



The wright stuff

Our man looks at how things can come together to form a shop

First published in Whisky Magazine issue 97 July 2011

Ed Bates is a freelance whisky writer, taster and industry commentator. He has worked for various spirit companies including independent bottlers Berry Bros & Rudd

It was the great Jimmy Greaves who famously described football as 'A funny old game' in that strange way that things seem to happen for a reason some times. Unrelated events that come together and sometimes great whisky shops are born.

Many great whisky shops are owned and run by a person or couple who have an evangelical zeal for whisky that just cannot be controlled; the name above the door blazing a trail among the whisky drinkers in the area. For The Wright Wine Company though, there are three individuals, within a team of nine, without whom The Wright Wine Company would not be the Whisky shop that it is.

The obvious person to start with is Bob Wright himself. That Bob was involved in the drinks trade can hardly be a surprise. How many people get the benefit of being born in a pub? Not for Bob the rigours of a paper round to earn extra pocket money. Bob instead stated out as a bottle boy as an after school activity. Was ever a career more written in the stones? With memories of being fed Teachers by a maiden aunt, the seeds were well and truly sown. And so it came to pass that in Skipton, a town not traditionally known as the gastronomic centre of anywhere, let alone Yorkshire, in 1983 Bob opened a wine shop on the site of an old smithy, just outside the town centre. From the outset the business had the simple aim of giving the customer choice and variety in all things. By the end of the century, Bob had the opportunity of acquiring the shop next door and expanding the range, more importantly, the range of whiskies from the previously not inconsiderable 300 or so to the current offering of more than 800. Today Bob is rarely found in the shop, having recently sold the motorbike 'cos the missus was not too keen, Bob is taking flying lessons, maybe for his 60th he will take up wing-walking.

Almost 10 years after Bob started things off, he was joined by the next of our influential trio, Julian Kaye. As with Bob's auspicious beginnings, Julian's fate was also pre-ordained to some extent. Let's face it, if one of your earliest childhood memories is falling off your bike outside Bruichladdich while on holiday, what else are you going to do for a living. Julian joined the company in 1991, after a stint working in various wine regions of France.

On being given two war-time bottles of whisky by Bob, instead of a pay rise, Julian was well set. How does one describe Julian? Julian is a Yorkshireman. It really is as simple as that, he knows what he likes, dislikes and is not at all afraid in letting you know it. What he likes, in fact that with whisky there is very little snobbery. As for whiskies themselves things like Glendronach and aged grain get the Kaye juices flowing. On the other side of the coin don't get him going on brand owners who don't care about smaller independent whisky retailers. If you want a quiet life don't mention dark bottles, Julian strangely wants to see the colour of the whisky. Also the subject of Independent bottlers thinking just because it's an iconic Islay or closed distillery that they can charge what they want for it, regardless of taste, is guaranteed to get him on a big box of Daz. It was this evident passion for whisky that led to Julian being appointed a "Keeper of the Quaich" in 2005. The youngest and most attractive of our trio is Katie Pinder, a qualified chef who first met Bob while working in the hotel trade. Since joining the Wright Wine Company in 2005 she has become the oil in the Skipton cogs, turning her hand to the everyday, smooth running of the shop, serving and advising customers, dusting and stocking shelves and taking orders for whisky and dispatching it worldwide as well as liaising with suppliers and making sure they don't run out of whisky. This is a team that, unlike the current England starting 11, undoubtedly works. People come to the shop from miles around, some even from Lancashire, to peruse the selection, or attend the regularly packed out tastings at a local hotel. The future of Bob's eponymous company is in very safe hands.