

## Burns Butchers are the talk of the town



The meat trade has a long and full history of butcher businesses that have been passed down through the ages from one generation to the next. From the Solway Firth to the Pentland Firth there are examples of shops that proudly span five generations and more. Until these enlightened times but for some notable examples, it has usually been the male line of the family tree that has assumed the responsibility for business continuity.

Like most sons of the business Michael Burns started out as a ten year old message boy making deliveries by bicycle. His grandfather, John had owned a shop in Falkirk and Michael's father, Thomas had established a shop in Bo'ness in 1954. He worked as a printer in Glasgow before joining the family firm in 1965.

After Michael's health began to deteriorate he realised the time was coming to pass the business on to the third generation, his daughters, Jane and Emma. Younger daughter Emma, who has a degree in business management, already worked in the shop but without support and guidance of her father it looked like a daunting challenge.

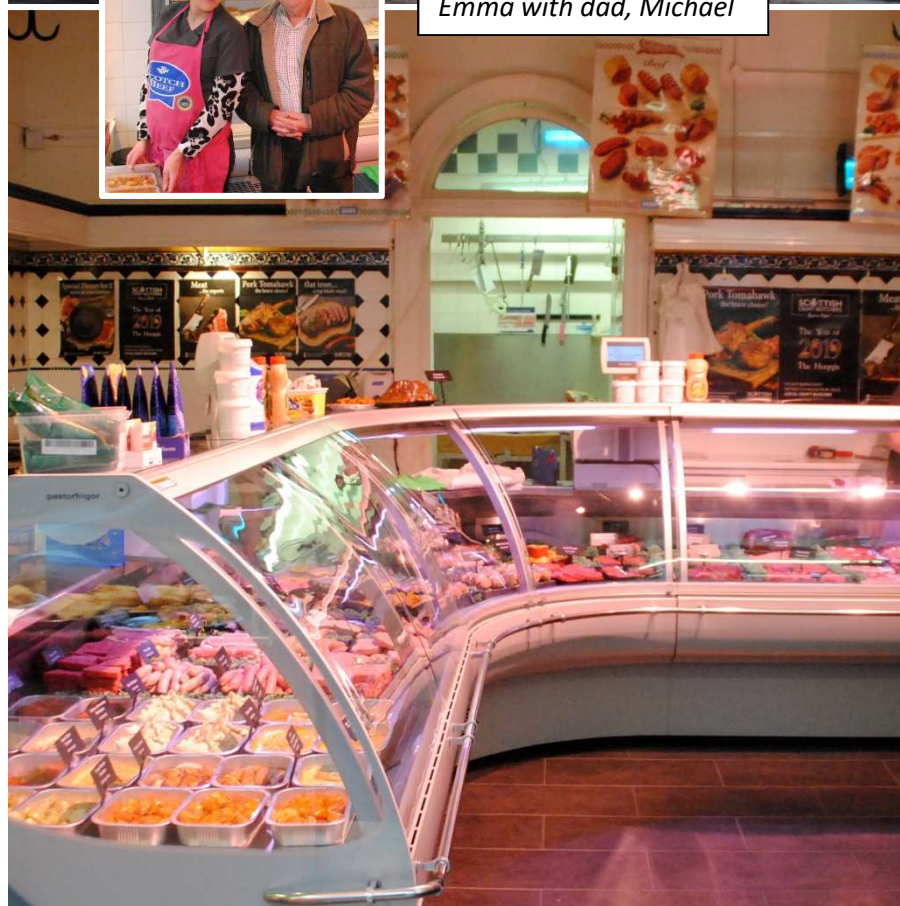


Sisters Jane and Emma





Emma with dad, Michael



It took one of those life changing moments to make Emma's older sister Jane give up her well rewarded job to join the business full time in January 2018. Emma was not averse to rolling up her sleeves and creating pastry products, but Jane did not arrive with such hands on expectations.

Having come along a pathway in supply chain management in electronics, then full time mum, the gems Jane ended up seeking were not those that could adorn her very finely manicured nails!

Initially Jane set out to discover what it was that made some butcher's businesses more successful than others. Jane soaked up advice from any source willing to give her time of day.

"I knew very quickly that, one, I was going to have to be there constantly, and two, that my hands were going to get dirty, very dirty. With no butchery experience to speak of, other than watching her dad ply his trade in years gone by, she had to learn and learn fast.

Jane says "I have come a long way. Previously I had to get others to handle tripe, liver and heart but now, it's no problem! I am working towards my Meat & Poultry Modern Apprenticeships but I certainly wouldn't call myself a butcher, eventually perhaps, however, I have a long way to go but I'm determined to get there."

With a burning desire to find out what made a good butchers shop tick, Jane embarked on a tour of butchers all over Scotland for ideas, inspiration and listening to advice from any source willing to help.

Equipped with a new found wealth of knowledge, she took on board new products and ideas that George Murphy, TPS and Peter Harrison of Dalziels and latterly Erin Conroy from Verstegen offered. Jane continued:-

"There are some fabulous butchers shops out there and I realised that people will travel for quality products. As with any industry, word of mouth and recommendations are key factors to a successful business. We want to make Burns a destination and if we are good customers will come regardless of their location, you don't have to be in a busy high street."



With a new set of eyes looking at what the shop was doing, Jane noticed that a number of the displays were somewhat basic and needed improving. Half empty trays and cabinets had to become a thing of the past if the business was to grow and become the force of old. Also, as with most high street retailers, opening hours were extended on a Thursday evening.

Bit by bit the gems that Jane had uncovered that could be applied to the shop in Bo'ness, were tried.

"We had everything but frustratingly it wasn't always on display. The plates are now kept looking fresh, proper ticketing and labelling and we have invested in new, trendy workwear for the staff.

"Our staff are key to the success of the business and I'm fortunate to have a great team around me. We have also recently invested in new ovens for the kitchen and a dry ager for front of house that has proved immensely popular with our customers.

"There is also a full kitchen refit planned for 2019 to cope with increased demand from our customers, however, trying to find a quiet week in a busy shop that's open 6 days a week will be a challenge but a great challenge to have!"

With more and more customers doing their shopping online Jane knew the business had to react. "Online marketing, particularly via the Facebook platform, is massive for us. I do a lot of my own shopping on Facebook and have now been on a number of social media training courses courtesy of the Business Gateway in Falkirk to ensure we're at the forefront of this market. I learned how to create engaging posts, the best time for posting, photography tips and how to analyse the results. I want to grow the page further as it's now become a substantial part of our business. Whatever I put on Facebook just seems to take off.

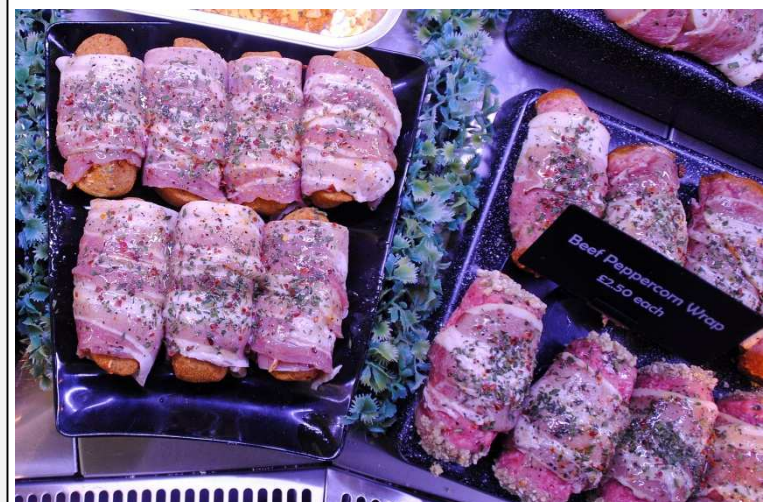
The business has a deli immediately next door to the butchers selling a selection of cooked meats, filled rolls, salads, pastry products, hot soup, bread and scones all made fresh daily. Bought in lines include Findlaters Pate, Hamilton's cheesecakes, locally sourced Egglishious eggs.

In the deli Lynne and Yvonne are assisted by chef, Barbara. Altogether there ten full time staff and one part time. Staff in both the deli and the butchers have changed a bit under the new management but Jane proudly claims "we have the right people on the bus and they are in the right seats!"

Butcher, Daniel Tonner, joined the business in June last year and along with carrying out all our butchering he has helped develop a massive pastry and pie trade. Full of enthusiasm, he is dedicated and works a huge number of hours getting it right.



*At your service: Daniel, Barry, Barbara, Janis, Jane, Anne, Lynne and Emma*







This very impressively performing shop proves that it does not need expensive refits to boost business. Yes, the trendy new dry ager now occupies space in the front shop but the shop is steeped in character, is distinctly traditional and has that fresh ambiance that the discerning customer expects. More an artisan food shop than a butchers as known to previous generations. Jane continued:-

"We need to provide what the customer wants as tastes and eating habits have evolved over time. The customer doesn't want pork chops and lamb chops any more, they want convenience foods, chef prepared meals, to be able to come and get five days worth of shopping. They want top quality meat prepared for them to pop straight in the oven."

Burns in Bo'ness buy the best they can, beef and lamb are sourced from Tom Clark, Westmuir Farm at West Calder, pork from Robertsons in Ardrossan.

As well as all the new added value products that they have introduced, Daniel has now rolled out a Skinny range that has taken off as well. Ideas are never ending. Every idea is tried and the successes are promoted.

What a remarkable turnaround in this business since Jane and Emma grabbed the bull by the horns. At the eastern end of the Antoine Wall, Bo'ness has been on the map from as far back as Roman times but with Thomas Burns Butchers the talk of the town, Bo'ness will long be on the map for discerning meat lovers.

