

Ardbeg

Owner: Glenmorangie Co (Moët Hennessy)
Region/district: The Islay
Founded: 1815
Status: Active (vc)
Capacity: 1 000 000 litres
Address: Port Ellen, Islay, Argyll PA42 7EA
Tel: 01496 302244 (vc)
website: www.ardbeg.com

History:
1794 – First record of a distillery at Ardbeg. It was founded by Alexander Stewart.

1798 – The MacDougalls, later to become licensees of Ardbeg, are active on the site through Duncan MacDougall.

1815 – The current distillery is founded by John MacDougall, son of Duncan MacDougall.

1853 – Alexander MacDougall, John's son, dies and sisters Margaret and Flora MacDougall, assisted by Colin Hay, continue the running of the distillery. Colin Hay takes over the licence when the sisters die.

1888 – Colin Elliot Hay and Alexander Wilson Gray Buchanan renew their license.

1900 – Colin Hay's son takes over the license.

1959 – Ardbeg Distillery Ltd is founded.

1973 – Hiram Walker and Distillers Company Ltd jointly purchase the distillery for £300 000 through Ardbeg Distillery Trust.

1974 – Widely considered as the last vintage of 'old, peaty' Ardbeg. Malt which has not been produced in the distillery's own maltings is used in increasingly larger shares after this year.

1977 – Hiram Walker assumes single control of the distillery. Ardbeg closes its maltings.

1979 – Kildalton, a less peated malt, is produced over a number of years.



Ardbeg and its two neighbours, Laphroaig and Lagavulin, are side by side in the south part of Islay which is called Kildalton and their peated whisky is in high demand everywhere in the world. They may seem similar, but there are great differences between the three. Ardbeg's capacity is considerably less than half of the others. Whilst Laphroaig and Lagavulin have been producing more or less without interruption since WWII, Ardbeg was closed 1981-1989 and was only in production for a few months per year between 1989-1996. This means problems for the owners as the demand of Ardbeg has increased in recent years and the question is if demand eventually will outstrip supply with so small amounts, of at least older expressions, in the warehouses. Production has increased since 2007 from 12 to 13 mashes per week. Ardbeg used to buy all their malt from Port Ellen maltings on Islay but with the increased production at Diageo's own two Islay distilleries, 20% of requirements now come from the mainland. The specification of Ardbeg's malt is 55 ppm which gives c 23 ppm in the finished spirit

The distillery is equipped with a stainless steel mash tun, six washbacks made of Oregon pine and one pair of stills. In the spirit still, installed as recently as in 2001, lies a large part of the secret of Ardbeg's taste; compared to neighbours Laphroaig and Lagavulin the peatiness is supplemented by a fruitiness which gives Ardbeg its own, very special style. The character is achieved by a purifier attached to the spirit still and increasing the reflux.

Some refurbishings were recently announced by the owners with both the distillery and visitor centre being upgraded and a new warehouse will also be built.

In 2005 Ardbeg Very Young appeared, the first step towards a new 10 year old based on the spirit distilled since Glenmorangie took over in 1997 and in August 2008 the "new" 10 year old finally appeared. A cask strength version called *Renaissance* was launched a few months prior to this and at the same time they also launched a limited Committee bottling called *Corryvreckan*, no age statement but made up from 12 year old bourbon casks and some younger French oak casks. The lightly peated *Blasda* (8 ppm and unaged) and *Mor II* (4.5 litre bottle) were another two new releases in autumn. Ardbeg's core range consists of *10 year old*, *Uigeadail*, *Lord of the Isles* (not many left) and *Airigh Nam Beist 1990* (bottled in 2006).

Independent bottlings have become quite rare but two 14 year olds (1993 and 1994) were released by Cadenheads this year.

History (continued):

1981 – The distillery closes in March.

1987 – Allied Lyons takes over Hiram Walker and thereby Ardbeg.

1989 – Production is restored with Iain Henderson as Manager. All malt is taken from Port Ellen.

1996 – The distillery closes in July and Allied Distillers decides to put it up for sale during the autumn.

1997 – Glenmorangie plc buys the distillery for £7 million (whereof £5.5 million is for whisky in storage). On stream from 25th June. Ardbeg 17 years old and Provenance are launched

1998 – A new visitor centre opens.

2000 – Ardbeg 10 years is introduced. The Ardbeg Committee (a worldwide forum for Ardbeg fans) is launched and has 30 000 members after a few years.

2001 – Lord of the Isles 25 years and Ardbeg 1977 are launched.

2002 – Ardbeg Committee Reserve and Ardbeg 1974 are launched.

2003 – Uigeadail is launched.

2004 – Very Young Ardbeg (6 years) and a limited edition of Ardbeg Kildalton (1300 bottles) are launched. The latter is a non-peated cask strength from 1980.

2005 – Serendipity is launched.

2006 – Ardbeg 1965 and Still Young are launched. Distillery Manager Stuart Thomson leaves Ardbeg after nine years. Almost There (9 years old) and Airigh Nam Beist are released.

2007 – Michael Heads becomes the new distillery manager. Ardbeg Mor, a 10 year old in 4.5 litre bottles is released.

2008 – The new 10 year old, Corryvreckan, Renaissance, Blasda and Mor II are released.

Ardbeg 10 year old

DR – Intense smoke and tar on the nose but with some distinctive sweet lemon notes, a mouth-coating palate with honeyed but fiery peat, completely balanced and impressive, and a long smoke tail at the finish.

DS – Sweet peat smoke with apples in syrup on the nose. Strong, spiky peat with a searing hot hit of salt and pepper. Long, peppery finish.



Renaissance

Blasda

Ardbeg Mór (4.5 litre)



10 years old

Corryvreckan