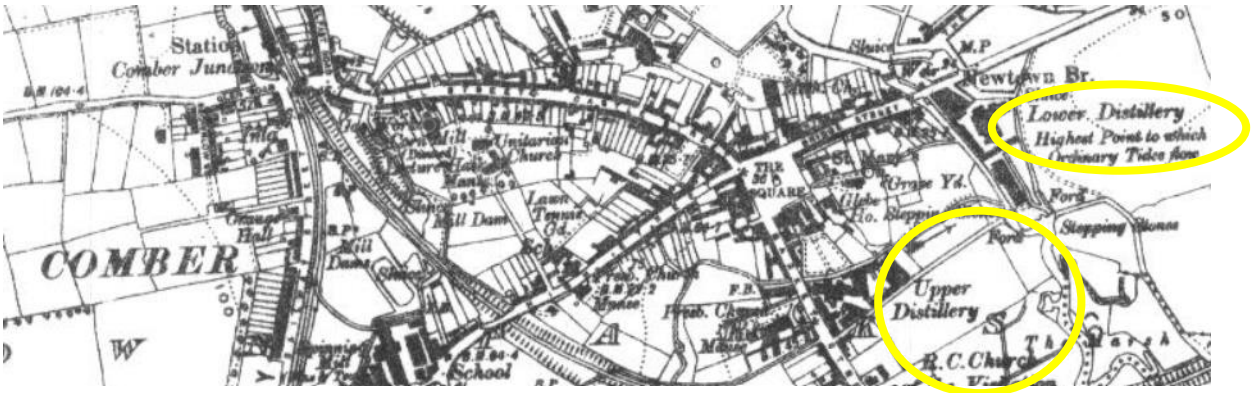
Appendix 3: PRONI OSNI Historical Third Edition (1900-07) map showing location of Cromac Distillery on the east side of the river Lagan



Appendix 4: PRONI OSNI Historical Third Edition (1900-07) map showing location of Avoniel Distillery just south of the Connswater Distillery next to the Rope Works on east side of the river Lagan



Appendix 5: PRONI OSNI Historical Third Edition (1900-07) map of Comber showing upper and lower distilleries



Appendix 6: Interview with Titanic Distillers tour guide Luka Gribbin, 23 June 2024

BM1: Okay, so first question; can you explain your role with the Titanic Distillery and how long you've been working with them?

LG1: Yeah, so I'm a tour guide, I've been working here since May of 2023. And yeah, so my role is just to take people around the distillery, talk about the history of the building, the pump house itself and then talking through the distilling process and a bit about the history of Irish whiskey, a bit about how it was before and what happened to it and how it's seeing a bit of a resurgence now and getting more popular, talk through kind of the distilling process and how the whiskeys made and we get around to tasting it as well and talk about how the different ways you age the whiskey and what goes into it, kind of changes the flavours and all that. So we do a bit of that and then talk about the dry dock outside as well and then that kind of lets us talk about more about the history of the area that we're in Belfast.

BM2: So regarding the distillery, how long has it been open and then when it comes to distillation, is it more pot still or do you guys use a patent still here?

LG2: So the distillery itself for visitors to come to say it's been open since April but we officially got our distilling license for this building in July of 2023. So April 2023, first opened. July 2023, we had our distilling license approved and then by August mid to end of August we did our first batch.

We're all pot still here and there's no column still here. So it's all pot still within our distillery and distillery that we've been working in collaboration with then at the moment for our blend and our vodka they would have and a column still there able to mass produce the whisky but what we're making here would all be batch very kind of small batch.

BM2: So being the first distillery since the early 1900s, is there a connection at all between this distillery and other any other distillery or is it completely brand new?

LG3: This distillery here is completely brand new. So I don't believe there's any historical connection with any of the old distilleries being Titanic Distillers. Kind of post-Titanic launch, rise to fame.

BM3: So being the first one, do you think that you guys hold a certain responsibility of telling the story of distillation in Belfast itself? Is that part of the tour?

LG3: Yeah, I think we do put quite a bit of emphasis on the fact that we are the first distillery back in Belfast and Belfast did have quite a rich distilling heritage before that. Unfortunately, just due to the circumstances, it kind of left Belfast and we're happy that we're able to put Belfast back on the map and it is kind of an essential responsibility of ours to be able to represent that properly as well.

BM4: With the visitor experience, can you walk me through what would be the main selling points? Would you talk more about the distillation first and then go into the dry docks or is it kind of like a converged telling?

LG4: I would say it's the reverse order, so we'd start with the history, move on then to the distilling and the whiskey side of things as the tour ends with the tasting. So in terms of the progression, it makes more sense to do the tour, talk about the history and then talk about whiskey. Within the history, obviously we do mention of the whiskey heritage of Belfast, but the actual kind of science is later on. All that then condenses into one is much easier for people to keep track of tabs of what's going on if you do it like that, you break it up and it becomes a little bit muddled up. I like to describe the tours almost like a journey through time, so what we'll do is we'll start with the history, talk about the dry dock, our industrial heritage or whiskey heritage and we head into the distillery and that's the pump house as well. So we talk about how the pump house used to work and do a tour, talking about how the building used to work and make our way back to where we were at the start of the tour and then we move on to the present and hopefully the future for many years to come and then talk about the whiskey side of things in that sense. So I think that's the way it works best and then we get around to tasting the whiskey.

BM5: Does the presentation of I guess having the Titanic like as your main arch like brand, does that bring in you think visitors? Is that like probably what spike their curiosity or is it more like people coming in like whiskey connoisseurs or interest in the distillery?

LG5: You know, I think we get a good blend of the two. And honestly, there are quite a few people who come over here and they're almost on a whiskey tour of Ireland and do all the distilleries. We have plenty of people as well who's main reason or even in Belfast at all is because they love the Titanic. And they come to here and learn a bit about the Titanic's history that isn't as well known. The fact that it was finished here and one of the last places it was in Belfast and all of these kind of facts about it, you wouldn't really get anywhere else as this is the place where it happened. So, do you get a lot of Titanic kind of fans and a lot of them then would be more interested in doing that side of things and less interested in the whiskey.

BM6: But part of some of the tours they do end up going into the distillery too and kind of discover. Can you explain that a little more because I was on the website and I know you guys do a dry dock tour. Is that like its own separate tour from the distillery altogether?

LG6: Yeah, it's its own separate tour. So originally before we came along, the dock itself was formed by innovation, Science and Innovation Park in Northern Ireland and they would have allowed certain walking tours to get access to that and do the dock as kind of part of their Belfast walking tour, Titanic walking tour. When we came along then, we kind of have taken this building and as part of that then we took responsibility for the dry dock itself as well, being able to provide tours of the dry dock. So there's plenty of research done on the dock itself and the history of this pump house and how it used to work and all these stories and interviews that we have with people. So we accessed the archives of the city and saw how it all works. We have all

the engineering drawings and plans and took some time to study those and created the tour and kind of custom with all that information at the heart of it. So it's kind of its own separate thing and it's kind of part of just being in this building. We've taken that responsibility. Going back to the responsibility a bit.

BM7: Okay, so why do you personally think there's a resurgence in Irish whiskey distilling and I guess people's taste of it too like spreading I know from the state's perspective we're getting more micro distillery brands. Why do you think that's becoming more and more of an interest?

LG7: I think people like a unique experience in a sense and so not always just buying big brands and what everyone knows appeals to everyone. People like obviously the likes of with Beer, a lot of people like all these micro IPA breweries and I think that that concept is kind of spreading more and more to spirits as well and because of that smaller distillers and more niche brands are becoming more and more popular. Being able then to start your brand advertising to a younger audience and kind of moving away from the belief that whiskey or Irish whiskey especially was kind of an old man's drink and being able to market it more towards the 21 to 35 and kind of an age group has been able to really change the market and improve sales in that sense especially using mixers and not always implying that it has to be drank straight can be important. We sponsored a couple of music festivals and do supply music festivals with our drinks and because of that then we are kind of appealing to a more senior...

[You're in the Belfast Giants arena too.]

… Yeah exactly so kind of being able to modernize the whiskey and Irish whiskey has really driven people to see us to go up and have more representation across more age groups than just kind of people that normally would be sitting and drinking with.

BM8: Referring to not just this distillery but I guess all distilleries do you believe that distilleries has a right within the heritage sector to explain the distillation history within not just Belfast but Ireland as a whole?

LG8: Yeah well I think it is a huge part of Irish history and the distilling so I think everyone has a right to talk about it and bring it up and a lot of people should maybe have the opportunity to learn a bit more about it because it was such a huge industry and it has kind of really been forgotten since the 1900's.

BM9: Yeah it's kind of a big thing in my dissertation is talking about it's always linen, shipbuilding, engineering but these gave way to like basically other industries out there which include distillation and I guess you would call them the barons of the early days of distillation had a huge impact on the city and now it's resurging again and you guys and now McConnell's are like all starting to put your footprint back into the Belfast area.

LG9: Yeah, it's definitely something that people don't know about Belfast is its history in terms of the whiskey side of things you know most people when you talk to them about Belfast

whiskey and how popular it actually was they had no idea there were even distilleries in the city before us so I think it is something that is kind of undersold and under talked about.

Appendix 7: Interview with McConnell's Brand Manager, Sarah Kennedy of Belfast Distillery Company Limited 25 June 2024

BM1: Can you explain your role at the Distillery and how long you have been working with them and what did you do prior?

SK1: So I started with McConnell's in 2020. So, it would be four years ago this month actually. And I started whenever there was no employees, it was really a board and an investment project for Belfast. And my job started as a brand ambassador, someone to create awareness and build a brand. A little bit different from your traditional brand ambassador, that would work for some of the larger companies because they have a very specific role, whereas my role was brand advocacy and brand awareness. And then also to be a point of contact for our distribution partners and our supply partners as well. So, six months later, John Kelly, our CEO, he started, and then from there we started to build the team out. My job started to evolve then into more of a brand role for the export market. And so what my role is now as a brand manager is to build and develop brand campaigns and brand marketing for our customers in the global market so that they can relate our brands to the market that they're selling it. And each market is completely unique and very, very different and allows for a completely different brand plan and brand communication as well, because Belfast needs to translate into other markets around the world. So before that, actually, I did my degree in business studies and then I worked in finance for five years and I worked in insurance programming for designing and construct for the distilleries, and that's how I got connected to the distilleries. So, it's all very connected. I also spent a lot of time in hospitality, so I know the drinks industry pretty well and have kept close eye on the growth of Irish whiskey over the past 15 years really.

BM2: Since you were with them, I guess, kind of from the beginning, could you like briefly go through the process of how it got to where it is today and then like, were there any roadblocks, I guess, to get it set up as it is today, like in the jail itself, or also just getting the products to the certain markets that you were mentioning?

SK2: Yeah, I mean, with any business, the size and scale of ours, there's always roadblocks. And this building is a Grade A listed building, so there was a lot of legal and social matters that needed to be covered before we were allowed to start building. And that's because we have to protect the exterior of the building and the interior of the building to a certain extent. And we have to honour and respect what this building used to be. There's a lot of historical significance around here. Also, physically, the building, the walls are very thick in here. So, in terms of the actual deconstruction and reconstruction of the interior of the building, it was quite difficult. So we had to get the potholes in through the roof, for example. The potstills had to be purpose built to the linear structure of the building. We've had to knock through walls, and you see on the ground here that that's how thick a wall was. So they were very thick, took a lot of work to knock through. We're sitting in cells here. And then we had these V columns, which we have actually

identified as part of our brand now, as wall retainers. So all of this had to go in. It took around two years for the actual construction of the building.

Also, the local community, there was a community outreach to make sure that we were communicating heavily into this area of Belfast. That got quite a tight-knit community as well. And we're also in an urban setting, so things like noise, disruption, all of those things had to be addressed. So there was roadblocks for that too. You had to work with the departments, you had to work with finance. It's very expensive to build a distillery. And also even the potstills had to be ordered seven years in advance because they're from Four Sides, which just have backlog of ordering of potstills. So that quality, the employment of people as well. You're needing to get the right people, the right location for them to be based here and that we're looking after local community as well.

And in terms of global export, global export into any market can be difficult and tricky with the legal side of things. The legalities around alcohol or promotion, you're making sure that your due diligence is correct so that you can identify the customer because you're building new relationships with customers. And these aren't long-standing relationships either. So you had to build, you did make 10 distributors before you got one that was identified as the correct distributor. Then there's also things like, for example, in South Africa where alcohol has to be at least 43% ABV. We need to make sure that our alcohol was uplifted. The likes of South Africa and America, we needed 750 bottles, so 750 mils instead of 700 mils because of the legal side of export. So there's been many different roadblocks, but also just trying to find the right solutions. And we've been very persistent in making sure that we built this building to the high quality of which it is now. Identify and employ the right people for the roads. And then identify the correct distribution partners in order to build the relationship and grow the brand in each of those markets.

BM3: We briefly talked about it, but just the connection between this distillery and the older one. You mentioned keeping to its roots and the women of the business and stuff. Could you just briefly touch on that?

SK3: Yes. So, McConnell’s distillery, the Cromac distillery, was in the River Lagan. The reason they called it the old Cromac distillery is because they used the Cromac wells. So their water source was the Cromac wells. It was JJ McConnell’s distillery as well. It was a known for the JJ McConnell’s distillery. So whenever we took ownership of the brand, we knew we had to build the distillery in Belfast. And we identified this building as a building that was sitting needing re-generation. We didn't take a Greenfield site that we had to build a new building on. We took a building that was not being used for anything and we regenerated it. So, we restored the building and turned it into a distillery. So, we knew that we weren't going to build it on the Ravenhill Road because that site doesn't exist there anymore. So, we wanted to find a location in Belfast because Belfast is at the root of our identity.

Ellenor McConnell does play a big part in our story because as the matriarch of the business, she held the business for 20 years as a widowed mother. And she brought it to a stage where it was a spirit dealers and grocers to a business that had five locations in and around Belfast City. So it shows the significance that females played in industry in Belfast. Belfast was a very industrial city in the 1800s, with the linen mills, the shipbuilding, the rope making, the bottling lines. All of that, women played a massive role in. So, I love to tap into that. We also have Julie who's one of our female distilling operatives, who is one of our distillers. So we're bringing women back into the industry too. I've been in the business now as the longest standing employee as a female in my role. And we have many other females that are playing massive roles and parts in the growth of our business as well to this day. So the connection between the two brands is there. Belfast City connects it, that whole local spirit, and also the roots in the ground. The knowledge and understanding of where we are and the history of where we are.

BM4:So just regarding the visitor experience, we kind of went through what history is presented. Is that mainly revolved around the Belfast industry, would you say? Or would you say they bring in the entire Irish distilling industry through telling the story of the rise and the decline?

SK4: Yeah, so throughout the history element of the distillery of this building, we touch on the history of this jail, but not too heavily because there is the jail tour. We just touch on why we're here. So there is an element of that, briefly. Then we discuss the brand itself and the history that's unique to McConnell's. So, about Eleanor McConnell, about the old Cormac Distillery, about the fires and the demise of the brand. But then we then move into the history of the Irish whiskey industry as a whole, and how Belfast played a role in that. And then also how the downfall and the demise of the Irish category, we call it those three things, the perfect storm. Which is whenever I did my degree, it was about PESTL analysis, so political, economical, social, technological. And it was all of those because there was the legalities around prohibition. Then there was the political elements and social element of the troubles and the partition. And also the wars as well, the European wars that were going on, the world wars. And then on top of that, we have the technology advances, which is through the invention of the continuous Coffey still. It was actually invented in Ireland, but then it was shunned by the Irish and taken on by Scotch. So that plays a massive role in it, and they connect because they correlate with each other. So, we do pay respect to the Irish whiskey category as a whole. When we talk about the renaissance, we talk about it as the category growth, and not just as our brand growing.

BM5: Does the history associated with the distillery have an impact on marketing and outreach of the company? So actually being tied to an older brand and not being a brand new distillery, does that go into the marketing aspect?

SK5: 100%. I think the whole pulling on the heart strings that you would get from the brand is that we were once a giant in the industry that a family built, and that a young thing, like a young widowed mother decided to champion. And through no fault of their own, really, the industry declined. It plays into this Renaissance, and back in the underdog and seeing the origin spirit

grow in Ireland again, because it is an Irish spirit. When you go around the world, there's countries that really just love that. I do work in the United States, in South Africa, in France, in Germany, Poland, Australia, and all of these countries have ties to Ireland in ways, even if they're direct or indirect, it resonates with them. Because as a country, on such a small island, we went through an industrial revolution and demise in many industries. And now we're coming back in terms of tourism, whiskey distilling, all of those elements that we had lost for so many years, hospitality, we're seeing an uplift on. And so I think that really resonates with our marketing and also our communication in different countries around the world.

BM5: Would you say like the visitors, I know you've only been open for like a month, is it more like local, or is there a lot of international?

SK5: Lots of international, yeah. I mean, next year is going to be more international, because whenever we opened, we had missed the application for the cruise ships coming in, because that happens a year in advance. But we're getting lots of walking customers and what you call FIT customers, free independent travellers, that would be coming in, that have heard about it, or that have downtime when they're coming off their cruise ships, or they're travelling and just trying to tap into what you can do in terms of tourism here. And we're getting lots of international visitors. On top of that, we are getting local visitors and we're getting visitors from Republic of Ireland and from the UK as well. So we're seeing a mix. Really expanding the fast tourist footprint.

BM6: So, why do you personally think there's been a resurgence, or I guess a renewed interest in Irish whiskey either through the product itself, or through the history of the product? Why is it becoming a more younger drink and how does that go into the marketing aspect as well?

SK6: I think on a global scale distilled spirits and matured brown spirits have become more popular. And it's because of the fact that whenever we tap into the origin of anything like a mezcal or tequila or Irish whiskey, Scotch whiskey, rum, cognacs, people really love to know where their spirit came from. They want to know that the origin is correct. They want to know a lot about the spirit. So I'm finding the popularity of brown spirits and matured spirits is growing as a whole, like through rum, tequila, agave spirits and whiskies.

But with Irish whiskey, I think from research what's growing it is premiumization of the category, because for many years there was premium spirits, but it was limited to Middleton or Bushmills or Red breast. Some of those high-end spirits, but if you bring it back to the Cooley days when John Teeling really brought back Irish whiskey, with the Cooley distillery you started seeing growth, and then you were starting to see the popularity of those premium spirits, like Dingle, Teeling, your Glendalough distillery. You were starting to see those premium Irish spirits grow, and with that then there was room for growth, because we are an industry that is still so small and tight-knit, and the quality that comes with Irish whiskey is just incredible.

And it was kind of a mix of the new entrance of demographics into the category, because some spirits that are really long standing already have their demographic that they target, whereas with

Irish whiskey we're targeting new demographics, so we're targeting women, we're targeting younger men and women, students, we're targeting people who are working the trade, so bartenders, and then also mixing drinks as well, we don't shy away from mixing in a cocktail, because we're getting to this stage where people just want to enjoy Irish whiskey. It's not this, you have to drink your whiskey neat, or it has to be cask strength, or heavy-peated. It's really just about how much you enjoy the spirit that goes into the drink. Knowing where it comes from, so the GI, people are just more educated into where their drink is coming from, and I just think the story of uisce beatha, the water of life, Irish whiskey, the fact that it went into demise and now it's up and coming again, people love that, people love that history and that heritage.

BM7: So, regarding heritage and tourism, do you think there's a certain responsibility of telling the history of it? And not only telling it, but I guess being the architects of it at this point? Because we have the whiskey museums over at Friend At Hand, and the one down Dublin. But being actual producers of it, is there a responsibility where you guys officially belong in the heritage sector, or is it just kind of a bonus added into it?

SK7: I think there is a bit of a mix between the two, and when it comes to our brand, in the early days I did a lot of the digging and piecing together and getting our story together, and there's an element of responsibility of re-igniting the story in the right way and focusing on the right points of what we're significant about the brand, because 1776 to 2019 is a long period, almost 250 years. So there was points of just, it was taken along as a brand, or points of non-significance, as you would say, but there was real points of significance for the brand, there was the moving from a spirit dealer grocer tea merchant to a multi-location, multi-warehouse corporation, really, in the middle of Belfast, the two; distillery that had brewing, distilling and exporting going on to the complete demise of the brand and the fires, and that's all very significantly important, not just for the brand, but for the city. Because it's to do with our industrial heritage and the footprint that Irish Whiskey played on our industrial heritage, and on the income that was generated through export to our island, so I think that there is an element of responsibility in telling that story, and that's why in our location we don't just touch on the history of the brand, we also touch on the history of the building, not too much, but we talk about it, we actually touch on the history of distilling, and how distilling was slightly different than it is today, where we have a single malt triple pot-stilled distillery, and it's fairly automated, so technology has advanced incredibly, one of the questions I get asked is, "Does the whisky taste the same as it did in 1776?" and the answer is no, because there's higher quality of standards, product consistency, clarity of water, cleanliness, everything comes into play here, regulation, like GI, HMRC, all of that comes into play here. This is a manufacturing facility, once it actually leaves this building, the selection of casks, the quality of casks that are out there, the finishing process and different fortified wines, or wines, or rums, or anything really, cognacs, is all in our control, so I think all of that educational piece plays a massive part in the story of the building, and it is our responsibility to do it the right way.

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