



Having set out to fulfil an ambition of running a coffee shop just how Bel Forbes ended up with a butchers shop is somewhat puzzling. She always had an interest in food but trained as a nurse initially. All her holiday time was consumed working in catering while at school and college but that seemed behind her when working in high dependency Orthopaedics and Surgical at Doctor Grays Hospital in Elgin. Bel explained:-

“When we moved into the area from Morayshire in 2006 I wanted a coffee shop and to bake. But the only premises for sale at the time was AB Simpson the butchers because Alistair wanted to retire. I immediately thought right change the use of the shop into a nice coffee shop selling cup cakes and a few gifts.”

However, when her husband John examined the economics of the existing business, he questioned the move since the butchers shop appeared to be a very viable business. Bel’s potential coffee shop in Edzell never happened but she took on the butchers’ shop.

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Bel’s Butchers, 25a High Street, Edzell DD9 7TE Tel: 01356 648409 www.belsbutchers.co.uk



She admits that she did not have a clue about the workings of a butchers shop but Alistair did a three month handover staying on after selling the business so that Bel could meet all his customers and continue supplies as normal.

"That made my life much easier. It was a steep learning curve because I had to learn it all. I didn't really change anything for the first six months because I had to get to know how it worked first."



The business had majored on the catering market and retail played a very small part. Bel's initial priority went into transforming the front shop so that the retail side could be developed. Customers' views were canvassed and focus was placed on meeting their demands and expectations. The result is that trade has grown immensely since the new owner took over the business.



The shop sparkles. Under the distinct blue awning the iconic butcher's bike attracts you to a specialist meat shop where standards are high throughout.

On entering the immediate impact of the well filled display cabinets is to catch the eye. The trays are all neatly arranged, meat expertly cut with tempting meat products all smartly ticketed. The effect is faultless and creates interest in the customers' eyes.



Raw meat is on the left, Ready to Eat on the right and the assurance that everything is handled appropriately is blatantly demonstrated. Bel is assisted by 2 full time butchers, John and Stewart and a team of 9 part timers.

Pastries and the ready to eat range was introduced and Bel admits that she was advised by other butchers as to on-going development. The business was already begin to motor but it stepped up a gear in 2009 when John joined Bel from a butcher in Broughty Ferry.

John's innovative meat products heightened the variety and quality of the fresh meat range recognised at the highest level when his marinated Lamb won the Diamond Award for Best Lamb Product in Scotland in the 2010 Meat to Go Evaluation. Bel claims this made a big difference to not only lamb but overall sales and had a major positive effect to the businesses profile both locally and regionally.



The premises have a back shop that is visible from the counter. Butchers at work are clearly visible emphasising that the craft skills are on hand to respond to customers' requests. Beyond that there is a separate purpose designed kitchen for ready to eat preparation including the production area for a great range of pastries.



Bel's husband, John who works for East Coast Viners Grain at Drumlithie, manages the pig producing side of the business so pork is family supplied and local. Beef is sourced directly from the farm of specialist producer Tom Stevenson at Balmacolly in Perthshire and Lambs, often from the local glens, are sourced from Stirling market.



A range of cooked meats, pate and ready to eat products such as stovies and macaroni cheese have all been successfully introduced. Bel is delighted with the response and pursuing her policy of steady progress will continue to use her great interest in food to expand on this. A Rationale oven has assisted Bel - she did not know how she ever did without it.



Bel trained to be a nurse before her interest in food eventually became too great to ignore. Since 2006 she has grasped all the factors that need to come together to create an impressive modern butchers business that clearly does not miss the importance of the traditions of the industry. The 800 inhabitants of Edzell have enjoyed the transformation of this butchers business. It maybe didn't require intensive care but Bel Forbes and her team have certainly nursed this shop into a very healthy concern.

