

Imperial Distillery



Imperial Distillery Offices



Imperial Distillery - built from Aberdeen red brick

Name:	Imperial (Pronounced: just as you write it...)
Region:	Speyside (Central)
Neighbors:	Cardhu, Knockando, Glenfarclas, Dailuaine, Benrinnes
Founded:	1897
Status:	Closed – the buildings were demolished by 2013
Water source:	Ballintomb Burn / Tonory source
Equipment:	2 Wash stills, 2 Spirit stills
Production capacity:	1,600,000 liters of alcohol per year
Ownership:	Pernod Ricard > Allied (since 2005)

The Imperial distillery, constructed in 1897 by Thomas Mackenzie, an entrepreneur who already owned two other malt whisky distilleries; Dailuaine and Talisker, opened in 1898, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year. Its name a reflection of her long reign over the British Empire rather than the 'geographically inspired' names of most other whisky distilleries. While Speyburn had toiled to ensure that their first distillate ran by the end of that jubilee year in celebration, Thomas Mackenzie named an entire distillery in her honor.

Dailuaine Distillery had been a success for Mackenzie, along with James Fleming who had died in 1895, and the business had expanded in the 1890s to include North of Scotland and Talisker Distilleries. However, Imperial opened just in time to meet the grim reaper who rode a horse named Pattison through the industry in an almighty crashing of casks and dreams, and so it closed within a year and remained silent until reawakening in 1918.

Dailuaine-Talisker was taken over by DCL in 1925 and they closed Imperial the following year along with many others, although it continued to provide malt for Dailuaine. It remained silent again until reopening in 1956 and then in the mid-1960s the distillery was reconstructed, the maltings and kiln demolished and Saladin maltings installed. Imperial's production was mostly used for blending and it then remained in production for nearly 30 years until 1985. It opened again in 1989 after being sold to Allied Distillers who ran it for a decade until 1998 and then formally closed it in 2000.

The original kiln apparently had an enormous gilt crown on its roof but it was removed in the 1950/60s. Although some of the original structure was replaced with steel and concrete buildings, and the current monolithic and decaying buildings have whitewashed plaster cladding over some of the remaining brickwork, although some of it can still be seen.

Warehouses and offices in the grounds were built from stone rather than brick and a large block of warehouses beside the railway have since been demolished. The plan for the distillery also included a row of workers houses known as Imperial Cottages, built to the northwest of the distillery and still occupied today. The four large octagonal filter beds of the effluent plant still stand, roofless, in the distillery grounds.

The distillery was almost demolished in 2005 for housing, its location above the banks of the Spey both picturesque and sufficiently high above the river to avoid any flooding risks in the event that Muckle Spate II ever rumbles down the valley. The mothballed distillery is currently under the care of Chivas Bros, its future uncertain and its regal beginnings now just a memory.

Trivia about Imperial

The water supply of Imperial originates from the Mannoeh hills to form the Ballintomb Burn. The cooling water travels for two and a half miles. As it travels by gravity there is no power required to feed the water into the condensers at Imperial. The hot water from the condensers that is reintroduced back into the burn is too hot to meet legal demands. A series of walls was designed within the dam that created a long canal by which the hot water travels before it reaches the outlet. This sufficiently cools the water before it is reintroduced into the burn.