

McMillan Coppersmiths bringing traditional workmanship into the modern day

Whisky stills made in the traditional manner at McMillan Coppersmiths in Prestonpans will form the central part of a modern distillery under construction at Inverkip on the west coast.

The two copper stills – a wash still and a spirit still – were loaded on Monday morning ready for the 85 mile journey west to Ardgowan Distillery, under the watchful eyes of the craftsmen and women who made them.

The firm employs 35 people in the East Lothian town and is now part of the [Briggs Group](#).



Scottish Secretary, Ian Murray, said: “This is a big, and emotional, moment for McMillan Coppersmiths as these beautiful stills are moved to Ardgowan Distillery at Inverkip to start their work. This is a really good example of Scotland’s traditional and modern skills coming together – the centuries old art of coppersmithing creating traditional pot stills which will be used to make whisky in one of the most modern distilleries in Scotland.”

Martin Whitfield, Labour MSP for South Scotland, who attended the shipping out on Monday morning, said: “This company is well known to me – not just since I have been a politician but before when I was a schoolteacher. Some of my children became apprentices here. Living in Prestonpans this has been part of my walk for around 20 years. To come in here and see the brilliant work – these hand-made objects that will last hundreds of years is an incredible privilege and a special moment.”

[McMillan Coppersmiths](#) is a growing company, supplying customers in Mexico and China as well as throughout Scotland.

The firm says it has benefited from investment from global engineering company, Briggs of Burton since 2020 and during that time the two businesses have grown in the Scotch whisky sector.

The company specialises in designing and manufacturing copper distillation equipment. Its portfolio includes projects with industry leaders like Diageo, William Grants, Pernod Ricard, Brown Forman and others.

These collaborations have shown the firm's ability to deliver customised solutions while upholding high standards of quality and innovation.

It is a major achievement for the East Lothian firm to have completed the contract placed more than two years ago.



Robert Goudie, Production Manager at McMillan Coppersmiths, said: "We employ 35 people here, which includes the design team

in the office, management and 25 tradesmen. It takes about seven to eight years to become a coppersmith.”

Asked if the stills were in their final shiny state, Mr Goudie explained they will be lacquered when put in place in Ardgowan Distillery. He said: “The lacquer is a coating that protects the copper. It will give it that salmon pink copper. Once that is on it will look amazing.”

John McIntosh, McMillan Coppersmith’s Global Projects Director, explained the TVR process which is key which improves the efficiency of the distillation process. He said: “Thermal Vapour Recompression uses the energy we have used before – capturing that, enhancing that and using it again so that it is not lost. Traditionally we had energy used once and then dispelled into the atmosphere. Here we capture it from our heat energy, process it to make our processes more efficient. There is a capital investment in the beginning but that certainly comes with a payback and the end users do benefit from it.”

Martin McAdam, CEO and founder of Ardgowan Distillery, said: “This is a very special day – and a transition of the project. We move from a building site to become a distillery once these stills are installed. This is the culmination of a lot of work here by the guys at McMillan Coppersmiths. We are delighted to have these ready and to be installed on the site in the next couple of days.”

Briggs have two manufacturing plants – one in Prestonpans and one in Burton on Trent. They have expanded the East Lothian business by taking on more apprentices and George Crombie, Chief Operating Officer of Briggs Group, said the business has a lot of future plans to carry on growing the apprentice schemes and the capability of the manufacturing side.



The McMillan Coppersmiths team with senior staff from Briggs Group, representatives of Ardgowan Distillery and Martin Whitfield MSP PHOTO Duncan McGlynn



Putting the finishing touches PHOTO Duncan McGlynn







PHOTOS in this gallery Duncan McGlynn











Ardgowan Distillery under construction at Bankfoot Farm
Inverkip