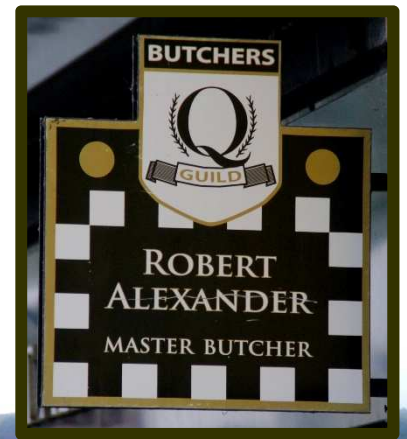
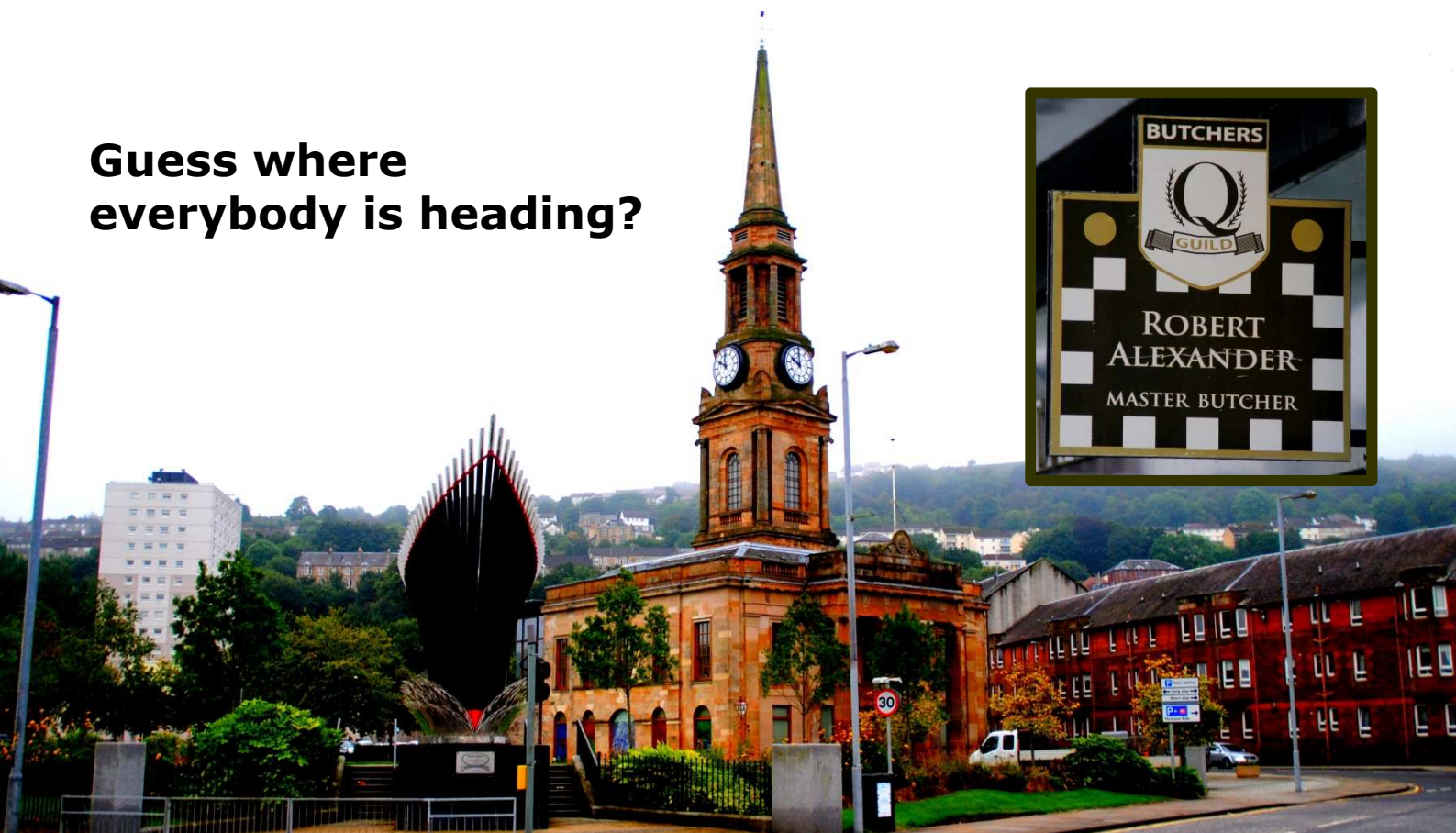


**Guess where everybody is heading?**



Its name may fill west coasters with pride but the lack of depth in the river Clyde created the need for Port Glasgow. Originally named Newark, it emerged as a port for the nearby city in 1668 and became Port Glasgow in 1775. The town was home to dry docks and shipbuilding from as far back as 1762.

Supplying shipyards formed an important base for the firm of Robert Alexander that has traded out of five different locations in the town. The founder, the grandfather of the current owner Drew McKenzie, had worked in a couple of shops in the East End and in MacKenzie's in Greenock before in 1941 being moved by his employer to a branch shop in Port Glasgow. Drew recalls the story:-

"Grandpa wasn't too happy because the shop was only doing a beast and a couple of lambs a week. He said to them 'send me up a couple of beasts and send me ten lambs' and he filled the window with the ten lambs. What he didn't sell he sent back. It went from sending eight lambs back, to seven to eventually selling all ten lambs."







A significant factor in establishing that Port Glasgow shop was supplying shipyards during the war effort. Its location opposite the yard gates proved an important one. Drew continued:-

"In 1941 it was the start of industrial canteens. Men were no longer expected to go home for their dinner and they had to get fed to maintain full production. 15,000 men worked in them and we had the shipyard canteens business from the day they opened to the day they shut."

Robert Alexander was able to purchase his shop in 1959 and thrived from supplying the Glen Yard, the Kingston, Scott Lithgow, Ferguson's and Kincaids. The men all worked in the shipyards and the women all worked in factories such as Black's, Playtex, Sangamo, and AMP.

"The women were paid cash on a Friday afternoon and they would come into the shop and we would be very busy. The town was booming until the yards shut and then there was a major depression about the place."

Just 22 minutes away from Glasgow Central on the 'blue trains' Port Glasgow has become a commuter town for Glasgow. A regeneration company called Riverside Inverclyde has had major success promoting the whole of Inverclyde and while retailing in traditional shopping centres may appear to be challenged, Port Glasgow is somewhat different.

There is a major superstore but it is at the end of the main street, the vacated shipyard land on the south bank of the Clyde has all been reclaimed and the shopping emphasis is moving from nearby Greenock to Port Glasgow. Parking is free and strictly governed by parking attendants but does ensure essential spaces for shoppers. A new retail park will complement the 'village' like shopping centre.



**Drew's mum, Mrs Irene McKenzie has been involved in the business since the age of 10. She still works three afternoons a week though it is fair to say her job title is now probably 'consultant' - there really are few things that Drew does in the business without sounding her out for advice beforehand.**





Alexander's initially replaced their shipyard trade with catering business but now Drew feels happy that the business is back to serving customers at the counter and home deliveries:-

"We have started doing Friday night deliveries and it has paid off. Even if it is only 10 or 12 orders they are good orders. We are predominantly retail now but serve a few hotels, nursing homes and local garden centre."

Alexander's Mince Monday's have been incredibly successful claims Drew putting Monday trade up beside Saturday's. Adopting an idea he got from another Q Guild member, the Port Glasgow Mince Monday's - buy one, get one free - have been ongoing famously for the last two years. Supported by quirky Facebook posts this has attracted lots of business and customers invariably buy more than just mince.

On a Saturday local offices are closed and Alexander's becomes a destination shop. The retail side has been well worth concentrating on. Wholesale and catering markets were low return distractions but there are rewards when attention is purely focussed on selling and satisfying customers' needs. Drew and his staff of 12 take time and effort, he continued:-

"The display and range of products are important, the competitive advantage comes from developing and selling products and everything is prepared on the premises. Supermarkets do not make anything that we make, or in the way we make it."



**Facebook post: It's another Mince Monday and guess where everybody is heading.**







Having been brought up buying live at Paisley market, Drew still brings in sides of beef but now sources the best quality beef and lamb from John Scott Meats in Paisley. Pork comes from Robertsons in Ardrossan, chicken from Vallance at Glasgow market and pastry for the large range of pie products is supplied by the Bells Food Group.

Customers return because of their good experiences with shopping at Alexander's. An extensive 'pick and mix' range is offered in a smartly presented brochure. This very popular offer generates strong and return sales; five items for £25 and nine items for £40.

"We are in a working class area and you need to cater for everyone by offering value for money. It is a simple promotion, people understand it, customers know that they can get nine items for £40. Someone who might have just spent £10 can spend £40. "

Thinking about how to get through the busy Christmas period Robert Alexander concentrate on set price packs all made up ready for their customers to collect. A manual system has a proven track record and orders are pre paid to reduce waiting time.

Thanks to the continued regeneration of Port Glasgow this Clydeside town will have plenty to sustain Alexander's for many years to come. After forty years working in the business and withstanding an era of great change, Drew McKenzie has refined his philosophy:-

"Now it's not about getting bigger, it's about doing things better and more efficiently."



#### **Award Winning Butcher-**

Twice Diamond winners at the Smithfield Awards  
2016 Q Guild GB Barbecue Champion  
2008 West of Scotland Sliced Sausage Champion  
2010 West of Scotland Beef Link Champion

"I cannot stress enough the benefits of taking part in and occasionally winning these National Competitions and no one is happier than our customers when we do so."

*Drew McKenzie*