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Taken into State care: 1998 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2012

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DALLAS DHU DISTILLERY



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DALLAS DHU DISTILLERY

SYNOPSIS

Dallas Dhu Distillery is situated on the southern outskirts of Forres. Established in 1898 by Alexander Edward as Dallasmore, the business was sold the following year to the Glasgow firm of Wright & Greig Ltd, who changed the works' name to Dallas Dhu. The distillery was in production for almost 90 years, though there were periods of inactivity. During all that time the plant and machinery were constantly being repaired and replaced. It finally stopped distilling in 1983, at which time Scottish Malt Distillers, the then owners, entrusted it into state care.

Dallas Dhu's significance lies in its ability to demonstrate the working conditions and lifestyles of the people who worked here in recent history. The manner in which it was taken into care immediately upon closure means that, not only does all the fixed plant and machinery remain in place, but so also do the movable items (e.g. hand tools), that give added value. It is also substantially architecturally complete. The property includes the malting and distilling factory, the bonded warehouses, and workers' housing.¹ This is unlike many other industrial sites in care, which are often missing elements, often more social elements such as housing.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:

- 1898 - Alexander Edward, local entrepreneur and distillery owner, builds the distillery, calling it Dallasmore Distillery. The architect is Charles Doig, of Elgin, who has a reputation for designing attractive, efficient distilleries. (Alexander Edward is also involved in Aultmore Distillery, Keith (1897) and Benromach Distillery, also near Forres (1898).)
- 1899 - prior to going into production, Edward sells Dallasmore to Wright & Greig Ltd, a Glasgow blending company, who purchase it to ensure a supply of malt whisky for their popular blend, 'Roderick Dhu', named after a character in Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Lady of the Lake*. The new owners change the name from Dallasmore to Dallas Dhu Distillery. Production begins 29 May 1899, and the first barrel is filled on 3 June.
- 1916 - Dallas Dhu is closed by the Lloyd George government because it is not producing industrial alcohol for the war effort.
- 1919 - Wright & Greig Ltd sell to J. P. O'Brien & Co. Ltd, of Glasgow, who restart production.
- 1921 - J.P. O'Brien & Co. Ltd go into liquidation. The company is purchased by Benmore Distilleries Ltd, who invest heavily in Dallas Dhu, introducing new equipment (eg, electric light, conveyor belts, hoists) and building a railway

¹ The manager's and excise-man's houses, across the Manachy Burn, remain part of the landscape but are not included in the property in care.

siding off the adjacent Inverness-Perth junction railway. (Benmore Distilleries also includes those at Benmore, Lochhead and Lochindaal (all Argyll).)

- 1928 - Benmore Distilleries Ltd sell to the Distillers' Co. Ltd (DCL). In 1930 DCL transfer Dallas Dhu to their subsidiary, Scottish Malt Distillers (SMD).
- early 1930s - Dallas Dhu is 'mothballed' due to the economic depression.
- 1936 - Dallas Dhu restarts production. New wash-backs and worm tubs are installed the following year.
- 1939 (9 April) - a fire destroys the still house. SMD rebuild it, but have to close the distillery almost immediately because of WWII.
- 1947 (30 March) - production resumes.
- 1950 - electric-powered pumps and conveyors replace the steam engines and waterwheels.
- 1956 - the worm tubs are replaced.
- 1964 - Dallas Dhu's capacity is increased, with two new wash-backs, a new mash tun and boiler added.
- 1966 - the railway siding is abandoned following closure of the railway line. A new elevator is installed in the malt barn to take delivery of loose bulk barley delivered by lorry.
- 1968x9 - the stills are replaced, but the malt barn is made redundant following the opening of SMD's new large-scale maltings at Burghead.
- 1971 - the new stills are converted from coal to oil-powered steam heating.
- 1976 - Dallas Dhu's water supply dries up entirely during a drought.
- 1983 - Dallas Dhu ceases production for the last time. The last barrel is filled on 16 March, an event recorded on the filling store wall. Immediately on closure, SMD entrust the works into state care.

Archaeological Overview:

- The distillery, as far as we know, was built on a 'greenfield' site and there is no known underlying archaeology relating to the distillery.
- Although documents in the company archives give a good overall record of physical change during the distillery's 86-year life, to date no standing building archaeology investigation has been undertaken, which could potentially furnish more details.

Architectural/Artistic Overview:

- The distillery is architecturally complete, containing all the buildings and structures required for the whisky making process – the malting and distilling factory, the bonded warehouses, together with housing for the workers. The malting and distilling factory is built on an E-plan, thus enabling the process to proceed logically from one end to the other (from south to north).
- The buildings themselves are mostly straightforward, stone-built, white-washed structures with tooled ashlar dressings and slated roofs. Only the tall red-brick chimney (square on plan with contrasting yellow-brick quoins), and kiln (with its slated roof topped by a pagoda-louvred apex vent) have any architectural distinction. What matters most is the plant and machinery within the buildings.
- The south range comprises the two-storey malt barn. On its upper floor was the barley loft, where the grain was stored, and the steepers - two large tanks where the barley was soaked (steeped) for a day or two. The damp barley was then

taken downstairs to the malting floor (which ran the full length of the barn), where it was spread out and left to sprout. It was turned periodically. The grain was then carried via bucket elevators to the malt kiln. (The malt barn's ground floor is now partitioned and serves for visitor reception.)

- The malt kiln, at the south end of the east range, is recognisable externally by its attractive pagoda-shaped roof chimney. The kiln fire on the ground floor dried the damp malt laid out on the perforated floor above. Adjacent to the kiln room is the switch room, which originally had a steam engine, but was converted to electric power in the 1950s. Above it is the mill room, where the dried malt from the kiln was cracked between steel rollers to form 'grist', which was then transferred to the mash house.
- The mash house, in the centre of the east range, is dominated by the mash tun, a great cooking vat with a perforated base, that enabled the sugary liquid produced (called wort) to be drained off. The hot wort was thereafter cooled in the adjacent cooler room before being transferred to the tun room.
- The tun room, within the projection at the centre of the E-plan, has six great wooden wash backs, or brewing vats. Mechanised switchers (revolving blades) removed the froth produced during the brewing process. After a few days the weak brew was piped through to the still house.
- The still house, at the north end of the east range, was where distillation took place. It is dominated by two large copper stills – the wash still and spirit still. The stills are connected to the worm tubs and chimney out in the yard. The present still house is more or less as rebuilt following the 1939 fire. At its far north end is the receiving room, housing the spirit receiver and safe (secure containers preventing workers from accessing the spirit).
- The north range houses the single-storey filling store, where the first step in maturing the spirit took place. The excise man's booth was in the SW corner of the store. To the west of the store were company offices.
- To the west of the malting and distilling factory, and physically separate from it, is the range of five bonded warehouses, where the spirit was left to mature in barrels. The four nearest the factory are single-storey, the far west one of two storeys.
- To the west of the bonded warehouses are two units of housing built for the workforce. Each is two storeys high. To the NW of the entire complex are the houses built for the manager and excise-man (these are not in the property in care, scheduled monument, or A-listing).

Social Overview:

- Today, the distillery plays little part in the life of Forres, other than helping to sustain tourism. The adjacent disused railway line is used for recreation purposes, by walkers and cyclists.
- As a tourist attraction, Dallas Dhu Distillery is unique. As a perfectly preserved time-capsule of the distiller's art, it enables visitors to get close to all the plant and machinery, unlike in a working distillery where significant elements (eg, the stills) are viewable only from a distance. The 'down side', of course, is the absence of whisky-associated aromas.

Spiritual Overview:

- The distillery has no known historic or current spiritual associations. However, some believe that the still house has a ghost!

Aesthetic Overview:

- Distilleries are noted for their aesthetic landscape qualities, and Dallas Dhu is no exception. Its white-washed walls and slated roofs, pagoda-kiln and tall brick chimney, surrounded by neat, colourful and well-tended grounds, are immediately attractive, and not suggestive in the least of an industrial factory.
- The interior spaces of the distillery and bonded warehouses are tremendously varied and interesting, due mainly to the mechanisms and processes of the working distillery. Light and shade vie with each other (from the bright airy space of the still house to the gloom of the bonded warehouses), as do the various items of plant and machinery, some massive and brute (eg, the worm tubs and stills), others more modest and intricate (eg, the spirit safe). The mix of raw materials from which they are made (wood and copper predominantly) adds to the drama.
- Although on the southern edge of the town of Forres, Dallas Dhu Distillery is physically separated from it by fields. This landscape context means that the distillery, unencumbered by suburbia, has a timeless rural air.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- A full record of all those who worked there during its 86-year life does not appear to exist.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- Dallas Dhu is a wonderfully preserved example of a typical late-Victorian malt whisky distillery, built during a 'boom time' for the industry.
- The replacement of plant and machinery during its 86-year history illustrates well the progress made in the industry during the first half of the 20th century.
- Dallas Dhu Distillery is an object lesson in taking an industrial factory into care immediately on closure. (**Biggar Gasworks** is another example.) By so doing, not only does all the fixed plant and machinery remain in place, but so also do the movable items (eg, hand tools), that give added value. The knowledge and experience of those lately employed are also captured.

ADDENDA

Associated Properties:

(other distilleries on the Strathspey 'malt whisky heritage trail') - Benromach; Cardhu; Glenfiddich; Glen Grant; The Glenlivet; Glen Moray; Speyside Cooperage; Strathisla.

(related ventured) - Burghead Maltings; Wright & Greig Ltd offices, Glasgow.

(the other Historic Scotland industrial property taken into care upon closure) -

Biggar Gasworks

Keywords:

kiln, tun, still, malt, warehouse, chimney

Selected Bibliography:

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Moss, M.S. & Hume, J.R., *The Making of Scotch Whisky: a History of the Scotch Whisky Distilling Industry* (Edinburgh, 1981)