

Alexander's for Specialist Pies



Strathaven is one of those Scottish place names that challenges newsreaders and traffic reporters, with many failing to grasp that Straiven as it is known is derived from the Gaelic: Strath Aibhne, meaning "valley of the Avon".

The 7500 residents of this historic market town in South Lanarkshire have long got accustomed to being miscalled. Strathaven is located 18 miles south of Glasgow and is a burgh of barony having been granted a Royal Charter in 1450.

Despite competition from the nearby large towns of East Kilbride and Hamilton, Strathaven still has a number of craft and gift shops, alongside the well known town centre names.

There is a fascinating mix of shops, and coffee houses and a variety of fine restaurants. The town's focal point is the attractive area, known as Common Green, where markets were once held.

It is here that James Alexander Butchers is situated and the business benefits from the free parking on its doorstep and there is a steady flow of customers make use of the time limited facility.



Jim Alexander started his apprenticeship in the Co-operative in Larkhall, then moving to Watts van sales for three years where he covered an area including Strathaven, Chapelton, Sandford, Stonehouse, Glassford and East Kilbride. The three Watt brothers ran eight butchers shops in South Lanarkshire and ultimately an abattoir in Strathaven. Jim progressed to become manager of the Watts shop in Carluke and subsequently when offered the opportunity to be an owner, Jim Alexander took over the Watt brothers Strathaven shop in October 1989.

Scott Alexander left secondary school at Christmas 1989 and has worked in the shop ever since learning the craft butchery skills from his father. When his father retired in 2006 at the age of 66, Scott took over the running of the shop.

The shop has a staff of six including four part time. Kelly has been with him for 10 years and Rory has completed his Modern Apprenticeship in Meat and Poultry Skills in the four years since he left school to go and work in Alexander's.





Scott, Kelly and Rory



The shop went through a major refurbishment in 2008 with new walls, floors, new CrioCabin display counters and dairy cabinet. All the equipment was upgraded as well to set the shop up to attract new customers.

Scott sources his beef and lamb through Malones. They help him to try and support local farmers as much as possible selecting Alexanders predominantly beef reared at Willie Purdon's farm at Stravenhouse Farm at Law in the heart of the Clyde valley.

The farm of 340 acres of grassland has been home to the Purdon's since 1990 and they stock up to 450 beef cattle with 70 suckler cows.

Pork is supplied from Robertson's of Ardrossan, who has been producing quality Scottish Pork since 1870 from the heart of Ayrshire.

With very small number of exceptions, Alexander's trade is all retail. Customers can be local to Strathaven but are also attracted from well beyond. Products are important to generating footfall with steak pies and mince rounds being major attractions.





Of the added value products, Chicken Balmoral is a favourite even after it changed its name from chicken, haggis and bacon wrap. A range of sausages is offered from beef, pork and onion sausage on to the likes of Black Diamond and Italian sausage.

It can surprise some customers but a Strathaven steak pie is not just a traditional Steak Pie, Scott also sells Steak and Sausage Pies. Scott explained:- "We are in an area where this is what is expected of a Steak Pie and we have a good trade for both our Steak and Sausage pie and Traditional Steak Pie."

Alexander's won awards for their Steak Pie and Steak and Sausage Pies in 2009, that still boosts sales of pies and like, lots of other craft butchers, pies are a major seller at New Year. Without giving away too many secrets Scott reasoned why his pies had such popularity:-

"We are not scared to put the best of ingredients in our pies and we do invest much time and care into making our steak pies. They contain good gravy and our puff pastry lids come from the Artisan Buon Giorno Bakery in East Kilbride."

