

Down the Portobello Road



BRAVEHEART

Joe Findlay's success in winning the 1988 Haggis Championship brought fame to Edinburgh's seaside resort. The publicity that spun from the win drew tourists and haggis connoisseurs to the south bank of the Forth where haggis was displacing donkeys as the number one attraction.

Alongside Joe Findlay's boost in sales, neighbouring traders welcomed the increased turnover that accompanied greater footfall. Television coverage including BBC2's Rick Stein's *Food Heroes* and Ainsley Harriet's *50 Things to Eat before your Die* turned Portobello's butcher into a national personality. It comes as no surprise then that when the local community formed a group to oppose a Tesco Superstore on the site of the former power station, their haggis champion was one of those leading the battle to save local enterprise from the march of the multiples.



It was equally appropriate when the campaign made a fund raising calendar to the theme of movies, that Joe Findlay would be cast as Braveheart. The calendar raised £7000 of the £23000 that The Portobello Campaign Against The Superstore (PCATS) raised to fund expert witnesses to present the case for refusing Tesco's proposals.

Friends of the Earth and MSPs from all parties joined the Portobello traders in protests that included pickets outside the City Chambers

The application for an 85,000 sq ft superstore on the old Scottish power site was lodged in August 2003.

After a period of consultation during which a petition bearing 3,000 signatures and more than 300 letters of objection were sent into the Council, the developers asked the Scottish Ministers to call in the application on grounds of non-determination. At two planning committee meetings in July and August 2004, the Council's Planning Committee agreed that they were unanimously "minded to refuse" the application. This meant that they would oppose the application at the subsequent public inquiry, which started on 1 March 2005.

PCATS were represented at the public inquiry with the help of Friends of the Earth. Funds were raised to pay for expert witnesses to help us with their case, and there was a period of intensive fundraising involving the production of a calendar, the jumble sale, the ceilidh, bag packing at Scotmid, a Burns Supper and pop quiz.



The Public Inquiry concluded that the superstore would have to be successfully integrated with the town centre and not cause significant traffic problems. "This proposal does not do that, would be free-standing and would adversely affect the quality of the shopping environment of Portobello" Then there were the words that was music to the ears:-

....I hereby dismiss your client's appeals and refuse to grant outline planning permissions for the developments....

Braveheart had told Tesco to take their trolleys, take their checkouts but leave Portobello to enjoy the freedom of a vibrant High Street. That victory for commonsense spurred Joe into refurbishing his front shop and into creating a separate cooked meats and pastries shop next door to his butcher's shop.

All this is a far cry from the Edinburgh shop in Rodney Street he took over from Alex Murray when his boss died in 1976. Joe grew the business from a two man business to a busy shop that sustained four butchers but the opening of a Wm Low Supermarket drastically affected business and on the recommendation in 1986 of fellow butcher Ian MacLeod, Joe took on the business owned by WG Adams but trading as Matthews in Portobello High Street.

The larger premises were a great success and Haggis soon sealed the future. The business has steadily grown to become a well-known and well-respected supplier of the highest quality meat products. Prizes for sausages, bacon and black pudding continued to keep the business busy and increasingly popular.

The notoriety brought customers from all over Scotland and the personal attention that comes with it proved to be a winning formula.

Intriguingly the shop doesn't open on a Monday but the affect of changing to five day trading made no difference to sales. Joe explained:- "We worried about it at first, is this going to work? I just wanted to try it and it made no difference whatsoever."



The beef and lamb selected by Joe Findlay at St Boswells Market and pork from Tom Wilkinson's Hillfoot Farm near Hawick give customers the kind of assurance that they now seek.

Bacon that has been home cured for over 20 years and the ever growing range of sausages has led to a factory being created in 2005. In total Findlays now employ 19 staff including six ladies and two Saturday girls.





*Above: Eileen and Helen,
Right: Joe with his daughter Caroline*



Joe is delighted with his new factory where all his much sought after products can be made. "It gives us space that we didn't have as we had become increasingly constricted in the High street premises as people and product filled up all the available space." After searching for premises for over a year a former laundry and candlemaker was turned into a valuable facility.

Now with the capacity to tackle the opportunities Findlays look forward to their fifth visit exhibiting at the BBC Good Food Show in Birmingham where he finds his products sell fantastically well.

Confident for the future Joe looks forward to spending less time in the business as his daughter Caroline takes a greater role.

