

MSP visit to coppersmith in East Lothian during Apprenticeship Week

Martin Whitfield MSP for South Scotland paid a visit to East Lothian business, McMillan Coppersmiths and Fabricators in Prestonpans this week to meet their apprentices.

The craft of coppersmith is one of the oldest and the apprentices hope to become the next generation.



Martin Whitfield MSP during his visit to McMillan Coppersmiths
PHOTO Duncan McGlynn

The company has 23 employees and almost half are apprentices, showing the company's commitment to passing on the old skills so much in demand by distilled spirits producers. The company has manufactured copper distilling equipment on an industrial scale since 1867.

David Allan, Operations Manager at McMillan said it was so important that traditional coppersmithing was passed on through apprenticeship programmes and welcomed the visit from their local MSP in recognising the support to the industry.

He said: "McMillan has a long history and has been operating for over 150 years, 60 years at their current site in Prestonpans. My family took ownership of the business in the 1980's and more recently we are now part of Briggs Group which has been welcomed by the team here".

"Copper distillation equipment, especially the copper pot stills are a key part of producing many global distilled spirits. The growth in the industry has gone from strength to strength and if we are to continue to support this growth then it is important that we upskill and grow our workforce now.

"These skills and techniques have been practised and perfected at Prestonpans over many years and our team recognise how important it is that these skills are passed on to grow the next generation of workers in the industry. As they were once taught during their apprenticeship.

"It was an honour to be able to showcase the business and its importance to young people here in Scotland."

McMillan have run an apprenticeship scheme on the site since 1982 with the business actively recruiting an average of 2 apprentices a year. However, since joining global turnkey engineering firm Briggs of Burton PLC in April 2020 the number of apprentices recruited has grown and are all working towards

their Level 3 Modern Apprenticeship in Engineering: Fabrication and Welding.

The visit by MSP Martin Whitfield marks Scottish Apprenticeship Week which is held annually in March to promote and celebrate apprenticeship opportunities.

Martin Whitfield, MSP for the South of Scotland, said: "It is an absolute pleasure to visit McMillan and find out about how our longstanding businesses here in Prestonpans are supporting the next generation of workers. The copper stills handcrafted at this site are part of our heritage and have been crafted here since the 19th century. It is so important that companies embrace apprenticeships like McMillan have so that these core skills remain in Scotland and aren't lost."

McMillan Coppersmiths and Fabricators specialise in traditional handcrafted Scottish Copper pot stills and columns for the Distilled Spirits industry. Located in Prestonpans, Scotland they have designed and built distilling equipment for many notable spirit producers around the world. McMillan use traditional coppersmithing techniques to shape and form the copper pot still bodies, necks and lyne arms. Their craftsmen take great pride in turning copper sheet into beautiful pot stills.

Apprentices have been trained in Prestonpans, continuing the heritage skills, for 40 years. The scheme has been managed inhouse by David Allan and George Meharry with the Edinburgh and District Employers' Training Association (EDETA). Each apprentice not only learns the theory but puts this into practice by learning how to fabricate, weld and form copper distillation equipment with the support of experienced craftsmen. The programme receives valuable funding and support from Skills Development Scotland.







All photos Duncan McGlynn