

A Safe Pair of Hands

“That would be a fine shop for you” was the casual throw away line that a rep fired at Alan Jamieson in February last year. The rep had intended to be making a call in Fochabers but arrived to find that the butcher’s shop had closed. Instead he was early for his regular call at David Brown’s in Aberlour Main Street.

It was here that Alan Jamieson had been working for thirteen years and clearly someone thought it was time for him to start up on his own. Alan, from nearby Rothes, had started as an apprentice with Gordon McIntosh in Dufftown. He then worked for a couple of years in the boning hall at Rhinds in Elgin before moving on to work in Aberlour.

A. J. Jamieson
**Traditional
Family
Butcher**





Although definitely not on his daily commute to work, Alan ended up looking at the Fochabers shop on his way home. He noted the contact details shown in the window and six days later had his offer for the lease accepted. He explained:- "I needed a change of scene. We found out about the shop at a late stage but the deal was quickly done and dusted. It was exciting but scary at the same time."

The shop had shut just over a fortnight before on 16 January and Alan continued:- "You never know why it closed but the fact that it was appealed to me. I could make it mine. The shop being closed gave me a fresh start but with all the things you need to make a fresh start with."

After six weeks to strip out, rewire and refit the shop, it re-opened on Thursday 30 March 2017. The shop had a new look, much more open and spacious but the only piece of equipment that Alan felt necessary to invest in right away was a walk in chill. Two serve over counters were replaced towards the end of 2017 and these display 45 different trays every day.

One thing that everyone was pleased to see unchanged was the only ever present member of staff behind the counter. In with the bricks one could say, Shona had worked in this butchers shop for 21 years and was there when Alan opened. He continued:-



"I think Shona was surprised to see how pleased customers were to see that she was still here. For me starting a fresh with somebody who had good knowledge of the customers made a huge difference."

"We started sensibly. I am very confident but the one thing I didn't want to do here was stretch myself. I wanted a bigger pie counter but ignored it for the first three weeks just to get a firm handle on what we were actually doing. It just steadily progressed."

The shop had been very traditional and a subsequent owner had tried the opposite. Alan claims that his success comes through evolution not revolution, the format has constantly taken shape since he opened:-

"We are not here to re-invent the wheel but we balance traditional and contemporary quite well. That's a fine line. I am a perfectionist but I think that we have got it pretty right. You always have to keep on top of it because if you take your eye off the ball, standards drop. That is the one thing we will not do."



The shop picked up Spey fishing parties and kept building up trade until by midsummer Alan knew that he was going to need another pair of hands. Trade justified taking someone on and so Matthew started in November 2017. The 27 year old had ten years retail experience with the Co-op so Alan felt he could cope with being thrown in at the busiest time in the year:-

"If doesn't matter if you've been in the job for one or eleven months, your first Christmas is wild.

"Matthew mainly covered the counter on his first week and still does during busy times which frees me up on the bench, Matthew is picking up the job really well so far, he's going to make a great butcher."

Matthew and Shona are both currently working towards Modern Apprenticeships in Meat and Poultry Processing with Scottish Meat Training. Alan will be completing his Federation Diploma.

His wife Lesley does everything behind the scenes - the accounting side, as well as sourcing and merchandising goods that provide add on sales. Alan feels that she is the voice of reason with a customer's outlook on things and leaves the butchering side to him.

"It is good to have an objective opinion, I am learning that side. The counter and chill are mine but the front of counter is Lesley's domain. She has a good eye for seeing things."

One of her finds was a range from JD Seasonings in Wigan. Lesley had heard about this range through some of her friends slimming efforts. But they were only available to purchase online. When Lesley enquired if they could stock the product they were just in the process of producing some JD display stands so perfect timing. AJ Jamieson were the first Scottish retailer of JD Seasoning and they are proving to be very popular with the customers. Shona extolled the benefits:-

"They are very tasty. The good thing is that they are not branded slimming products. The shopping list is on the back and the instructions are in the inside. You cannot really go wrong."

The range now has almost 30 different meal ideas, sausage casseroles to tacos and cover all seasons. You can buy online but there is a minimum order and you would have to plan ahead whereas the JD range provides inspiration for Alan's customers.

"Winning an award for our steak pies made a huge difference. That was a fine thing for us to stamp our individuality on the shop. We followed that up with burger awards.

"Customers are pleased to see that we are picking up awards. These not only highlight our products but show consistency that the high standards are obviously being continued."



Deliveries are made locally within the village and surrounding areas when required, current customers include The Walled Garden in Fochabers and The Sunninghill Hotel in Elgin.

Supplies of beef and pork are sourced from Millers of Speyside, beef and lamb from Munro's in Dingwall, Chicken and bacon from KDI in Elgin and Dalziel, TPS and Dalesman for different seasonings. Scobies supplied the new corner counter display.

At AJ Jamieson's they treat everything seriously but everything is done with a smile on their faces. Alan said:-

"I love my job. You look forward to work, I couldn't imagine having a job that wouldn't want to go to. We are known to be always laughing and joking. There is always some form of mischief, you have a caper but you do the serious stuff. People comment if we are quiet."



The team of three behind the counter get on very well and Alan is involved in football as goalkeeper coach at Highland League club, Huntly.

His football career began playing in goal for junior sides Dufftown, Islavale (in Keith) and Lossiemouth United before moving into Highland League at Rothes and going on to coach at Lossiemouth for four years. The coaching was put on hold when Alan opened the shop but returned to Huntly at the turn of the year once the shop was established.

"Priority was the shop but I knew that I could always go back to it. Saturday is our busiest retail day. Thursday and Friday are busiest production days."

Experience gained from football coaching has been put to good use at the butchers, Alan explained:-

"Even as a coach you are part of the team, you win or lose with the team. Take one of us out and the machine will not work as well."

"We have got into a routine and we are quite good at adapting. We don't do nearly. Everything is bang on. I am lucky that Shona works that way, Matthew is quickly picking this up too which is fantastic"

Clearly Alan has combined his butchery and football coaching skills. The business is young but the former goalkeeper has proved a safe pair of hands for a business that had given up all attempts to stay in the game.



The Fochabers Sausage

This is a special invention inspired by a chef at Walled Garden Cafe. He arrived in the shop one day with a lucky bag of ingredients that he challenged Alan and Shona to combine in a special sausage for him.

After creating six options the Fochabers Sausage was selected. It has proved to be a hit both in the Walled Cafe and over the counter and has even made its way into the counter as specialised sausage rolls.

This will be one to look out for in the Scottish Craft Butchers' next Speciality Sausage Evaluation.