

Edinburgh International Book Festival – mixing whisky with books #BalvenieStories

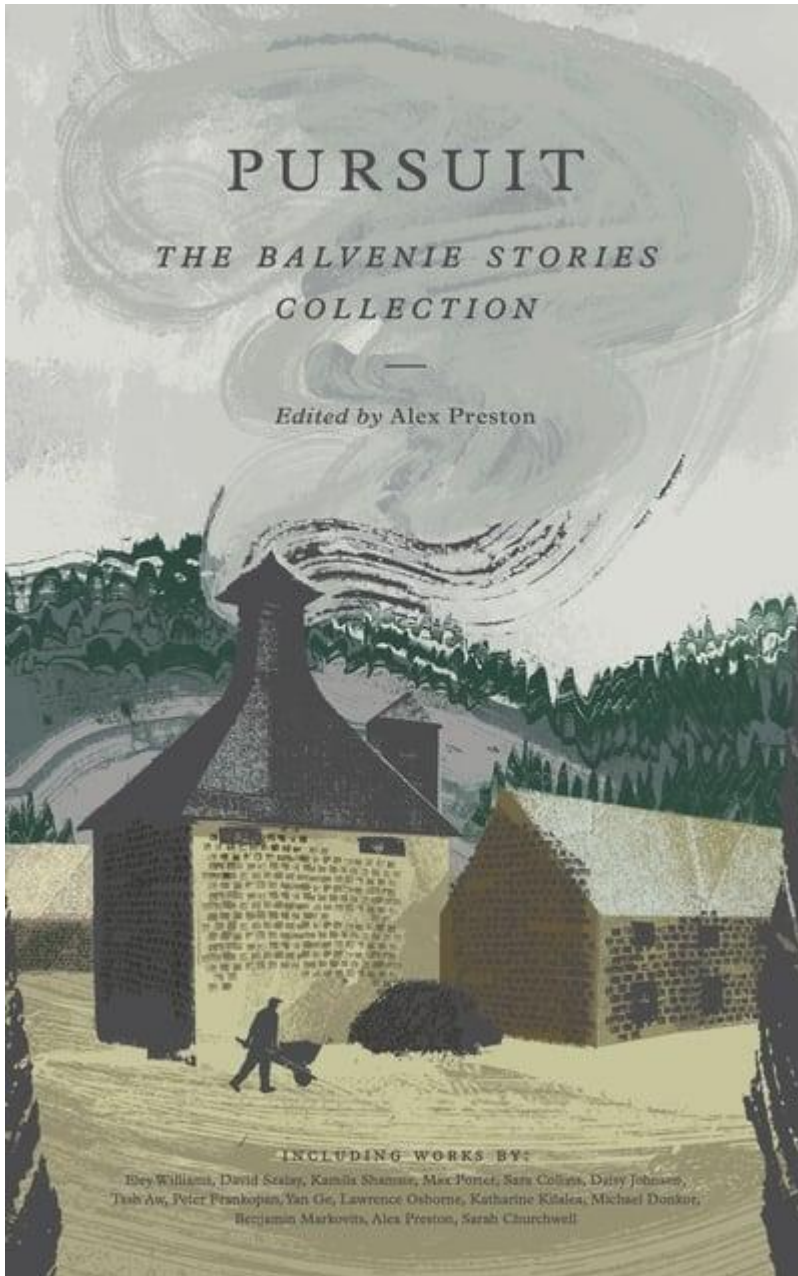
It is always a pleasure to go to a whisky tasting, but perhaps only improved by mixing of a little literature with your dram.

The book we heard extracts from is called Pursuit – the Balvenie Stories Collection, and it is made up of short stories, both fiction and non-fiction created specially by many acclaimed writers. The idea behind it is exploring what it is to pursue a goal, to strive for an ideal or follow a dream.

At the Book Festival event at Waterstones on Princes Street this week we were entertained by Booker longlister, Max Roberts who read us his whole wonderful story 'The Part-Time Countryman', (complete with hand actions representing text messages). Roberts was accompanied by Eley Williams who has also written a delightful tale about a conceptual clock, the product of the last burst of energy from one horticulturist. She explained that we use metaphors from gardening every day with phrases such as 'budding writer' and (this is my suggestion) perhaps attributes which flower. The pair were joined by the book's editor, Alex Preston who is himself an award-winning author and journalist. The book is published by Canongate.

You can also listen to the stories told by characters involved with the creation of the Balvenie [on the website here](#). These

were recorded both in Dufftown and Kelvin Cooperage Kentucky, where Apprentice Malt Master Kelsey McKechnie sourced virgin oak barrels for The Sweet Toast of American Oak. They will be made available as a podcast and on smart speaker soon.



There are also audio whisky tastings (yes that is a thing!) with Malt Master David Stewart MBE who guides the listener in what they will experience from the glass. These are available through an NFC enabled neck tag on the bottle which connect to your phone. This technology is designed in partnership with connected product solutions company Thinfilm.

At the tasting we were guided by Alwynne Gwilt who is a Whisky

Ambassador for The Balvenie. She explained that they have their own cooperage at The Balvenie, something which is unusual. They are very keen to keep crafts alive, and as in years long past this is a distillery run by people where human skill prevail over machinery and automation.

David Stewart said : “Stories are the lifeblood of The Balvenie Distillery. They make up the fabric of who we are and what we do. The Balvenie Stories collection tells these tales in liquid form, giving whisky drinkers across the globe a special glimpse into the unique and very human nature of how we produce our whisky. Each expression in the collection reflects this by telling its own story via first-hand accounts and recollections of the many people involved.”

The stories are also repeated visually on the packaging both on the tube and the label with illustrations by British artist and printmaker Andy Lovell. Andy spent time at the distillery where he listened to the stories first hand.



Balvenie who have a distillery in Dufftown, Banffshire, have created their Stories range of malts celebrating the stories of the people behind the creation of their whisky. There are

three whiskies – a 12 year-old The Sweet Toast of American Oak 9 (£45), a 14 year-old The Week of Peat (£65) and a 26 year-old A Day of Dark Barley (£600). It was only possible to create a peated whisky at Balvenie by making it during the week when the distillery shuts down for maintenance. Such is the power of the peated flavour that everything needs to be cleaned out before other whisky is made afterwards.

The three expressions were created by the Malt Master David using a brittle barley, Apprentice Malt Master who used the Kentucky Virgin oak to produce a fruitier flavour and also distillery manager Ian Millar whose idea it was to introduce the Speyside peat.

We tasted the first two, of which the 12 year-old was my favourite, appealing to my preference for something a little sweeter and less smoky. It is finished in twice tasted white American oak from the Kelvin Cooperage.

But the best idea would be to get some whisky and the book and curl up somewhere cosy to enjoy both.

Pursuit – The Balvenie Stories Collection published on 3 October 2019 by Canongate 9781786899019