

Matured for good taste on Speyside

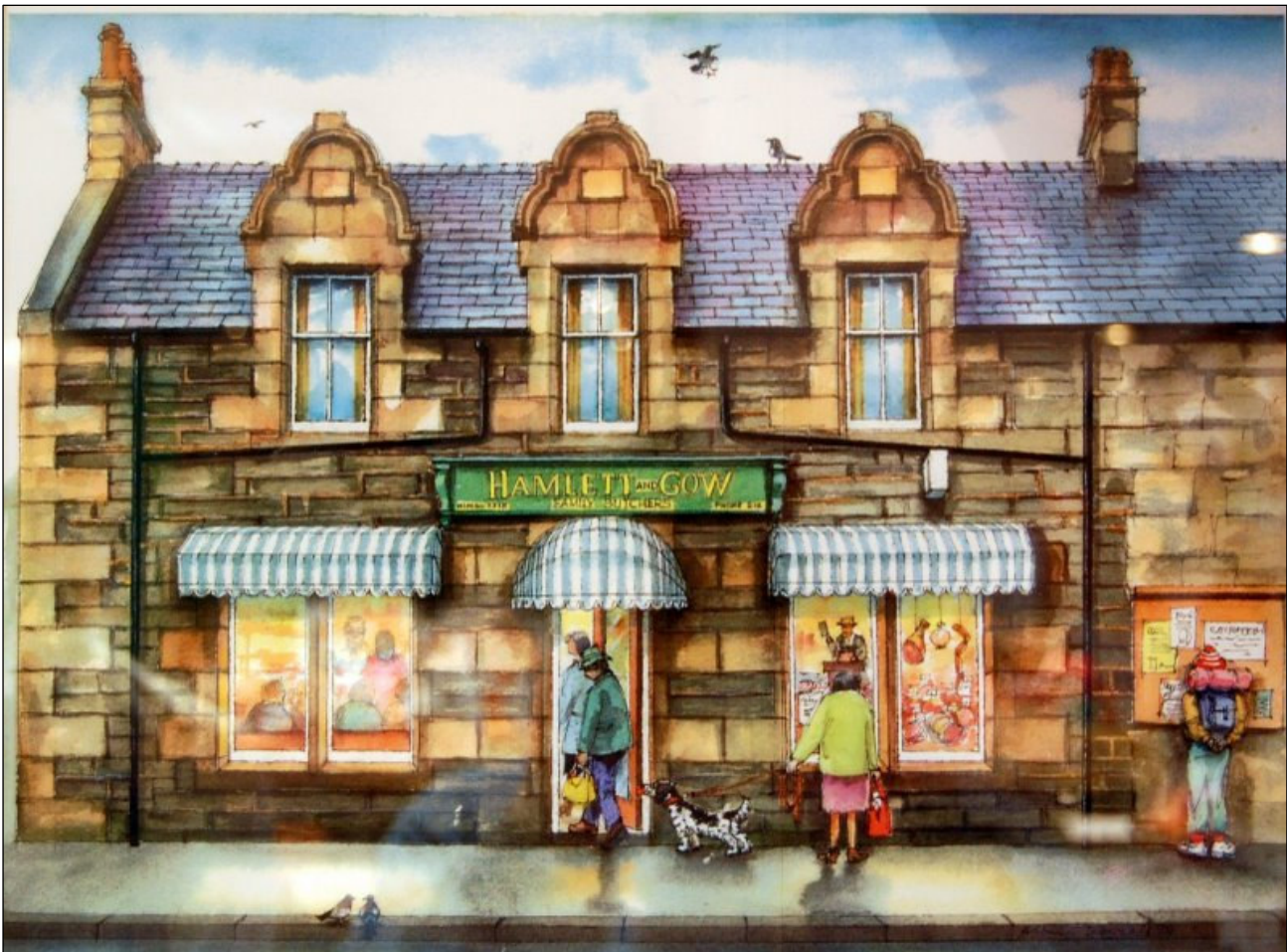


Kingussie is probably best known for being home of the dominant team in Shinty. It is in the heart of Badenoch country and it sits on one of Scotland's most famous rivers just over seventy A9 miles north of Perth. History oozes out of the area with the ruins of the early 18th century Ruthven Barracks dominant above the flood plain of the River Spey.

Locals and the numerous visitors from March to October enjoy the peace of the village. The shops, hotels and cafes have something for everyone but there is little doubt that the village butchers is a gem in their midst.

As you approach George Gow's shop there is that classy green and gold livery. Even before you pass through the door you can tell this is going to be no ordinary butchers shop. The refrigerated cabinets stretch out in front of you and as well as looking fresh, regimented and bright the display has a wide range of local meats.

Tickets and notices are especially smart and there is also an attractive foody smell that appears to have lingered from firing off steak pies. All this adds to the very pleasant ambiance of the shop which is just slightly more than you might have expected to find in this Highland village.





Knightsbridge has had a strong influence this Kingussie shop since Stuart Hamlett took over the village butchers in 1973. The son of a Liverpool butcher, Stuart worked in Harrods for a number of years before a friend alerted him to the business that was for sale on Speyside.

Stuart went into partnership with George Gow four or five years later and although retiring in 2001 Stuart still comes in to help at busy times.

The shop is the third shop occupied by the butchers' business having steadily edged further and further away from the corner of King Street and High Street. Twenty years ago when the current shop was transformed from laundrette to butchers there was no difficulty in retaining a clean look. A back shop was built out behind the shop and the result was a very workable unit that serves its customers well.



George Gow was born in Grantown where his grandfather had a farm but in 1960 when George was just four years old his father and mother moved to Inveruglas Farm near Kingussie.

George left Kingussie High School at the age of 15 and maybe attracted to the idea because his uncle was a butcher in Grantown, he went to train in Jim Clark's butchers shop in the village's main street.

When Jim Clark announced he was going to sell the business, George went to work for MacKenzie's in Newtonmore but after Stuart Hamlett took over the Clark shop George returned to Kingussie.



Trading as George Gow for the last seven years the shop attracts customers from Grantown to Fort William. As well as the main over the counter trade, the shop supplies some caterers and shooting estates and has a fairly hectic lunchtime appointment with pupils from George's old school piling in, mainly in search of pies and sausage rolls. Own make Chicken Curry pies, Macaroni and Cheese pies and Pork pies extend the choice.



A significant amount of sales comes from sending meat to customers in England. No advertising is required here; the customers are those who have discovered the Kingussie butcher while on holiday. Gow's award winning Haggis is also wholesaled to England.



The locally finished beef and locally reared lamb ideally compliment the shop. George manages to keep the shop going with lamb from his own farm between September and April. His preference is for Texel crossed Suffolks from his 150 breeding ewes. Cast ewes yield mutton. George claims his mutton would classify as R4L and the older sheepmeat proves a great hit in the shop attracting customers from far and wide. A minimum of two weeks maturation ensures a good eating experience especially when the longer, slower cooking instructions that are issued with it are followed. "It is wonderful. I was brought up on mutton."

At his Inveruglas Farm five miles away between Kincaig and Kingussie, George finishes some store steers himself, Angus crosses if they are available. The livestock are taken personally by George to Grantown abattoir every Wednesday afternoon. Pork comes from Mr Craigie at Milton of Kilravock near Nairn because it is consistently good. Local estates supply venison and game including partridge and grouse.

One of the most successful add on sales comes from Red Rooster potatoes from the Black Isle with the supplier finding it hard to believe just how popular the sale is in the butchers.

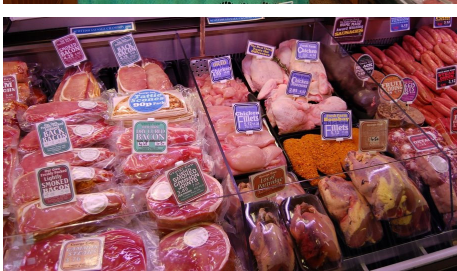




George Gow's shop has no trouble being busy with the peak coming through from spring to October with the vast majority of customers all greeted by their first names. Open Monday to Saturday with a half day on a Wednesday there are three employees - Wayne, William and Frank - plus George and Stuart part time. Wife Nicki does the books and ticket design. Wayne has been at Gows since leaving Clarks in Newtonmore five years ago.



Everyone pitches in to produce as many steak pies as possible for new year. Bacon is cured from the Milton of Kilravock pigs, sliced and vac packed. George reflected on how things change:- "It's not a road I thought I'd ever go down but it is so convenient especially for holidaymakers."



George never stops thinking about his products:- "At one time we sold shoulder lamb on the bone, shoulder chops and cuts like that but nowadays customers don't want that. It is the diced options that they go for. Over the summer we do a bit more in sauces and marinades and change things as the seasons go."



The business has won many awards for its products and for its displays. The most recent successes were winning the 2008 North of Scotland Black Pudding title and picking up a Silver Medal in last year's Scottish Potted Meat Evaluation. This is an endorsement that comes as no surprise to customers, in fact it's almost expected since there's more to Speyside than just whisky!



The BBC TV series *Monarch of the Glen* was filmed in and around the area of Kingussie. Ardverikie Estate, where *Monarch of the Glen* was filmed, is about 12 miles from Kingussie but the Laird of Glenbogle and many of the cast popped in and out of George Gow's while the nine month filming was ongoing for each series. Alistair MacKenzie and Richard Briers were good customers while shooting episodes.



The shop was used in the series and some might recall Ewan and Donald uncovering the wreck of a World War Two German fighter plane in the loch when on a fishing expedition. Isobel, Golly, Molly and Donald are disturbed by the emergence of the plane. They all know that the local butcher, Irvine Taylor, was pilot of the plane. Fortunately for George the butcher's role was taken by an actor.

