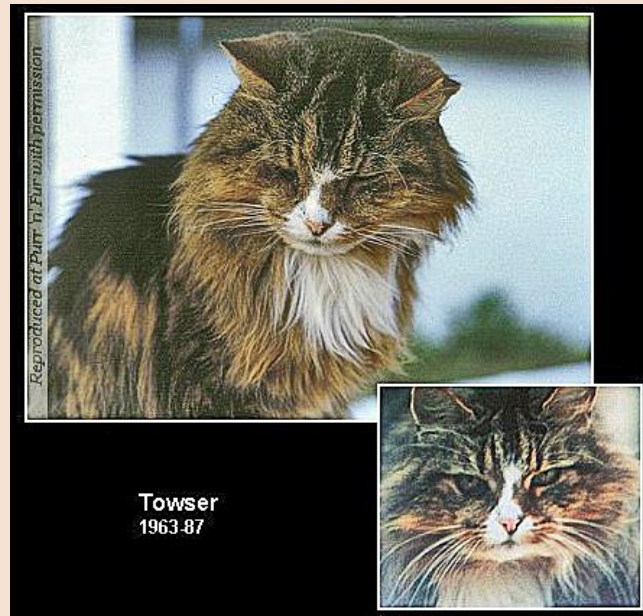


Towser and her successors at Glenturret 2006+) Crieff, Perthshire, Scotland

(page checked February 2026)

A revised version of this article is at [Purr 'n' Fur / Working / Distillery Cats 1.](#))



The Glenturret Distillery, near Crieff in Perthshire, Scotland, is the oldest working Scotch-whisky distillery in the country and home of the world-renowned Famous Grouse whisky. Barley stored in a distillery ready for whisky making is a big attraction for mice, and so for many years Glenturret has kept a cat on the premises. From 1963 the position of resident mouser was held for almost 24 years by **Towser**, a long-haired tortoiseshell female, who had a remarkable mouse-catching career — so remarkable, in fact, that she holds the *Guinness World Record* as the world's best mouser. She died in 1987, and her life and exploits are fondly commemorated by a bronze statue at the 'Famous Grouse Experience' visitor centre on the Glenturret site (*below right*).



The inscription reads:

Towser
21 April 1963–20 March 1987
Towser, the famous cat who lived in the still house,
Glenturret Distillery, for almost 24 years.
She caught 28,899 mice in her lifetime.
World Mousing Champion, Guinness Book of Records.

I enquired how this very exact figure of mice caught had been arrived at — surely no one had been keeping count for 24 years? It seems the adjudicators for the record claim went to Crieff to observe the cat's prowess for a period of some days, and the total was extrapolated by a statistical technique from their observations. Even if the number might not be totally accurate, it's a pretty impressive performance and works out at an average of some three mice every day!

By the way, the story goes that Towser's amazing mousing prowess was the result of a 'tiny wee dram' being added to her milk each night; but Glenturret says, 'We don't have any scientific proof to back this up, and we certainly wouldn't advise it to anyone whose cat is underperforming in terms of rodent control!'

Towser's paw-prints and a logo decorated bottles of one of the distillery's products that is now discontinued: Fairlie's Light Highland Liqueur. As it's no longer available it took a while to obtain images of a Fairlie's bottle, but we're pleased to be able to show them now, with our thanks to Dan. We've also discovered that there were Fairlie's liqueur glasses with the same Towser and paw-prints theme.



A couple more artefacts commemorating Towser were offered on eBay during 2013: a pottery figurine by Wade, which has details of her mousing achievement around the base and was made in a limited edition of 1500; and a circular lapel pin badge, thought to date from the 1980s. Both items were described as 'rare'.



Later feline staff

Following Towser's death a new cat was appointed, called **Amber** (left). Unfortunately she didn't seem to have her predecessor's skills, and as far as is known she never caught a single mouse! But she remained as the resident feline until she too died of old age in late 2004. It was felt that spring would be a better time to take on a new cat, and so the quest began in March/April 2005 and was reported in the national press. Scottish branches of [Cats Protection](#), the UK's largest cat charity, were invited to help with the search.



The requirement was for a cat that would be outgoing enough to welcome visitors from all over the world (some 120,000 annually) and enjoy being the centre of attention — and certainly not camera-shy. Mousing ability would be considered an advantage, but changing practices mean that distilleries these days are much more mouse-free than in earlier times, so it was not regarded as essential. A cat psychologist was even consulted, as it was felt it wouldn't be easy to find the right animal . . . but eventually nine finalists were chosen, from Perth, Forfar, Dundee and Cardyke (Glasgow) CP rescue centres. They

were all cats that for one reason or another had fallen on hard times, and each was described as a 'real character'.

Staff at the distillery were looking forward to having a new resident after several cat-less months, but following the 'interviews' they found it very difficult to make a choice from among so many worthy candidates! In the end they found it impossible to choose between **Dylan**, a ginger tomcat from Forfar, and **Brooke**, a black-and-white female from Cardyke — so it was decided to take them both on. Glenturret therefore had two worthy successors to the famous Towser. And, following the extensive refurbishment and opening of the 'Famous Grouse Experience' in June 2002, they had their own cat-flap so that they could come and go as they pleased to and from their base in the still house — which is always pleasantly warm.



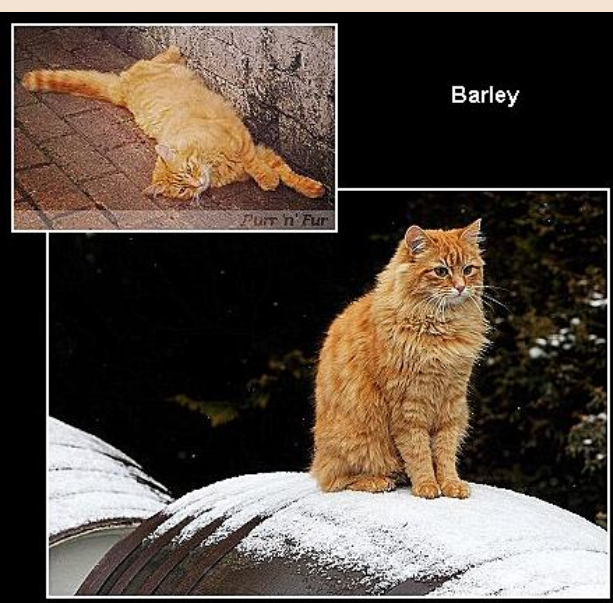
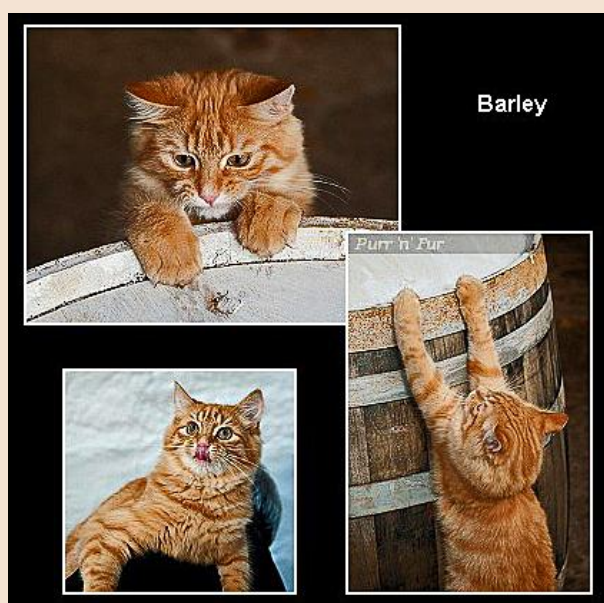
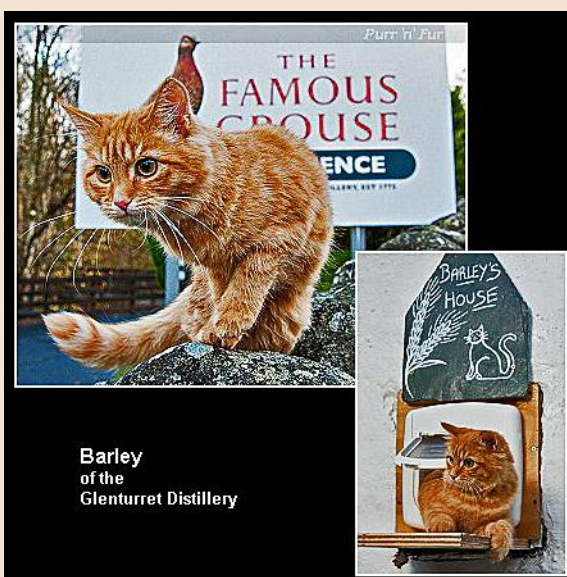
And there was a happy ending for the seven other cats not selected by Glenturret — all found good new homes, either with distillery staff or as a result of the publicity that took place at the time of the search.

Sadly Brooke died in 2011 and Dylan sometime before that. Latterly Brooke had evidently had her own Facebook page, but we learned of it only retrospectively after it had been removed. Following her death the distillery expressed their intention to take on a new mouser.

Barley (Glenturret)

By mid-2012 the search for a new feline resident was under way, again with the help of Cats Protection, and it lasted some three months; but in the end (or maybe having heard of the search) it seems a local farmer donated a young male ginger kitten. As mentioned above, there are no longer the same problems with mice that distilleries used to have in the past so what was required was not so much a mouser as a cat with a big personality to 'meet and greet' the roughly 120,000 people who visit the distillery annually.

In September 2012 'whisky fans and animal lovers' were invited to submit ideas for the kitten's name to Glenturret, with the lucky person submitting the winning name being invited for an expenses-paid overnight visit with accommodation and a VIP tour of the distillery. In the interim we believe the kitten's temporary name was Simba. From hundreds of names suggested, three were short-listed — Ginger, Barley and Glen — with the final decision, following a vote on those three by fans, being that the kitten would be called **Barley**. He was soon reported to be settling in well and to be 'a great character'. Unfortunately, as things turned out, Barley didn't have a very long tenure, as he inexplicably disappeared during the winter of 2013/14 and, despite repeated attempts to find him, he never returned.

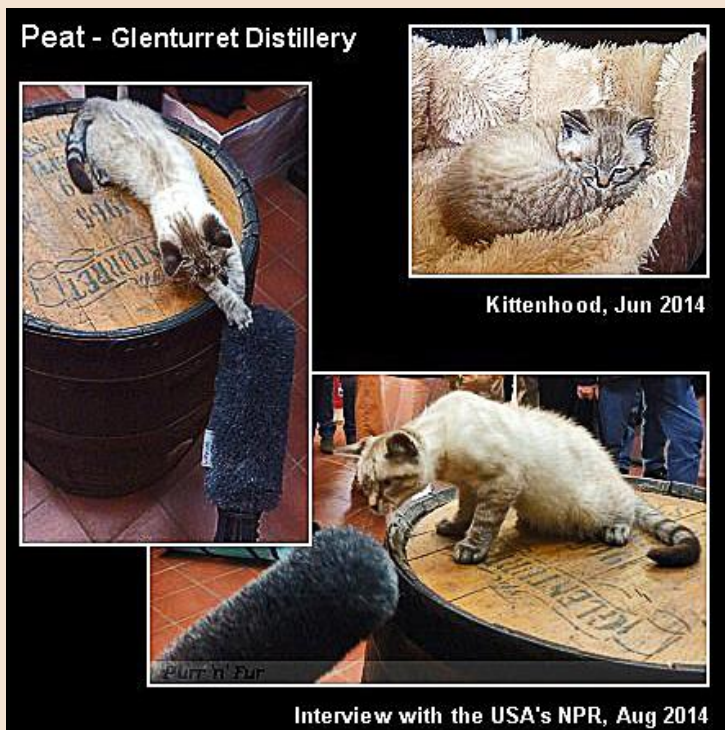


Peat (Glenturret)

Peat, a delightful eight-week-old kitten, was chosen next to take up the much coveted role of Official Mouser at The Famous Grouse Experience and joined the team in June 2014. He quickly charmed everyone he met and made himself at home in the new Tasting Bar. He proved to be inquisitive, fearless and a very sociable cat; before long he became known widely on social media and had several hundred followers on Twitter.

By September it was felt Peat was ready to be allowed out into the grounds — but it proved to be a fateful decision. After promptly getting himself stuck up a tree, from which he was rescued, he was found later by a member of the distillery staff lying badly injured by the roadside, having been struck by a car. He was rushed to the vet, but nothing could be done to save him and he died peacefully in the arms of the Distillery Manager. He was just a few months old, and distillery staff were heartbroken at his loss.

A little earlier, in late August, Peat had been 'interviewed' by America's National Public Radio as part of a short feature on distillery cats. Unaware of his demise the day before, the NPR broadcast went out on 9 September as planned, but after learning what had happened there was another brief item the following day. Both broadcasts are available from the links below.



Glen and Turret

By July 2015, once again two new kittens had been taken on — **Glen**, described as 'rather timid and quietly inquisitive', and **Turret**, 'a tabby on a mission', a month older than Glen and 'into absolutely everything'. It was felt that two cats would not only be company for each other, but might be less likely to wander far. Following their arrival the pair settled in under the watchful eyes of the 'Four Men of Glenturret', the Stillmen, and explored the distillery while getting up to general mischief. They quickly became popular with visitors.



Glen (left) & Turret

Glen II

Sadly the distillery's run of bad luck with its cats continued when after just a few weeks Glen became ill; in declining health and being too small to operate on, he was put to sleep on veterinary advice. The team was heartbroken and Turret was left mourning his companion. It was felt that a new friend should be found for him, and an extensive search began. Eventually another suitable kitten was found, who seemed to be in excellent health and was about the same age as Turret, and so **Glen II** joined the team. Fortunately he gets on well with Turret, who regained his playfulness, and the pair soon became well-established and were delighting visitors. A spokesman said, 'It seems that Glen II has aspirations to be the boss, but Turret isn't ready to relinquish his favourite spot underneath the still quite yet. Glen particularly likes to be front and centre when there's a tour party in, and has found a spot on top of a whisky cask where he gets maximum attention (*below left*). A true showman, and a natural in the role!' It's hoped the pair will have a long and happy reign at The Famous Grouse.



Turret



Glen II

In February 2017 Turret made his way to the nearby Crieff Hydro, perhaps fancying a short spa break! Staff there [pampered him](#) before sending him back home.

Glen II and Turret

Glenturret Distillery
(Photos: Fraser Band)



Warm thanks to Carol McLaren of the Glenturret Distillery for kindly providing photographs and much of the information on which our account of Towser was initially based, and to Natasha Monroe for further assistance later. More about the whisky can be found at the website linked below. An acknowledgement is due also to [Nigel Cole](#) at Flickr for one of the photos of Brooke.

Links

- ❖ [The Famous Grouse](#) website.
- ❖ Facebook: [The Famous Grouse](#).
- ❖ YouTube: short clip showing the [statue of Towser](#).
- ❖ *Herald Scotland*, May 2005: [Which cat can fill this puss's boots?](#) *(archived but doesn't load fully)*
- ❖ BBC News Tayside, Jun 2014: Peat - [Kitten named Official Mouser at Glenturret distillery](#).
- ❖ Scotland Now/Daily Record, Jun 2014: [Famous Grouse Experience reveal Peat the cat as Glenturret Distillery's new Official Mouser](#). *.(archived copy – scroll to near foot of page)*
- ❖ NPR (National Public Radio), Sep 2014: [Behind Every Good Whisky Is A Trusty Distillery Cat](#), with a follow-up [here](#) on hearing Peat had died – first story available as text and audio, second text only *(audio doesn't play, Feb. 2026)*.
- ❖ *The Scotsman*, Sep 2014: [Famous Grouse distillery cat dies aged 6 months](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ *The Scotsman*, Jul 2015: [Famous Grouse enlist two new distillery cats](#). *(archived copy)*
- ❖ *The Scotsman*, Dec 2015: [Glenturret's lonely distillery cat gets a new friend](#) *(archived copy)*
- ❖ Fans of The Famous Grouse commercials, featuring Gilbert the Grouse, can see 28 of them back-to-back in a [YouTube clip](#) (10m)

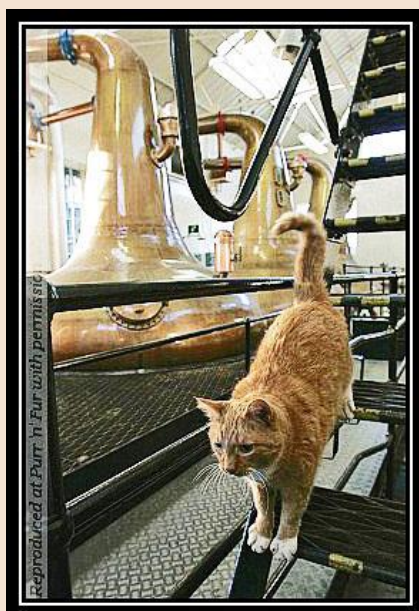
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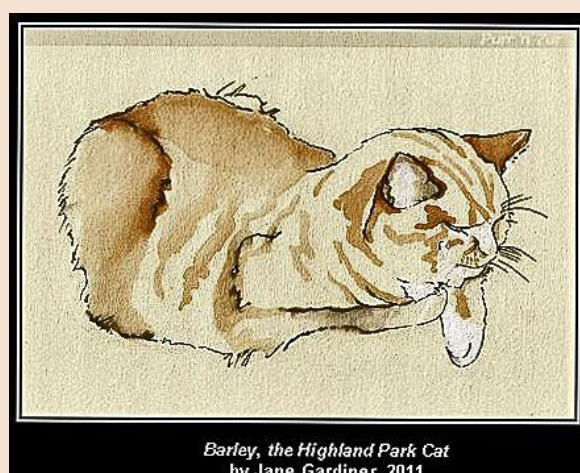
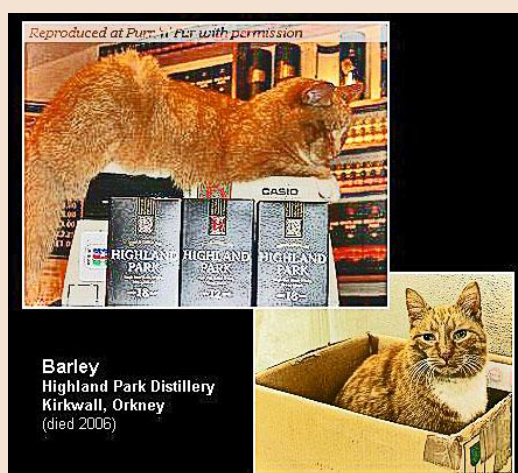
Another Barley (2006+) Highland Park Distillery Kirkwall, Orkney

(For a fuller account of Highland Park cats, see *Purr 'n' Fur / Working / Distillery 2.*)

Barley was a cat of character who was the resident mouser at the Highland Park Scotch-whisky distillery in Kirkwall, capital of the windswept Orkney Islands to the north of Scotland. 'Was' because unfortunately, at the age of 15, Barley died as a result of a road traffic accident, the distillery announced in March 2006. Furthermore, bosses decided that he wouldn't be replaced, thus ending a tradition of some 200 years (Highland Park was founded in 1798). The reason I was given is that this is one of only four distilleries in the whole of Scotland to retain traditional floor maltings, and apparently this has health-and-safety implications as far as the keeping of cats is concerned. It didn't mean that cats are banned from all Scottish distilleries.



Over the years Barley had become well loved by staff, tourists and locals alike, and each Christmas was said to have received a 'sackful of presents and cards'. Many tales are told of his exploits; one concerns the manager's dog. Although friendly to people, the cat disliked dogs, and on one occasion terrorised this poor animal so thoroughly that it became too frightened to move and had to be physically carried to safety! However, Barley was a great companion to the night-shift workers, while in the daytime his favoured sleeping spot was actually on top of the cash till in the Highland Park shop. Visitors would often think he was a toy till they touched him! Artist Jane Gardiner made a lovely drawing (*below right*) of Barley based on the photograph.



So the long tradition of Highland Park cats came to an end; but staff were hoping to commission a local artist to create a memorial statue that would stand in the entrance courtyard. The plan was that it would feature not only Barley, but also his two immediate predecessors, **Malt** and **Peat**, and serve as a tribute to all the mousers that had formed part of the distillery's heritage. In response to an enquiry in 2013, it was confirmed that unfortunately the plan had not materialised, but the reply went on to say that 'His [Barley's] memory has been very much kept alive by the team at the distillery, who remember him fondly.'

Visit the informative [Highland Park](#) website. Very many thanks to Louise Nicoll of Highland Park for supplying initial photos and information about Barley for this account. Our thanks also to Dave Werner for the photo of Barley patrolling at the distillery: [see it](#) full-sized.

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