



Ned Gahan, Head Distiller, Neill Conway, Head Brewer and Paul McCusker, Distillery Manager, at Waterford Distillery. Photo: Joe Evans



# Old methods to produce extra special whiskey

By Marion O'Mara

MARK Reynier, the CEO of Waterford Distillery located at the former Cherry's Brewery at Mary Street/ Grattan Quay is no ordinary whiskey maker. He is a man driven by his love for the business and a passion not just for the best but driven in demanding excellence from the barley used in making whiskey which hopefully will be flowing from the Waterford plant in the next few years.

Every grain of barley being used at the Waterford Distillery can be traced back to the farm, the field and even the part of the field it came from and that passport traceability is what will make the product extra special.

But, that's not enough for the Scotsman behind the renaissance of Islay's Bruichladdich single malt whisky.

His reputation precedes him but now from his Waterford base he is pushing the boundaries further and there's no mistaking the excitement in his eyes when he says that a raw organic product is not enough. Now he is in the process of distilling the first ever Irish spirit from biodynamic barley.

Essentially he is going right back to basics - to a time before the advent of agri chemicals and to when farmers used centuries old methods to keep soil alive and living.

As he spoke to the waterford News & Star at the Distillery last week he said that the new biodynamic distillation takes it to a whole new level, creating a significant first for the Irish drinks industry.

Mark Reynier explained how biodynamic agriculture, which is the ultimate in organics, is the controversial agricultural principal outlined in 1924 by Austrian philosopher Dr Rudolf Steiner. The codified manual was the culmination of 10,000 years of

farming know-how according to Dr. Steiner but to others it's just folklore.

The concept, he said, involves a farm becoming self-sufficient for all its needs, relying on home-made organic fertilisers and naturally occurring plant insecticides. Explaining further he said that our forefathers knew and worked around the astrological calendar which not only predicted tides but guided planting in well prepared soil, growing and harvesting.

One of the best preparations for the soil was "horn manure", made from buried, manure-packed, cow horns and it is back to that kind of process Mark Reynier wants his barley suppliers to go. It's still a bit about using fer-

taliser but Mark said: "It's about using a small amount and at the right time."

"So, is this going to be the best whiskey that has anyone ever tasted," I ask. Mark replied: "I don't know. Like any other whiskey we won't know until it is distilled - and in the case of the new biodynamic product that could be five years time."

That is not going to stop him aiming for the very best but the signs are good - so far.

The first thing you notice in the almost fully automated distillery is the aroma from the barley itself and the white liquid - currently about 80% proof that one day will, Mark Reynier hopes, be the best single malt whiskey

on the market.

This barley comes from farms in Killocock, Slane and Naas but hopefully other farmers, close to home, will also be buying into the super organic way of doing things.

On a tour of the plant Head Brewer Neil Conway, commented, "When Mark first mentioned the idea, we thought he was mad. We had to educate ourselves on what exactly biodynamic farming is and how biodynamically grown grain may effect the production process in the distillery. I've found biodynamics fascinating, particularly the preparations involved and understanding how they activate and mobilise different nutrients that the barley

crop needs.

"The most satisfying part has been the openness of all the people involved in this project. It's been a real team effort from the biodynamic growers, our maltsters and everyone at Waterford Distillery. We're all learning from each other during this new chapter of malting, brewing and distilling."

There's a real sense of pride across the business as boundaries are being broken down and in many ways there's a peeling back to basics, to purity and hopefully to a quality that none of us are familiar with.

A new generation of consumers is taking ever-more interest in the provenance of their drinks - how and

where the ingredients are grown - which is key to the Waterford philosophy. The distillery's unparalleled production methods involve distilling barley from 61 individual Irish farms, one a week, in isolation from eld to barrel - with complete traceability.

Like no other distillery, by celebrating and exploring the differences in soil, location and microclimate, or terroir as it is known, and extolling the virtue of super-premium wood, both French and American oak, Waterford Distillery aims to create the world's most profound - and natural - single malt whisky.

Now all we can do is wait until it's time to say Sláinte.



Mark Reynier, CEO Waterford Distillery. Photo: Joe Evans.



Waterford News & Star reporter Marion O'Mara speaking with Paul McCusker, Distillery Manager, Ned Gahan, Head Distiller and Neill Conway, Head Brewer at Waterford Distillery. Photo: Joe Evans