

# Huntly Revisited

Having recovered from the shock of a double superstore hit that questioned the sanity of Aberdeenshire councillors and their planning department an early visit was required to checkout the just who was dancing in the aisles of this rural town.



Somerfield was the only supermarket in town until Asda and Tesco were given permission to create their trademark gateposts one on the east and one on the west entrance to Huntly. Tesco opened in early April and with its 305<sup>th</sup> store, ASDA followed on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> May.



Perhaps unfairly to Tesco (but who cares about that?) we visited ASDA the day after it opened. The ASDA store was extremely well stocked with everything looking A1. The store had a good feel to it with their latest choice in design taking ASDA away from the narrow aisles and high shelving that once was their preference. Trade was good but nothing like the crowds that had flooded into previous superstore openings.

There was 16 metres of beef with packs two or three high on most shelves. The only Scottish branding was on shelf fronts and in every case the St Andrews flags were correctly positioned in front of beef with pack numbers that indicated the beef came from Scottish plants.

There was also a fair amount of beef on sale that had come from outside Scotland, lamb from Wales and pork from France. Although one has to concede that the Scotch was correctly merchandised it would have been easy for customers to pick up the English packs thinking that they were Scotch.





Travelling just a mile along the road passing the United Auctions Mart you reach Tesco's finest. Tesco had 13 metres available for pre-packed meat but the meat packs were only single tier and not crammed together.

Examination of the packs revealed beef from Scotland, Cornwall, Wales and Argentina. With Lamb and Pork Tesco's stock had a stronger Scotch content than both ASDA and Somerfield. Still not much that would have sniffed that local Mart! [A full list is appended to this article.]

On the day after ASDA opened the Tesco store was deserted and not surprisingly their management wanted to know who was taking pictures! Tesco's entrance to their Huntly store was different from ASDAs. ASDA, and Morrisons in their newest stores, hit the customer right away with fresh vegetables and fruit. Tesco in comparison have put less emphasis on initial impact and one could have compared it to like walking into B & Q. Tesco was the only one to have a petrol filling station.

Customers will be inquisitive since these stores have been under construction for some time but our interest is in how the Huntly Town Centre will be affected and in particular the butchers, all three are members of SFMTA. In a town with a population of just under 4400 is there enough business for everyone?





The butchers shop nearest the new supermarkets is run by Douglas Raeburn trading as Gordon Rhind in Gordon Street, he commented:-

“Yesterday our sales and customer numbers were just a normal Monday. I was quite surprised.

“We will just continue to do what we do. Our only sales that are down is vegetables but I am not too worried about that. At the end of the day it is going to be a case of the two of them fighting each other.”

Douglas prediction was borne out as the Tesco store was very quiet on the Tuesday after ASDA opened in Huntly. At 12.30pm on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May the seven customers in Huntly’s Somerfield were out numbered by staff.

## Planning Gain

The minutes of Huntly’s Community Council reveal that Planning Gain from ASDA had amounted to £102,000 and the “Tesco Planning Gain would be larger given the size of the overall development and would probably be in the region of £200,000 to be released in stages”.

Charles Raeburn of Forbes Raeburn said:

"Its funny the way it's working, since Tesco opened – that's six weekends – the Monday, Tuesday trade is sticky, Wednesday is normal but Thursday, Friday and Saturday has been up every weekend.

"Obviously I have lost some locals but the folk are coming in about there is a lot from Turriff, Banff, Keith, Fochabers, and the Strathdon area coming to the shops. They are not coming that distance without coming into town. We don't know whether that will carry on."

Between the other two butchers is Scott the Butcher, Haggis Champion in 2001 and run by the owner George Fullarton. He thought that ASDA is the one to fear since Tesco already have a presence in Banff, Inverurie and Keith, Tesco does not currently pose the same threat to Huntly as ASDA:-

"The problem will be getting the volume of folk down the street. It is the same in every town where there's ASDA and supermarkets, butchers work away. Tesco has not done a lot of harm; you have the occasional quiet day. If they want certain products, they cannot buy them in Tesco or ASDA they have to come to us.

"We will have to wait how things react to ASDA. Two of them is one too many. I think they will fight one another, we might not score but I do not think that we will be any worse off. It will be six months until we know the effect.



"Huntly is a traditional farming area, they know their beef round about here so that maybe helps as well. We are hoping for fine weather now and folk will come to their butchers for their barbecue stuff because they cannot buy the same at the supermarkets.

"They are here, they are everywhere else and every other butcher has the same problem as we are going to have in Huntly. They have managed to survive."

As the new shiny superstores raise the bar for slick presentation and convenient shopping it will be important for these butchers to emphasise their locally produced quality beef, lamb and pork. The recipe for success will undoubtedly include good personal service and innovative, tasty and unique meat products.



Only one shop in Huntly town centre was visibly for sale – it had traded as a florist. Amid local concerns of reducing town centre footfall ASDA has launched a scheme that is intended to support local shops. Although it is an offer that cannot be refused by the shops ASDA no doubt will major on the support to the small guys but they are not blind to the fact that in turn it sends town centre shoppers back to ASDA to receive a discount off clothing.

The scheme, dubbed COLLECT & SAVE, will reward customers for shopping in both its supermarket and the local stores. Designed to support the local community and economy in which the Asda store operates, the scheme has the support of local trade associations. So far fifteen businesses in the town have joined up.

Customers collect £5 worth of George vouchers every four weeks provided they spend £25 or more at Asda **and** at the participating shops. The opening offer lasts from 15<sup>th</sup> May until 30<sup>th</sup> June and then a further three offer periods of one month each up until the end of September.

ASDA say they hope that this partnership will enable local businesses to feel the real benefits of the extra traffic and footfall that the new Asda store will bring to the town. Maybe the butchers don't yet need to worry but perhaps the fashion shops should!

Concern should include local farmers too.

The meat plant numbers on the packs in ASDA, Huntly revealed the meat for sale had been slaughtered or cut in the following:-

**Beef:-** 1101 - ABP, Perth; 1530 - Braveheart Beef, Bonnybridge; 1108 - Mathers, Inverurie; 7195 - Dawn Pac (West) Llanelli, Wales; 2458 - ABP, Doncaster; 4109 - ABP Shrewsbury, Shropshire; 4108SL - Houghton F & Family Ltd, Warrington and from Ireland

**Pork:-** 4787 - Grampian Country Foods, Winsford, Cheshire; 1512 - Grampian Country Pork Halls, Broxburn, Wales; 7195 - Dawn Pac ( West) LLanelli, Wales and from France

**Lamb:-** 4787 - Grampian Country Foods, Winsford, Cheshire; 7017 - Welsh Country Foods, Gaerwen, Wales

The meat in Somerfield in Huntly came from the following:-

**Beef:-** 1598 - Highland Meats, Saltcoats; 1541 - A K Stoddart, Ayr; 5106 - Dawn Cardington, Bedford, 8216 - RWM (Dorset) Sherborne, Dorset

**Pork:-** Ireland, Denmark, Netherlands, 4085 Tulip Fresh Meats, Cheshire; 8061 Tulip Fresh Meats Bristol

**Lamb:-** 2100 - Dawn Carnaby, Bridlington and from New Zealand

Tesco in Huntly was selling meat packs numbered:-

**Beef:-** 8073 -St Merryn Meat Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall; 7176SL - St Merryn Meat Ltd, Merthyr Tydfil; 1512 Grampian Country Pork Halls, Broxburn, Irish Rump Steak and Organic Argentinean Rump Steak; 7176 - St Merryn Meat Ltd, Merthr Tydfil

**Pork** British 1512 Grampian Country Pork, Halls, Broxburn; **Lamb** Scotch