



Peebles has the distinction of being ranked as the Top Independent Retailing Town in Scotland, and second in the UK, for its range of independent shops and 'home town' identity in contrast to the ubiquitous 'cloned towns' predominant in other areas.

While Nardinis is synonymous with Largs, the Fish Bar with Anstruther and Saddlers with Forfar, its Forsyths that everyone thinks of when Peebles is mentioned. WTS Forsyth is a vibrant butchers business that had changed with the times to meet customer expectations while retaining traditional values.

In 1938 Walter Thomson Shaw Forsyth travelled the 45 miles up the Tweed valley from Duns to take over the old established business of James McKenna & Son. In those days a pony and trap was used for deliveries but with the onset of war and during rationing bikes were used. The first van was purchased in 1954.



Jim and Malcolm, the sons of Walter, continued the business after their father died in 1963. At that time only bacon curing, poultry and game were being produced. Over the coming years a wide range of meat specialities, cooked meats and pies were produced as a means of diversification.

In 1982 they opened their own bakers shop next door to the butchers which specialises in handmade bread, freshly made rolls and pastries.

Today the business is run by Jim's sons Walter, Callum and Norman and Malcolm's son, Michael. The butchers and bakers shops both work together to offer a unique personal service to their customers. The business boasts a very loyal and conscientious workforce with several key members of staff employed by them for lengthy periods.





Mike, Louise and Callum



The very nature of the business means that everything they sell is made on site in small batches, much is labour intensive so there is a staff of 38 including part timers and after school help.

Family members play key roles but they enjoy invaluable support from important staff members. Cath Smith has a managerial role in charge of all paperwork and organisation. Butcher Eric Geddes is in charge of manufacturing and has been employed at Forsyth's for the last 30 years.

Typically when Mike Forsyth got married his wife Louise was drawn into the family business and she can identify the qualities that makes a family business successful.



"Business has to be a partnership. It all takes time and labour. Everyone in the business has important roles to play. The one thing that keeps a small family butcher different from everybody else is that what we sell, we make ourselves."

Products have really moved on from the main stays of sausage, haggis, black pudding and potted meat. Now the range boasts a vast array of pies, burgers, cured bacon, ready meals, kitchen ready products, coleslaw, salads and quiches.



Underpinning all the products they make Forsyth's maintain a strict selection process sourcing their all important meat from local farmers.

Lamb, Suffolk crosses, comes from Robert Barr at Woodhouse Farm in Manor Valley just three miles down the road and when those are not available from April to Autumn purchased at St Boswells but all as local as possible.

Pork is reared for Forsyth's by Thom Wilkinson of Woodfoot Farm Hawick and there is a lot of local game, venison, pheasant, partridge and rabbit. At Christmas turkeys are sourced from Copas and Gartmorn.

Forsyths have always bought their beef live at the market. That used to be at Reston and Berwick but more recently at St Boswells. Now it is Louise who is in charge of sourcing quality cattle for the business.

Although she was brought up on farms in Malawi and Sudan, she studied for a Masters of Art in History and Philosophy at Aberdeen University and the mother of two seems a most unlikely buyer of live cattle.

The art she has perfected is that of selecting and buying live acquired by accompanying experienced buyer Andrew Scott to markets. Now she rattles off descriptions of her purchases quoting grades, percentages in language that only the market wise would understand.

The spec is a maximum 600 kilo beast, it has to be finished well and presented well to market. Smaller cattle will be purchased to give Forsyths' customers a choice of sizes of joints and steaks. Louise revealed her policy:-

"We always buy from farms that we know, most of the farmers I know personally, I meet them on a Monday at St Boswells and by now they know what we are looking for."

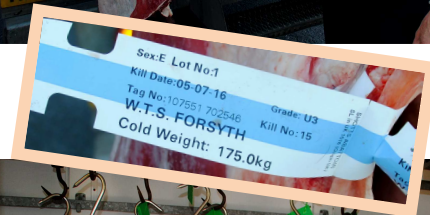
Recognising an impressive, professional finisher, Louise regularly purchases beef from the Hamilton family's Bee Edge Farm at Coldingham. Smailholm Mains cattle are very local and always favoured by Forsyths when available. Pathhead and Trapain farms are others that Louise looks out for. From market Forsyths cattle takes the trip to Shotts before delivery is taken but Louise already knows what that beef is going to look like:-

"If you listen to experienced buyers like Andrew it is amazing what you learn. Discussing every animal that comes through the ring, you just listen and soak up the information that they have picked up over years and years of being in the trade.

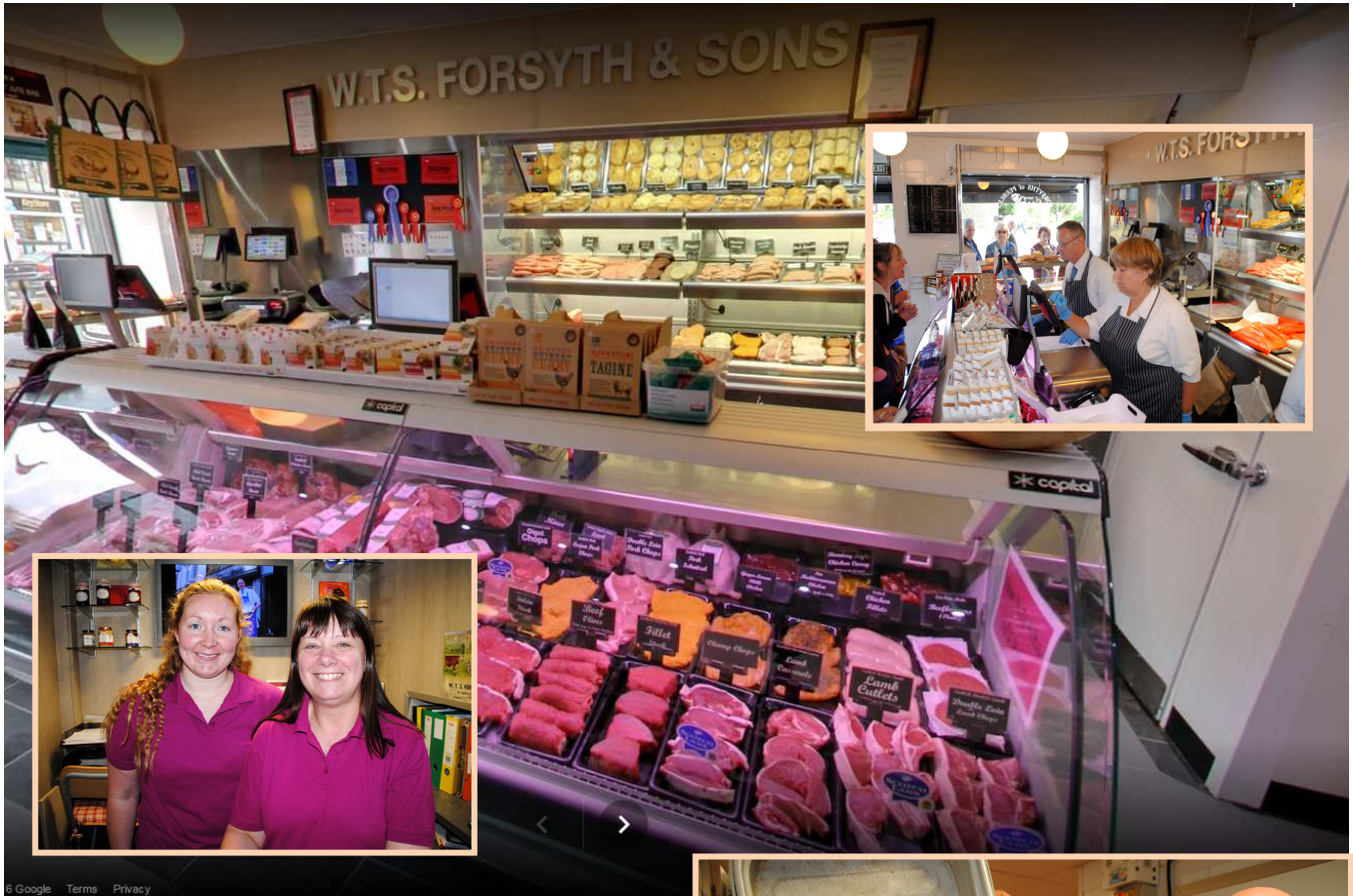
"When we moved to buying at St Boswells, Jake Norris used to buy for us. I watched for a long time until starting buying six or seven years ago. It was the most terrifying things that I have ever done in my life.

"As a woman, there are a lot of people noticing what you are doing - you do stick out like a sore thumb. I wasn't aware of eyes on me at the time because you are so focused but you are aware later that people are talking about what this blonde was doing at the market. It does make you more determined to do a good job.

"I love it and would recommend anyone who likes a bit of a challenge to go and give it a shot. It makes you think fast, you have ten seconds to decide if you are willing to spend £1500 on what's walking around in front of you."



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Back at the shop Louise describes the look of the butchers shop in a way that only a female would:-

"It is a bit like women and make up. You need to wear make up but not look like you are wearing a lot. You don't want to slap loads of stuff into your shop. A shop front and a shop interior has to look not overly done but it has probably taken a lot of effort to make it look that good yet understated. It has to be tastefully done, modern but not overly modern."



Other retailers set the standards for design, promotions and housekeeping and Forsyths clearly understand customer expectations.

They are constantly bouncing ideas off each other, they come up with new meat products, consider how to make your shop look attractive and make sure that their front shop staff are making the best of themselves. Louise concluded:-

"Stick at what you know is good and what you are good at doing. The whole thing is equally important. Whether it is me buying the beef, the guys doing pies, Cath in the office doing paperwork, Michael and Callum overseeing everything, the guys in the middle shop cutting the beef, everyone has an important role and co-dependant on each other."

Clearly they all do a fantastic job. These are challenging times but Forsyths are passionate about what they do and the steady stream of regular customers is testimony that they are good at lots of things.

"We are a good traditional business surrounded by supermarkets giving us all this marketing claptrap and half of it is not true but what we say is true.

I really do see these cattle walking around, I really do know the farmers who produce the meat that we sell in our shop and I know the effort that has gone into producing that meat that you are able to buy.

I know that within our remit, we have done everything to ensure good welfare, good everything with that product."

Louise Forsyth