

## A.G.Barr - Barrs Irn Bru

A.G.Barr - Born 1872 Falkirk, Scotland - Died 1903

FALKIRK has produced many famous products and not just famous people over the last 1000 years. One of the most famous has to be the legendary Irn Bru invented by members of the Barr family. The world has them to thank for the fizzy drink that proudly claims to be "made in Scotland - from girders".

A. G. Barr and Company is the largest manufacturer of soft drinks in Britain. The current business takes its name from Andrew Greig Barr who was born in Falkirk in 1872 and died tragically in 1903 aged just 31.

Andrew was the second of Robert Barr's three sons whose father (also Robert) was a cork cutter in Falkirk supplying the area's bottling trade with stoppers from premises in Callendar Riggs and Buchanan Court.

When more modern bottle stops were designed, and the demand for cork dropped, Robert Barr maintained his close connection with the bottling trade by setting up as a manufacturer of aerated water.

Lemonade factories were not new to the district. James Marshall had opened his Garthall Works just off Falkirk's Cow Wynd in 1870 and Falkirk Brewery started making aerated waters soon afterwards.

Robert Barr became the third competitor in 1880 when he began production at his Burnfoot Works.

The business made a modest start, cork cutting remaining Barr's main interest. But it was so successful it was quickly decided to step up production. The association with cork cutting was slowly relinquished, although as late as 1889 Barr's continued to be described in Slater's Directory - the Yellow Pages of its day - as "aerated water manufacturers and cork cutters".

Andrew Greig Barr was just eight and a pupil at Falkirk High School when his father moved into the soft drinks business. He was to finish his schooling at Stewart's College in Edinburgh and work with the Clydesdale Bank in Falkirk and manage its branch in Larbert - before he and his younger brother William finally joined their big brother, Robert Fulton Barr, and their father in the lemonade business.

FROM the start the magical formula was to remain a family secret. Andrew Greig Barr personally supervised the blend of syrups and essences to be added to water.

Even today only two members of the family know exactly what goes into it.

While Andrew was learning the banking industry, his father and brother were dominating a soft drinks trade that was growing rapidly.

In 1887, Robert Fulton Barr was sent to Glasgow to establish a branch of the Barr empire in Parkhead. Andrew then quit the bank and joined his father and younger brother William at Burnfoot.

Falkirk remained the centre of the Barr business, but Robert Fulton Barr moved things along at a staggering pace from Glasgow by introducing a dazzling range of new products, including soda water, orangeade, cider and sarsaparilla. Andrew joined his brother in Glasgow in 1892 and for a few years worked jointly between the city and Falkirk. But he was ambitious and aggressive, and quickly took sole charge of Glasgow with expansion on his mind.

Within five years the Glasgow operation was completely independent of Falkirk. Andrew Greig Barr had a new factory built and the most modern plant purchased. Then, In 1901, he introduced a new product, Irn Bru, the one that was to put Barr's firmly ahead of the rest

Barr's dray horses In 1903, with his Glasgow business thriving, Andrew married Isabel Margaret Gibb at Dollar. It was to be a tragically short relationship, Andrew dying just 11 weeks later from a combination of blood poisoning and pneumonia.

Before his death, however, he cleared the way for the Barr dynasty to continue by making provision in his will that his younger brother William should manage the Glasgow operation for 18 months and be given first option to buy the firm.

That is exactly what happened with A. G. Barr and Company launched as a private firm in 1904 and Barr's in Falkirk growing independently until the two were finally brought together in 1959 under the chairmanship of Robert Barr, the third generation of the family.

UNDER Robert Barr's shrewd management, the firm continued to thrive with takeovers and acquisitions strengthening its market share.

`Mr. Robert', as he was known by his workers, was awarded the OBE in 1977 for his services to the food industry and retired as honorary life president in 1978. He handed over the reigns of the empire to his son Robin but continued as honorary president until his death in 1993 at the age of 86.

#### World's Largest Horse

NEARLY as famous as the Barr products were the Barr horses used to haul the flat-top lorries piled high with crates. These were hardy beasts and had to be: a loaded lorry carried 60 to 70 dozen bottles and weighed about three tons.

Barr's `fleet' was a common sight around the district and many of the animals became famous in their own right, none more so than the giant Clydesdale Carnera.

Legend has it he weighed a ton and was said to be the largest working horse in the world.

Robert Barr bought him from a Perth farmer in 1930. He stood 19 hands 1 and a half inches high (6ft 6ins at the shoulder). It took 24 inches of iron bar to make a single shoe for him when the average for other horses was 17.

As a promotional asset, Carnera was a runaway success. He often won prizes at shows and was loved by the public.

But he came to a tragic end in January 1937 and literally `died in harness' after slipping on the frost-bound road at the Cow Wynd.

All efforts to get him back on his feet failed. worried members of the public fed him buns and somebody even produced a mattress for him to lie on. A crowd gathered during the course of the day. so many wanting to watch the drama unfold that three policemen were needed to keep the road clear for traffic.

There was still a huge crowd present when the veterinary, Mr Bell, arrived at 4.45 p.m. to put the unfortunate animal down.

Nobody moved until Carnera's body was finally hoisted on to a lorry and transported to Glasgow at around 7 o'clock that night.

#### Unlucky Strike

ANOTHER of Barr's animals achieved immortality when it was killed in June 1927 by a fall of masonry from Falkirk's Steeple after it had been struck by lightning.

The horse had been yoked to a lorry delivering aerated water to grocers Wilson and Thomson. The driver, James McComish, had been placing an empty box on the vehicle when he heard the noise of the collapsing debris and instinctively stood back.

He escaped with a cut head, but his horse died instantly.

For more information on Irn Bru check out these websites

[www.irn-bru.co.uk/index.asp](http://www.irn-bru.co.uk/index.asp)

[members.tripod.co.uk/~BARRS\\_IRN\\_BRU/main.htm](http://members.tripod.co.uk/~BARRS_IRN_BRU/main.htm)

[home.rednet.co.uk/homepages/knc/Bru.htm](http://home.rednet.co.uk/homepages/knc/Bru.htm)