

I'm Going to Jackson



For some Oban is the end of the road or even railway line but many leave by boat destined for one of the eight Scottish islands that are serviced from the Argyll town. It is home to just over 8000 inhabitants but that number can triple during the popular tourist months.



It is the mix of opportunities that this brings that creates the business for George Street butcher Alister Jackson. Jackson Brothers make local deliveries to yachts, fishing boats, Self Catering, Restaurants, Cafes and Hotels. Tucked in behind the Caledonian Hotel close to the ferry terminal, Jacksons' bright clean shop has been serving the local community since 1932 but attracts customers from far and wide.



Alister is the third generation of Jacksons to run the business. It was his grandfather Alister and his brother William who established the business, then Alister's father Ian and uncle Sam, took over but when Alister's father died in 1984, the 20 year old was thrust into partnership with his uncle. Following Uncle Sam's retirement in 2003 Alister continues along with his three staff and valuable busy period assistance from his student sons, Scott and Ryan.



Alister Jackson's beef is specially raised for him by Duncan Henderson (above) at Whitehouse Farm in the shadow of Stirling Castle. The specialist beef finisher buys stock from breeders in Islay, Tiree, Dalmally and as far up the west coast as Fort William and Skye. When these cattle flourish in the kinder conditions of the Carse of Stirling they provide a weekly supply for the Oban butcher.

This arrangement suits both the butcher and the farmer. Duncan Henderson explains:-

"We try and supply Alister with as consistent a product as we can. We set up to produce a 330 kilo carcass and we aim to keep within 10% of that all the time.

"The cattle are all heifers and on average two years of age when they are ready for Jacksons. In the main they are Limousin crosses and of the 300+ cattle finished every year over half of those will be destined for Oban."

Clearly this perpetual supply means that Jacksons' customers buy beef of an unvarying eating quality and cooking times will be constant. But Duncan finds the partnership just as convenient:-

"We have a ready market every week. It is one worry less every week but it also gives me continuity. I can go out and buy cattle that I know will be grown into a perfect product for Alister. It makes buying them, keeping and feeding them all the easier because I am aiming for the same specification all the time.



"Every Wednesday morning I deliver Jacksons cattle to the abattoir at Dunblane. It doesn't take as long as taking cattle to market and makes planning your week easier.

"We know how our cattle perform because they are all weighed. Alister gives us feedback and it is good to know that you are getting the right results."



Jacksons' success has been built on specialising in the very best quality Scottish Beef, Lamb, Pork and Poultry. They buy only the very best livestock direct from the farm or from market, with a full traceability system in place.

Alister firmly believes that quality is one of the most important elements of running a successful butcher's shop and to ensure that he gets the highest quality meat is why he has struck up the partnership with Duncan Henderson. Duncan is a major buyer of Argyll born calves with a preference for Limousin crosses that are brought on so as to provide a regular supply for the Oban shop. Food miles are minimised by using the abattoir at Dunblane and the deliveries to Oban also carry the lambs purchased by Alister's uncle at the United Auction's mart at Stirling. Alister commented:-

"I can visit the farm personally and see traditional methods of farming so that the beef I get is of the quality and type best suited to my customers' requirements. Provenance and quality are extremely important to my customers. They appreciate good food and some travel over 100 miles to visit my shop. I do some local advertising but it's nearly all word of mouth so I know I must be doing the job right."

Assisted by his two staff Sean and James, Alister welcomes customers from 7.30am until five at night, six days per week. As a speciality Wild Red Deer Venison is supplied locally from a larder on the nearby Isle of Seil. It comes in carcase form and is becoming increasingly popular. They make their own sausages, burgers and of course, although not geographically connected, Lorn Sausage.



Alister Jackson has lived in Oban all his life and the longest he has been away is the three and a half weeks taken to go on honeymoon. Oban retains that small shop atmosphere; lots of different shops and cafes and Jackson Brothers are part of that. He is very much a part of the local community and is involved with the local committee developing a BIDS initiative to try and help boost Oban's vitality.

In its beautiful setting in the Firth of Lorn, Oban grew up around a famous distillery that was founded in 1794. Oban malt whisky is now termed a classic and in much the same way, Jackson Brothers butchers shop matures and cares for its meat. You can drink to that and even Johnny Cash can sing about it too.



Band go to their day jobs in 'Come On Sister'

Oban has two unlikely new MTV stars in the shape of butchers Sean Grant and James Paterson. The pair feature in Belle and Sebastian's music video for the single, *Come On Sister*, which is partly filmed at Jackson Brothers.

The members of the Scottish indie-pop band Belle and Sebastian are full-time musicians in real life, but in the video for "*Come On Sister*," the latest single from their album *Write About Love*, they've all got working day jobs at businesses bearing their surnames in and around Glasgow.

Frontman Stuart Murdoch works for Murdoch Recycling, violinist Sarah Martin has a gig operating heavy machinery at Martin Plant Hire and guitarist Stevie Jackson works at Jackson Bros. Butchers. Belle and Sebastian have always excelled at finding the magic and humour in everyday life, and this slyly funny clip is no exception.

