

## Bruce: winning the battle for independents

While travelling to Fraserburgh at the top right tip of Scotland, your mind somehow starts pumping the lyrics to the 1985 Talking Heads hit *The Road to Nowhere*. Nobody just passes through Fraserburgh. It's 60 miles east of Elgin and 40 miles north of Aberdeen but with a population of 12,500 and despite the woes of Fisheries Policy is a bustling place.

The song opens "*Well we know where we're going*" and that is oh so true for the town's SFMTA member Alistair Bruce. Trading as Bruce of the Broch the business of his Guild of Q butchers shop is now dwarfed by the pie trade that he has developed but it wasn't always so.



When they moved into their current butcher's shop in 1990 supplying 75 fishing boats was around 40% of their trade. Tesco's arrival five years ago had a detrimental effect on the town centre, the three butchers survived but the number of shoppers in the centre dropped and it took two or three years to recover. Worse still in one year no fewer than 84 fishing boats were decommissioned. The Fraserburgh fleet has since declined to around 30 boats and even their time at sea is severely restricted.





Ally explained the seriousness of the situation:- "We lost 40 odd boats in a year and were faced with having to pay off two or three guys but we didn't."

His butcher's shop now has staff of ten; seven butchers and three part timers who work on the separate Bakery counter. Beef is bought live at Thainstone Mart and supplemented by cuts from Mathers and Rhinds of Elgin. Self service opportunities provide customers with the chance to pick up ready made salads and meals, wonderful desserts and fresh local fruit.



The meat and meat products are freshly cut, innovative and attractive but one section of the cabinet makes it hard to miss the real reason why Bruce of the Broch is moving from success to success. Pies of all sorts of shapes and sizes make up an attractive display but that is just the tip of the iceberg as far as this business is concerned.

The demise of the fish processing in the Broch, as all the locals call the town, was not a disaster but rather an opportunity in the eyes of this local butcher.





Faced with changing trade Ally Bruce diversified into pies in a big way. He looked further afield for customers and created a production and distribution capability to marvel. Down beside the harbour a processing plant for fish now has an EC Meat Products licence.

This unit employs 30 staff who begin at 5.00am to turn out products that the businesses three vans distribute six days per week in an area as far south as Montrose and as far west as Inverness. All sorts of pies are made. Production can be anything between 20,000 and 30,000 pies per week; 25,000 would be an average week.

The pie production is supplied directly from the butchers shop and it is 'the best of stuff' that is prepared and sent down to the four chefs who prepare all the fillings for the pies and ready meals. No bases or proprietary mixes are used here; these chefs make up all their own sauces from scratch.





Their own separate bakery unit produces all the pie shells and pastry to maintain 100% control over the product as well as contributing big savings. The bakers there work from 8.00 at night until 6.00 in the morning. They supply the butchers shop, and a small baker's shop that Ally runs from a rented property but the bulk of the pastry output is for further use in pie production.



Bruce of the Broch supply Co-ops and Somerfields but has resisted overture from major multiples. Ally feels that the pressure that he might come under could tempt cutting corners and diluting quality to meet their price expectations and that is just not something he would subscribe to.

Another opportunity was waiting to be taken and since this one just happened a further production facility has been added. Another product that he was selling in his own shops had taken the eye. Eight or nine months ago Ally received an approach from one of the shops he supplied with pies asking 'why are you not giving us

sandwiches?' Really it wasn't something that Ally had contemplated but given a fortnight he had the labels all worked out and 40 sandwiches went out. From the small beginning they now produce 3000 packs of sandwiches per week; all kinds of sandwiches – seven different fillings, four different buns making 28 different variations.

"That is why we went down the road of an automatic buttering machine, conveyor belt and dedicated clean room" said Ally. Now he is on the Road to Everywhere not so much Talking Heads but Turning Heads. Location is not everything but sometimes he'd like to be closer to the major markets:-

"Only problem we have is that we are too far away to hit any big population with the exception of Aberdeen. After that there is a jump of 70 miles to Dundee whereas suppliers in the Central Belt probably have a market of a couple of million."



Meat has always been the business of the Bruce family. In 1886 James Bruce an Aberdeen man returned from Bloemfontein in South Africa to get married.

He moved to Fraserburgh and started a butchers shop in Kirk Brae with help from his wife Charlotte. The business grew and they moved to a new shop in Castle Street.

There were now six children in the family James, Albert, Dod, Charlotte, Dorothy and Nan, who all became involved in the business from an early age.

When James Bruce died in 1932 the family split the business up and the brothers all started trading by themselves. Albert Bruce started a shop in School St in Fraserburgh, this shop took a direct hit with a bomb during the second world war. After the cessation of hostilities of the Second World War, Albert had to rebuild the business from scratch. This he did with the help of his son Albert (Abbie).

Abbie continued to build up the business after his father took a stroke and had to retire early. In 1974 his son Alistair joined the business and still runs the business today. In 1990 they moved to new premises in the main square in Fraserburgh.

In 1993 their old premises in Frithside St, were converted into a bakery with a kitchen. They employed a chef to make all the pies and pasties for their 2 shops and have not looked back since.



Castle Street Shop 1916



Before the Bomb in School Street

In 2000 due to demand they started to wholesale Pie range and in 2004 added a Ready Meal range. In April 2004 a factory unit was opened and it has an EEC Meat products license.

[www.gourmetmeats.co.uk](http://www.gourmetmeats.co.uk)  
Taking the product to a wider audience, is the business' extremely impressive online. Having built a reputation on supplying the very best Aberdeenshire meat available, they decided that they should supply their Award Winning Pies, Ready-made meals, Bakery goods and Fish online.



**Gourmet Meats from Bruce of the Broch**  
National & International Award Winners

Home
Wholesale
Delivery
History
Contact

**Products**

Home

Beef >

Pork & Bacon >

Burgers >

Speciality >

Haggis & Puddings >

Chef's Pies >

Chef's Meals >

Fish >

Bakery >

➔ Award winning Scottish Butcher

➔ Secure online purchase

➔ Top quality meats, meals and much more!

Aberdeenshire has always been renowned as the "Food Garden of Scotland". An area blessed with the quality of land air and water which combine into perfect pastures which feed and nourish the finest livestock. Bruce of the Broch are members of the Guild of Butchers, The Guild of Scotch Quality Meat Suppliers and a member of the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders - a sure sign that however demanding the diner, however exotic the chef, you can be certain the meat is prepared to exacting standards. Everyone can be confident of never being sold short when looking for those special cuts.

Bruce of the Broch are dedicated to providing the highest quality of service and produce from farm to plate, ensuring that whenever you buy, you are simply guaranteed the best.

Our customers know we have special flavours and textures which cannot be found elsewhere. These are in the form of recipes, some having been in the family for 4 generations.



**Basket**

**Best sellers**

Rillet Steak (Gentleman's)

Sirlon Steak (Gentleman's)

Rump Steak

Rump Steak (Gentleman's)

Rib-Eye Steak

Home | Steak | Joints | Pork | Bacon | Sausages | Burgers | Barbeque | Chef's specialities | Marinades | Coaters  
Haggis | Puddings | Pies | Family pies | Chef's meals | Fresh fish | Seasonal fish | Bakery | Wholesale | Delivery | History | Contact