

Ballater – Bigger, Brighter, Better

It is unlikely that Hogmanay 2015 will ever be forgotten in the Aberdeenshire village of Ballater. The phrase out with the old and in with the new took on an extreme meaning as Storm Frank did not wait for the bells and 40 hours in advance thoroughly dampened the impending celebrations.

Around 600 people were evacuated from their homes in Ballater with flood-stricken residents airlifted or led by boat to safety. 100 local businesses were also devastated as the River Dee swept through the village.

Local butchers HM Sheridan have been at the forefront of driving the revival of the village. They were preparing for one of their busiest days of the year when the flood water reached their premises in Bridge Street and despite efforts to keep the water out using sacks of haggis mix and oatmeal, clearing lower shelves in their fridges it was impossible to save anything as the water rose three feet in the shop within twenty minutes. Reluctantly at 9.30am on Wednesday 30th December they were forced to abandon everything.

Returning to their shop on the morning of 31st co-owners Barry Florence and John Sinclair discovered that the flood water had gone down almost as quickly as it had risen but Barry tells the sad story:-

"We couldn't believe what we saw, it was like everything had been tumbled in a washing machine. We spent that day filling two skips and later a third from the freezer. The entire shop was contaminated by heating oil and dirty water.

"We wanted to open again as quickly as possible but on that first day we did not know how. We remained positive throughout but it was a great relief when our insurance company, the NFU Mutual came up with the words 'yes you are covered'. The detail could be sorted out after that. We know that we were fortunate because that was not the case for everybody."





Above: Bridge Street, Ballater on 30th December 2015
 Right above: Sheridans on 31st December
 Below: Bridge Street, Ballater on 24th October 2016
 Right below: Sheridans on 24th October 2016



Sheridans had refitted their shop in 2012 so it was heart breaking to see their pride and joy wrecked by Storm Frank. Their shopfitters, Watco reacted quickly to the situation recognising that a total refurbishment was necessary. "We could not have asked for better support, Willie Waugh from Watco was tremendous" explained Barry.

Colin Hewitson supplied new Rational and Blue Seal Turbofan ovens, a Rose boiler, Blue Seal Hob, Kolbe mincer grinder and a Talsa power filler to name just the larger items. When the building was prepared for Watco to come in they worked from 8 in the morning until 9 at night for two weeks. It felt like their electrician Russell Hughes was never off the job and the premises were up and running within 13 weeks.

NFU Mutual even paid for an opening night. Trade returned quickly because the village was badly in need of a butchers. Barry and John are most appreciative of their very local customers and grateful for the encouraging support they received both in the aftermath of the storm and ongoing.

The knock on effect on Ballater included loss of holiday lets as locals were re-housed and consequently loss of tourist business. Two fires had destroyed two local attractions – the old Deeside line railway station and museum and at the Darroch Learg Hotel. As the shops reopen and these two fire wrecked buildings are repaired 2017 looks like being a much better and brighter year for Ballater.

"I have no qualms about recommending Watco, especially their planning and the timescale turning around our job within 12 weeks." Barry Florence, HM Sheridan.



Throughout Ballater's troubles their most famous patrons have taken a very keen interest and assisted where they could. Balmoral Castle and Birkhall are just upstream from Ballater and the Royal family are big supporters of the village. The Prince of Wales made several visits after the flood, indeed he has set up an outreach project from the Dumfries House Trust to establish a restaurant and community shop in Ballater. The Rothesay Rooms and the Highgrove Shop will open in November 2016. The Queen visited business in Ballater in October 2016

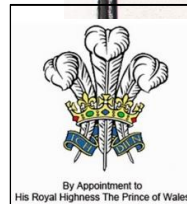
HM Sheridan boasts Royal Warrants from both Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, Duke of Rothesay.



When it comes to buying butcher meat there's not many places where you would hear customers remark "if it's good enough for the Queen, it good enough for me."



Beef and lamb bought on the hoof from a pool of local farmers and killed at Inverurie. This is augmented with cuts and pork from Scotbeef. Bacon is cured on the premises and venison comes only one mile from the nearby Glen Muick Estate and game too, from local estates. The hot smoked venison and duck is somewhat a local delicacy.



Behind the scenes there are facilities to bone the meat, make a range of over 30 sausages, 20 different burgers and 25 different pies and pastry. They even make their own Cloutie Dumpling and a variety of ready meals are produced by their chef, Popeye who is constantly looking at product development potential keeps the products coming.

Awards have been won for haggis, steak pies and sausages. Gluten Free products are made and Barry can clearly demonstrate that what makes this business tick has got much more than Royal Warranties to it:-

"It's that fine line between trying to be a traditional butchers shop and being forward thinking with a modern approach at the same time."



Mike Sheridan started his business from a garage property in 1963, two years later he acquired a shop in Ballater and then in 1978 he bought the Davidsons butchers business to establish himself in the same premises as used today.

John Sinclair and Barry Florence grew up together, attending Aboyne Secondary School and then worked together at Sheridans. Barry started as a 14 year old in 1979 as a schoolboy doing messages by push bike with 5 mile round trips not unusual and John found himself working alongside his pal when he embarked on his butchery career in February 1982.



Mike was a real character both within the trade and within his local community and he enjoyed being able to take more of a back seat. Barry and John took on much more of the operational side of the shop and Mike with no immediate family had decided on how he wanted his business to continue. He left almost every village group a sum of money. A stained glass window in the local church was unveiled by Prince Charles. The Community Council meet in the Mike Sheridan Room but his business and place in meat industry heritage was handed to his two trusted employees, Barry and John. Barry again:-

“It came as a shock when Mike died at the age of 67 on 11th April 2006, and just as much of a shock when he left us the business, it was totally unexpected.”

To the new partners, the business side of things was new. They changed a few things that they had been itching to do for some time since understandably Mike was quite wary of change. The staff have been very supportive however and the business flourished under the new regime in a fashion that would have the full approval of Mike Sheridan.

The partnership now has a good team of 11 people around them, their customer base is growing, there have been a lot of learning curves but they have enjoyed it. John summed up the only down side:- “Someone said that we would get more time off and holidays but that didn’t work out!”

Storm Frank Sausages
An outcome of media
interest in Sheridans –
the Venison & Wild
Berry Sausage won
Gold in the 2016
Speciality Sausage
Awards.



Insurance advice: check what is covered very closely. Ask for a breakdown, allow for high stock levels over Festive period, insure for business interruption and take any insurance review very seriously.