



WHISKEY
CLUB

The History of Irish Whiskey Podcast

Episode 1

SPEAKERS

Fionnán O'Connor, Barry Chandler

Barry Chandler 00:11

Welcome to the history of Irish whiskey. I'm Barry Chandler. And since I've been old enough to drink Irish whiskey, I've been fascinated by its history. Now I grew up in Cork, and I was surrounded by remnants of local whiskey history, from the old Midleton distillery to the various Cork Distilleries Company sites dotted across the city of Cork. Yet these distillery buildings and the ruins are really only part of the most recent history of Irish whiskey. And to truly understand how we arrived at the flavors and the styles we find in our glass today, we have to actually look even further back than the last century or two, to understand the decisions, the inventions, the legislation, the egos that shaped the drink, that today we call Irish whiskey.

Barry Chandler 00:57

Now in Ireland, we claim whiskey as being a spirit that originated on our island that we beat the Scots and the Americans and all others to distillation. The truth of course, like so much of Irish whiskey history is a little bit more complex. I tell the story of Irish whiskey regularly. And I began to wonder recently, was I telling the right story. What we share as gospel today might be nothing more than a myth, or a yarn shared on the distillery tour suddenly becomes the absolute truth to one audience, and well meaning blog posts full of inaccuracies becomes the cast in stone story to another.

Barry Chandler 01:37

So where then, can we find the real story of Irish whiskey? The history of its evolution, perhaps all the way to the present day? Well, it turns out that one man has not just been asking these same questions,

but over the past decade, he's been answering them too. Fionnán O'Connor is an Irish whiskey historian, researcher and author of the definitive book on Irish pot still whiskey, *A Glass Apart*.

Barry Chandler 02:04

He's known as much for his entertaining and staggeringly accurate tasting notes as his research and writing. And I asked him if he'd have an interest in helping me understand the history of Irish whiskey from his research perspective and findings. So recently, we locked ourselves away for three solid days, we turned on the microphones, and we bravely attempted to distill, forgive the pun, 800 years of Irish whiskey history into seven episodes, each covering a specific and very important time period in the evolution of our favorite spirit.

Barry Chandler 02:39

The History of Irish Whiskey podcast is the result of our chat. And by chat I mean, Fionnán O'Connor and I talking, mostly Fionnán talking, and me furiously scribbling notes. Of course, no seven part podcast covering 800 plus years can include every event, every personality and every development. And I don't claim this to be the definitive, infallible recanting. But for me, it was an invaluable few days, tying fragmented nuggets of history to one another, and then answering many times, why a thing became a thing, and how interconnected so much of the history of Ireland is to the history of Irish whiskey.

Barry Chandler 03:23

Fair warning, this well intentioned linear history has a habit of finding a rabbit hole or two to explore, and maybe even a side anecdote or three to share. But I think what we've ended up with here is an entertaining educational journey through the centuries that can only be enhanced with a drop of the good stuff in a glass while you listen along. So grab that glass now and listen into the history of Irish whiskey.

Barry Chandler 03:51

In the first episode, we go all the way back to the 1200s. To try to find the origin of the spirit we today call Irish whiskey, and we examine the subsequent dramatic and nation shaping for centuries, that bring us to a very different country in the 1600s. I started by asking Fionnán O'Connor, if he can definitively pinpoint the first mention of our favorite spirit.

Fionnán O'Connor 04:21

If we're talking about hard references, to distilling as an act, the first kind of bookmark we get is something called the Red Book of Ossory and it's written in the early 1300s, down in St. Thomas's Cathedral, in the southeast of Ireland in Kilkenny. And there's a great misunderstanding around the Red Book certainly in the Irish whiskey industry. It's talked about a lot, but it's not really read or discussed or examined. And the Red Book of Ossory contrary to kind of popular opinion is not actually about whiskey at all. It's not a reference to whiskey in Ireland.

Fionnán O'Connor 04:57

It's essentially a treatise on how to distill and how specifically to use a warm coil a little windy bit at the end of a distill, which at that time was cutting edge technology. And the red book itself is a kind of a

multifaceted text. It's full of hymns and all kinds of other stuff. But this one sliver within the red book that describes distilling is itself actually a copy of an Italian manuscript almost word for word.

Fionnán O'Connor 05:24

And that Italian manuscript was called the Concilium Medical Alia, was written by a guy named **Taddeo Alderotti**. And that text is one of the most important parts of European alcoholic history, it was disseminated around Europe, it was a hot text. And it's just made its way into Ireland. So we pinpoint it. So that's the beginning of whiskey on to the first reference to distilling but it's not it's part of Ireland's link to this broader European story of alcohol, of liquor of aqua Vita distilled alcohol. And of course, "uisce beatha" in Irish is a translation of Aqua Vitae from Latin. And that word gives us a "eau de vie" in France, or "aquavit" in Scandinavia. All of these various drinks in Europe that come from this shared kind of heritage.

Fionnán O'Connor 06:12

And so it's fitting that it's not just the red book, the first number of texts we get in Ireland, about distilling belong to this kind of Mediterranean history. And when we look at Eldorado, so if we hunt that text down, we have to go to the University of Bologna, one of the oldest colleges in the world, which at that time would have been a leading medical school and Alder, it would have been the famous professor of chemistry as kind of Stephen Hawking of the year.

Fionnán O'Connor 06:41

If you really wanted an education, you got as close to Eldorado as you could and you listen to a lecture. And so it's funny, the the concilium was written roughly 1280. So if we take the Red Book of Ossory, there's a little bit of quibbling, but the accepted traditional dating is 1324, which is only 40 years different for medieval times. That's extremely fast off the mark. But it also means that some people say, Oh, maybe there was Irish whiskey beforehand. And it's just described, but not really we don't see Irish literature, in the Middle Ages is enormous. There's the largest vernacular literature after the fall of Rome.

Fionnán O'Connor 07:20

There's loads and loads written about ale and Ireland, about wine and Ireland, never mentioned, not a single mention of "uisce beatha." So it's fair to assume, bar enormous contrary evidence that, like the rest of Europe, distilling comes in around the High Middle Ages. And when it comes in, it's through an Irish attachment to these kind of hotbeds of European thought. And that story, while less mystical is interesting in its own way, that it's part of Ireland's global history, that it's out looking. And when we look at distilled liquor in the West is certainly the Orthodox at reading of how we start getting distilled beverages, certainly anything approaching what we would call it liquor.

Fionnán O'Connor 08:01

We're looking at this period in Europe, where European medical schools like Bologna, or most famously Salerno, which is, again, has even slightly earlier records of aqua vitae. We're seeing Arabic sciences come in from the Middle East for the first time, we're seeing people like epicenter, these Roz's these figures from the Islamic world, both Arabic and Persian. And we're also seeing the kind of reintroduction of Greek classical learning. After the fall of Rome in the Middle Age has reverted, a lot of this stuff was

lost, and via Byzantium and absorption into the Middle East, Europe was getting European medicine as well as Arabic medicine back into itself. And we had this huge leap forward and distilling as part of that. And part of that development.

Barry Chandler 08:48

The Red Book of Ossory was written or copied by a bishop and certainly attributed to a bishop. And we often hear the story of the monks are the ones that brought distilling, perhaps from through Europe from the Far East, from the Middle East over to Ireland. Religion didn't have a role to play in how you opened and described maybe the origins of whiskey. Where did religion feature if at all?

Fionnán O'Connor 09:15

Yeah, it's I think a lot of it is a bit of a red herring that the story we're always told is Irish monks brought whiskey back and there isn't a shrapnel of evidence for any of it. I'm a big fan of proof. And it's also the wrong part of Irish history.

Fionnán O'Connor 09:29

When we think of Irish monks, we think of the guys who wrote the Book of Kells kind of stuff, as calm killer and Aiden and Kevin and all these figures, and they were long, long gone, that that period of monasticism is like the six hundreds to the nine hundreds. I don't think it's important to distinguish that world to a certain extent had disappeared. But even the monks of the period, you're getting more of these kind of European orders like the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Cistercians. And yes, the Red Book of Ossory was written in a monastic contexts or a clerical context. But it is not itself a religious document.

Fionnán O'Connor 10:05

It's again, it's a copy of a medical schools text. And most of what we see after that is not from clerical sources. There's no real descriptions of monks in Ireland distilling. Where we start seeing references in the 1400s, really. So the first use of the phrase is "uisce beatha" that I've found anywhere yet, is in a 1415, or circa 1415, medical, what's called Materia Medica. And a Materia Medica is like the staple textbook of a doctor, everything a doctor needs to know.

Fionnán O'Connor 10:39

And it's a material belonging to a physician named Abe Lamb. And the contents is a kind of herbal, you know, what herbs do what and so forth. But there's also shockingly, the same text that was in the Red Book of Ossory, but it was going all over Europe, this Bolognan Al Rottie. But it's now in Irish. And we're seeing we start seeing those all over the place. And there's a possibility that it came from Ossory. Now, it's not enormously likely because there's a little too much gap of time between them. And also when we look at the kind of Irish medical class, they are intimately almost devotionally tied towards Mediterranean, which is called scholastic medicine.

Fionnán O'Connor 11:25

And so Ireland, in the feudal era had these kinds of families that there are hereditary casts, and the most famous will be the browns, the legal class, the lawyers, but you also get the feeling of the poets. And among that you get this group called all of honors, it's an Irish word for a physician, a healer.

Fionnán O'Connor 11:45

But they're passed through family lines, you get the shields, the Elise, the lowlands, and so all of these scribes belong to this world. And these physicians routinely show up in Salerno, in Bologna, in Montpellier. And their textbooks, these material medicals are, by and large, either copies or cribbed versions of this European medical learning. And that's where we start to see proof.

Fionnán O'Connor 12:10

And that's where we start seeing discussions of Uisce beatha just as the Irish translation of aqua Vitae, and it's in this world, people like Alder Rottie, or add to go down or any of these big names in Europe. And that connection remains very strong for a very long time. And we start seeing, it's only through that, that we see the transmission of aqua Vitae into something a little more uniquely Irish.

Barry Chandler 12:37

These medical men then that had this knowledge of the warm coil, they had this knowledge of distillation. I'm curious, how were they using that knowledge to what and were they applying the warm coiler distillation was it for spirits to consume? Was it for medicine? Was it for chemical distillations they were experimenting with help us understand a little bit about the use of distillation in that time period.

Fionnán O'Connor 13:09

Yeah, it's from it. It's kind of Solera nuttin, Mediterranean roots, Aqua vitae is seen as therapeutic. And one of the first things they realized about it is that its antiseptic. And then quickly thereafter, it's noticed that it stops things from decaying. And so even during the plague years, there's this idea that like, we might preserve flesh, and I do whatever.

Fionnán O'Connor 13:32

And when we look at the 1460 Irish medical manuscript, it's ultimately stemming from something called the Lillian medicina, the lily of medicine, which is a Montpellier text, but they're talking about gargling whiskey, literally, or Uisce beatha as it was rubbing it on limbs to cure paralysis at doctoring it with herbs as a kind of a tincture thinking that the way you deliver.

Fionnán O'Connor 13:52

Ginger helps reanimate you this will get ginger into your system and see these complex preparations based around the idea that these stuff wasn't medicinal and for in most parts of Europe, in its early stages, spirits are considered either medicinal substances or medicinal substances that are being abused.

Fionnán O'Connor 14:14

And when you look at the history of Italian distilling, there's a lot of small town prohibition saying stop misusing Aqua Vitae and in Ireland again, one of Ireland's first real Irish signatures is recreational spirits drinking part of this kind of Gaelic medical practice that was itself deeply Mediterranean scholastic. And that goes on for hundreds of years, much longer actually, than other parts of Europe. And that kind of Graco Arabian old medicine strapped to a kind of native futile idea of like casts of healer. So when we

talk about where did whiskey come from, you're talking about groups of people or the spread of ideas as much as anything.

Barry Chandler 14:55

The use of alcohol in medicine is still commonplace today, but you hit on something there where there was at one point, a transition from its use solely as a medical device to one of more of a celebratory, festive, hospitality oriented thing. Certainly something we're maybe as Irish well known for and renowned for today. But talk to us a little bit about how that transition happened from medical to festive.

Fionnán O'Connor 15:24

Yeah, and one of the kind of mysteries in Irish spirits history is there's really two kind of channels through which liquor becomes popular in Europe. One is the kind of apothecary model where originally these universities or churches had, again a medical role to play and then it becomes like petty druggists and people abusing that and it gets out to the township.

Fionnán O'Connor 15:47

And of course, it's in the commercial interests of the shop to maybe sell it for other reasons. And Europe is littered with all these little cures that come from this original understanding of aqua vitae as a doctored substance. And then the other big channel that we see going through Europe is a kind of branded tradition where you're getting wine fortified with alcohol so that it doesn't go off.

Fionnán O'Connor 16:09

And then increasingly, you're getting the fortified wine sold as wine, and especially if you want to distill spoiled wine, or things like grandpa's wine byproducts, any of this other stuff or excess harvest. So these are the two kinds of ways their spirits are evolving and eventually kind of wine or brandy is making its way around the Mediterranean based on trade. That doesn't happen till slightly later.

Fionnán O'Connor 16:33

But then, in total isolation from the course of spirits elsewhere, suddenly, in Ireland, it becomes the like festive drink of the kind of Norman and Gaelic feudal classes, and they're knocking the stuff back and we get these, you know, shocking records of them. And again, it's England at this point, there's a few records of distilling knowledge, but there wasn't popular spirits consumption in England. At this time, England makes up for it later.

Fionnán O'Connor 16:59

But anyway, again, there's the question of like, how does this take off and the Celtic fringe and yet it's fascinating, but it can be very funny. You see these like accounts of Irish chieftains, funerals and people playing leapfrog and swilling uisce beatha, and all these funeral games. And of course, it's usually from kind of colonial authorities who are shocked and somewhat startled by the whole thing. And this is the question of how does this translation occur.

Fionnán O'Connor 17:23

And when you're looking at a lot of these sources, you start to see the medics in the same capacity because they're not just writing texts, they were essentially you're dealing with a feudal world where if

you're chief you have entourage. You have people around you who are important for various you have a poet whose main job is to make fun of your enemies in front of you to your great delight you have even the whole spaces is exotic and strange. You had braggatory where the infamous professional farting class to entertain you.

Fionnán O'Connor 17:54

They would eat specific diets to make sure they got gaseous enough to pull off the show was great crack and you see this like uisce beatha being passed around. But you also have again, the all of my medical class in that space advising on the fair, and invariably, we see records of them providing information about the digestive role of aqua Vitae, and it was believed to have a digestive therapeutic process.

Fionnán O'Connor 18:19

And there's a lot written about the country disease of Ireland, which is dysentery but the idea that the morbid climate that all of these things that were endemic to the country, cold weather, bad weather, you know, the Irish ate a overwhelmingly disproportionate amount of dairy in comparison to the rest of Europe it was a largely pastoral society so there's a little bit of grain being grown but the focus is very much on cattle wealth and

Fionnán O'Connor 18:45

that that goes way back that goes right back to the time they build Irish epic with Colin the idea that if you want to hurt somebody you raid their cows and Irish people were eating with a called bonbons all these dairy based foods my advisor used to say to me my academic advisor essentially in all Irish people long before the potato, the most primal kind of like dietary yearning in us is for like whole fat milk butter cream and that goes so deep into the cycle we describe the beer as creamy pints this strange like dairy consumption and that's very old but of course it recent arrival to the authorities very sick

Fionnán O'Connor 19:25

and you see again, like Aqua Vita, or what they call us Koba, which is just an older, mangling of uisce beatha but at the time, the word whiskey doesn't exist you hear described usually as a skull bow in English.

Fionnán O'Connor 19:37

And they're talking about, it's necessary for the crudities of the Irish feeding or this or that. And so, even though it's festive, and it's raucous, and it's binge drinking, it doesn't lose that medicinal tinge. And what's most interesting of all, is that when we look at the medical literature, we see them doctoring it again with herbs and various things.

Fionnán O'Connor 20:03

And when we look at the festive culture, a common story is that, oh, they must have been adding all these herbs to just make it taste nice and whatnot. That's almost certainly true. They do. But the recipes are almost identical to the older medical concoctions, it's clearly the same material thing. And there was this idea that different that phenol, and anise and all of these substances, cure different things or heat

up your blood and so forth are the four bodily humors all these old medical, medieval understandings and they're not just doctoring that the final product, they were doctoring the beer before they distill.

Fionnán O'Connor 20:39

It was all very complex. But yeah, we do see this transition in this festive world and we start hearing phrases that we I mean, to this day, you know, deoch don doras, the drink at the door, the idea of therapeutic substances entering a world built on hospitality, and one of the most famous traits of medieval Ireland was overblown, hospitable, largest theres innumerable commentaries about you show up to an Irish Lord's house and they almost empty the parlor and I think it's a big trait of Irish culture that runs for a very long time.

Fionnán O'Connor 21:13

But this world lends itself to blurring something that was meant I mean, even slideshow the toast means health. Now that's true across Europe for lots of different toasts. But it runs this idea whiskey never shakes that idea of being medicine right through the hot toddy. This vague lingering idea of therapeutics

Barry Chandler 21:32

the makeup of that spirit then would bear no resemblance to the spirit we know today and we're building over the next few episodes how we get to the whiskey we know today. What do we know about you mentioned some herbs fennel, etc that would have been used? Would it have been distilled wine predominantly with this been pre grain distilled spirit?

Fionnán O'Connor 21:54

Yeah, so original Aqua vitae, Italian Aqua Vitae, medical Aqua vitae is a wine based spirit and certainly the first descriptions both the Red Book of Ossory and the Olayan manuscript and associated text describe distilling from one now of course they describe selling wine because they are literally copies of the Italian text. And Wine Spirits in Europe starts to mutate into grain spirit usually in the you know, places that drank a lot of beer so we see things in Germany where we start seeing like rye and barley make their way in instead now they're happening in these kinds of like township areas are not really the same. And so we do see wine distilled and the Irish drank a shed ton of brandy for a very long time. So blurring all of this we see brandy coming in intersecting and of course they're referring to that as they uisce beatha too, because it's eau de vie.

Fionnán O'Connor 22:46

It's the same idea, and definitely, but there's certainly an increasing amount of references to grain based aqua vitae for obvious reasons. The feudal Ireland drank an enormous amount of French wine, but also drank ale. Irish Ale from the time was very different age, what we would think of as beer and be what was seen as beer in England. So beer in certainly by the Elizabethan period at England was drinking malt based beer with hops and that that was, again more like what we would think of as beer.

Fionnán O'Connor 23:21

And in Ireland, they describe this stuff called Karim and we know a lot about it because it was so disliked by tutor administration and whatnot this like muddy substance, and it was that they were not distilling they were brewing malted oats, and malted barley together, and there's a lot written about

quorum, and this sometimes it was just malted oats, and sometimes was malted oats and malted barley in tandem. And again with there's all these complaints that Oh, once you leave Dublin, you should have no wholesome beer. And also it's very difficult to grow hops in most parts of Ireland and hops are a preservative and but when we start seeing references to overt distillates,

Fionnán O'Connor 23:59

and we start seeing naturally the distilled version of of the Karim, and so we start seeing oats at a very early stage and in Irish whiskey. We eventually start seeing a drink called Balkan, which is from will account literally madness of the head or Bang to the head. And yeah, fantastic.

Fionnán O'Connor 24:16

There's an Irish poem slightly later called the Star aim and a clarity. It's a satire of a chief and the chief, his great deeds he's battling these ogres and the Ogres are various versions of of personified booze and he's he fights an ogre named Balkan McKercher, which is literally mean son of oats. But yeah, it's really hilarious stuff.

Fionnán O'Connor 24:37

And we start seeing like there's an English traveler John Dunton, who goes out to what would now be roughly Connemara, then was called arecanut. And he visited chieftain named OFlaherty. And he's taken out he's shown a very good time again, this idea of like big hospitality, but he goes out hunting with him and

Fionnán O'Connor 24:54

he's got a basically a flask of Bolcom and so we see it pop up in this feudal world and it's increasingly convivial and of course by proxy to resources, it increasingly resembles Irish Ale, Irish grain alcohol.

Barry Chandler 25:09

So the word then seeing this move from distilling being the preserve of the medical men, to perhaps the Chieftains, and maybe in the 1500s, more of the more distilling being perhaps attempted by more of let's call them the general public, would that have been something that would have been expensive, inaccessible, tough for the poor, impoverished Irish person to participate in? Or did we start to see some rudimentary stills popping up in valleys and hills?

Fionnán O'Connor 25:42

We do we have a few material stills that have been discovered, and most of them, the earliest we get them is the 15th century. And so again, a strong indication, we should believe the proof that it is a late medieval arrival and an early modern kind of phenomenon. And yeah, it's strange in a European context. So again, what happens around the rest of Europe is you start seeing distilling being like an apothecary idea, it happens in this kind of semi urban township pattern, and they know how to distill and then you get the specialists and gilded merchant distillers coming out of that,

Fionnán O'Connor 26:16

or you get the vintner as the natural specialization of the winemaker as a side hustle to make brandy and then some of them start making brandy permanently. And then again, like Ireland, once again, odd

child in the class, you suddenly got this landscape of non urban non monetary most of Ireland was outside the pale was a barter based economy that the pale as in the area in and around Dublin, that was, by this time, really the only part of Ireland, outside small coastal towns that was under Tudor control and be using cash. And when people go into the interior, it all reverts to barter very fast. And of course, you wonder like, okay, there's no, no money passing hands. You have this culture, socially built on hospitable, largest, there's a lot written about Irish hospitality, not just at the feudal level. But right down the system, there was a strong, taboo. And there's a lot written about this part of Ireland, a whole series of taboos based on hospitality.

Fionnán O'Connor 27:16

And based on the idea that if someone shows up at your door, you need to put them up. And if you don't, there's something deeply spiritually malignant in you, and probably, the people around you will note it, and then you'll have social repercussions in infinite, discrete ways. And so it's again, in ancient Greece, you see something similar when you see like the Odyssey, this this idea of like, you need to put people up. But then similarly, if you abuse it, there's something wrong with you as well. And we start seeing imitations of the higher feudal orders down the wrong and again,

Fionnán O'Connor 27:51

the best description I was given, because it does survive in Irish culture with a way that if someone comes to your house in Ireland, and as an Irish person, you almost feel jittery until you give them you offer them a cup of tea, or can I get you anything, it's a nervous reaction, and all of these discrete kind of survivals of this originally, deeply embedded idea of obligation to host and to host with whatever resources are available as lavishly as you can.

Fionnán O'Connor 28:17

And it's there and in that space that we first start seeing a uisce beatha appear down the social rung, you start getting the idea of like as a word called tangy, that disappeared. But this idea of like offering somebody a drink upon arrival, and all these weird and hospitable gestures, and it's all to do with social reciprocity. I put someone up in my home because I might have to travel one day and I want to make sure that I in a pre monetary no such thing as ins in these places. I want to make sure that I can have somewhere to stand all tied in with this. And we start seeing in these spaces, Aqua Vitae recurringly appear. It's part of the the social landscape, you're talking about it heavily forested landscape, a lot of boggy terrain, not a lot of roads. Travel can be difficult and dangerous and cold and wet. And the therapeutic mixes with the luxury in this again, like wider sense of social contexts or not. Yeah, that's where it pops up.

Barry Chandler 29:25

The story of alcohol the story of whiskey reflects the social changes the political changes the economic changes in the countries where the alcohol stems from Ireland changed dramatically in the early 1600s, the Battle of Kinsale 1601 created a marked change in the direction of Ireland as a country and an economy. Can you talk a little bit about what changes we saw in Ireland at the time and how that then affected? What became the whiskey we know?

Fionnán O'Connor 29:56

Yeah, I mean, Kinsale is an enormous turning point. And I can't be overstated a lot of what we think of as Ireland, rolling hills, green hedges, all that stuff, settled tillage, that's a result of this turning point. That's not the natural landscape before that, again, Ireland looks physically very different, culturally very different. Socially, there's not a lot of money used as you go inland. If there isn't the coastal towns, there's a whole gray market of barter in the middle and that's another substitute area where we start seeing Aqua Vitae pop up.

Fionnán O'Connor 30:30

And but before then, so in the 1500s, the time we're talking about really from the 1300s to the 1500s. and Ireland was split between Dublin and the area around the pale which was its own kind of concept on these coastal towns and then a world where the old Norman ruling class had gone wild and native in the interior and started to resemble their kind of Gaelic chieftain, neighbors, and their cultures became in this strange hybridity you get this, the Normans talk to all this like ducks to water, deeply feudal culture based on allegiance, based on again, hospitable reciprocity is all this stuff, some of which looks a lot like feudal Europe, and some of which is quite strange. And you get, like, for instance, tied up with the hospitable justice,

Fionnán O'Connor 31:20

They were in the lead up to Kinsale, you have what's called the nine years war and the nine years war is sparked by tension between the Tudor government and originally Ulster, O'Neill and O'Donnell specifically, and then it rapidly spreads into a big all Ireland war, and nearly bankrupt the exchequer of the Tudor government that spent 2 million Sterling on it. Spain eventually gets involved on the Irish side, which makes the English really worried that they're facing down a second Armada type experience. So they really start putting money and manpower into this. And when the battle of when the Irish and the Spanish lose the battle of Kinsale, O'Neill in the gang rush originally pardoned, and they there's a little bit of a hush period, and then they get very nervous that the partner is not going to last long or this or that. And they basically disappear to Europe and within a very rapid space of about 20 years.

Fionnán O'Connor 31:20

you get things like cutting where Gaelic chiefs would go the rounds of their subjects and be expected to be put up. I know, the Tudor is always saying that they're just living off the fat of the land. And so for instance, we were down the road from a McCarthy castle, and there's references to McCarthy cutting around the Southwest, and he's being given Aqua Vita. And then eventually he gets cheeky and started saying, instead of me showing up, maybe you can just send it to the guy, send it to the castle, and I'll drink it here. And so it blurs with tax at that point. But we start seeing again, that whole world collapse, it collapses with Kinsale, it collapses with the flight of the Earl's, first of all half the aristocracy just disappear.

Fionnán O'Connor 32:59

The English government not only starts to actually control Ireland in a meaningful sense, as opposed to just the pale, but convert the country towards a monetary economy, market towns you start seeing heavy deforestation had started just before and continues. And the idea of trying to get the Irish to

settle down and become farmers market townspeople small market town and farmland, periphery, the whole landscape changes start to look much more like what we think of as Ireland.

Fionnán O'Connor 32:59

And that transformation also means that there's a lot more tillage in iron so this was the worst cereal crops in Ireland before but not on the kind of like more ordered systematized way we start seeing more wheat we start seeing more again, three crop rotation looking staff more organized. And a country that has changed not just in the use of money, but in its physical appearance in so many different ways. It looks unrecognizable very soon to what it had looked like for a very long time beforehand.

Barry Chandler 34:08

The change of Ireland then the loss at the hands of the British at the Battle of Kinsale. You talk about it putting Ireland on a path to being a little bit more British and being more of an economy and something resembling the British system that had a massive effect on deforestation cutting down of the oak trees. We were about three quarters of the country was covered in forest at one point or perhaps more than that we're moving into this new era where the country is open land there, there are fields that are tilled that are managed, where crops are grown, that was probably a big driver of the use of grain then there was more grain available perhaps would that have contributed to an increase in the usage of local available grains in uisce beatha that became the whiskey that we know today. So are we seeing more of the rise of grain based whiskies then?

Fionnán O'Connor 35:02

Yeah, and we certainly see a lot less the uisce beatha of the previous years had been a product of futile large s. Some of the ingredients they put in it like saffron, overwhelmingly more expensive than necessity requires, you're showing off as much as anything. And sometimes it's a form of intimidation, you take people to your house, and you show them how much money you have, discreetly, and then you get them drunk on that that world is gone, you see more playing spirit. And also you see again, a switch to like a peasant, distiller class, it becomes wider spread. And again, it's invariably tied up with landscape at all parts of history, it is a reflection of Irish agricultural history.

Fionnán O'Connor 35:42

And so when we start seeing more organized tillage, of course, we start seeing more tillage at Booz and similarly again, Ireland moves into a different, a different, how would you put it, I mean so so much changes, the food changes, the drink changes, the language starts to be on the backfoot. There's a whole like dimension that Ireland passes through, and it happens roughly like from there to 1661. By the time we get the restoration in England, the end of Oliver Cromwell. By the time we've come that far in history, Ireland looks unrecognizable.

Barry Chandler 36:24

Shortly after the Battle of Kinsale, King James, the first ascends of the throne, he succeeds, Queen Elizabeth, he has maybe a more moderate approach. But he also recognizes the distiller class that has grown. He recognizes the distilling that has taken place throughout the country. And while we're not yet at a time period where taxes start to be applied, he has a clever method of perhaps extracting some money in return for distilling happening. Tell us a little bit about what James the First did with whiskey.

Fionnán O'Connor 36:58

Yeah, so first of all, when James takes over, and Queen Elizabeth died without an heir, and the Stuarts replaced the Tudors, they were already related. So you're getting a huge change of governance in England. He inherited a throne that is nearly bankrupted itself, between wars with Spain. And then again, there's just enormous expenditure in the Nine Years War. And he's trying to foot the bill, basically. And he sets up this system, what are called patents.

Fionnán O'Connor 37:26

And if you had the patent for something, you had the exclusive right, in theory, you had the exclusive right to collect money on behalf of the crown, and you're supposed to pay for the patent and have the crown got money from you. But it's just Cronus legislation about like, why have the patent for shoe cobbling and anyone who wants to cobble shoes now owes me money for no real discernible reason other than I'm the great kingly Shoe Man. And we start seeing yeah, but they're handed out for distilling as well, four of them in around 1608.

Fionnán O'Connor 37:54

And these aren't licenses for distilling, they're essentially a tax, right? You know, and then what happens is the patents get farmed out. So if you have the patent, and you can't make it, as far as your patent extends, you can say okay, Jimmy down the road can collect on my behalf, as long as he pays me for the privilege, and then he wants to farm it out and someone pays him and you get this essentially this racket of a pyramid scheme basically. And then finally, the Payton's which were seen as generating very little money for the crown and very, you know, heavy levels of resentment they're finally done away with and we start seeing more organized concepts like first tax on sale and then excise.

Barry Chandler 38:37

One of these patents will be familiar to people because if you pick up any bottle of Bushmills, you will see embossed on the glass, the date 1608, which would reference one of these early licenses or patents to distiller granted by King James the First to that area. So that would be one example of it's something Bushmans points to.

Fionnán O'Connor 38:55

Yeah, it's you know, and that was handed to a guy named Thomas Phillips, who was based in Limavady, he was essentially part of the administration and his patent would have reached across Antrim, and then up as far as dairy, and this idea of they weren't making alcohol. They were essentially living off those who did they have the right to collect or to extend that to others, and to be in charge. And again, licensing in this sense means something very different. It's not distilleries as commercial concepts didn't really exist. That's a later stage. Again, you're starting to see trade distillation in a small way.

Fionnán O'Connor 39:35

You start seeing inns, which is another thing that changes in Ireland with the collapse of the old kind of feudal order, you start seeing with money, commerce, and so on. That's a big priority for James's government is the setting up of inns because before yes, you could go through the Irish interior and

sleep anywhere for free, but you're suddenly in a lot of people's debt. And if they're giving you booze and you've said something in the morning that you regret having said this and that, you become entangled very, very quickly in this kind of social swamp.

Fionnán O'Connor 40:04

And it's very important that no, if soldiers are going in or somebody's going in, they need to throw cash down on the table and say, you're billeting my horses. I'm staying here for a night, I'm getting dinner, and you're getting money in return. And you start seeing distillery Republicans, you start seeing people, essentially turning their ale into a kind of a motley whiskey of a kind, and that exists as a kind of a semi trade, but we don't see distilleries as we think of them until later.

Barry Chandler 40:34

In the next episode of the history of Irish whiskey, we're going to get to that next phase of Ireland's whiskey history. As we discussed the birth of the distillery, we see the arrival of the word whiskey. And we examine the circumstances that led to whiskey becoming more commonplace throughout the island of Ireland, as we covered a period from 1661 right up until 1760.

Barry Chandler 40:59

The history of Irish whiskey is a presentation of the Stories and Sips whiskey club and the entire seven episode season of the history of Irish whiskey is available exclusively to whiskey club members. With a new episode released each week. Membership of the Stories and Sips whiskey club is open to whiskey fans anywhere in the world, and to become a member and to listen to the rest of this podcast season. Catch up on our behind the scenes distillery visits, watch our Meet the maker events with some of Ireland's leading distillers and blenders and makers. Simply visit [storiesandsips.com/club](https://www.storiesandsips.com/club).

Barry Chandler 41:34

Membership is month to month. We have no long term commitments. You're free to cancel your membership at any time, no questions asked. But of course, we hope you will stick around as we learn more about Irish whiskey together. A big thank you to Fionnán O'Connor O'Connor for sharing incredible whiskey history, his knowledge and his perspective and putting in one place finally, the history of Irish whiskey for us to learn from and even help us to appreciate more the spirit we call Irish whiskey today. It's launching.