

Owen Brand in the Deep South



It is only 29 miles south of Girvan but the road to Newton Stewart takes you through the most remote parts of South Ayrshire. You lose radio reception only to be startled as a traffic report interrupts the CD player to tell you that there are traffic problems in Belfast. Yes, the South West of Scotland is a world of its own but well worth the trip when there is an impressive butcher's shop at the end.

John D Owen started a butcher business in Newton Stewart in 1925. In the 1930's he relocated to Queen Street but now the business run by his grandson Kenny trades in the centre of the market town. Faced with the need to upgrade to meet higher standards and raised customer expectations, Kenny decided that the move to his current premises was a better investment and so the shop, as it is now, opened on 31 July 1997. Since then trade has gone from strength to strength and he reflects that it was the right move:-





"Personally, I thought the move from Queen Street was going to be worthwhile, as the business where it was, wasn't going to give me the living I wanted out of it."

Kenny's success was no doubt aided by the reluctance of the town's two other butchers to incur the investment. The new shop gave Kenny the opportunity to extend his product range:-
"I was always keen on all the other foods, I am quite a 'foodie'. You need to do a bit more to make people's shopping experience complete with all the other bits and pieces."



Part of the rationale about moving was to have the room to expand into all the other lines and with this Owens have been very successful. They now have eleven of a staff, ten of which are full time and the butcher shop includes a bakery counter. The sweet bakery goods, bread and rolls are bought in from a traditional baker in Castle Douglas giving the Owen's shop a distinct difference from the offers of an instore bakery.



Newton Stewart has a Somerfields which has metamorphosed from a Safeway and



a Morrisons. Over and above that there is a Co-op and a new Aldi is planned for a plot near it. Newton Stewart is a town of 4,000 – 5,500 but there is no significant industry with jobs relying mainly on tourism and farming. Customers travel from a wide hinterland to visit the butchers in Newton Stewart. They travel from nearby Creetown, Gatehouse of Fleet, Stewartry and the Machars.

The success of this butcher's business is built on service and quality of product.

"We always try to sell as much local produce as we can". Kenny uses a local buyer to source cattle for him at the local marts in Newton Stewart, Castle Douglas and Dumfries and to purchase direct from local farms.

Local lamb also comes from Lockerbie, which although 65 miles away is as local as possible. The shop also sells Scottish pork, Scottish poultry and Scottish venison.

Counters stretch out in a z shape from window, deep into the shop through cooked meat counters and pastries to a bakery counter. Opposite the counters there are shelves for all sorts of accompaniments to meals.





The shop sells 20 varieties of sausages of which only between four and eight varieties are on sale at any one time. Haggis, black pudding and white pudding are made on the premises.

The business has won several awards for its sausages and won a Diamond award for its beefburgers in the Smithfield awards and is the reigning South West Scotland Beef Sausage Champion.

Kenny feels that these awards have made a good impact on his customers and after a half page advert in his local newspaper, added 50% to his sales, a high proportion of which is still enjoyed.

He advertises periodically to maintain a high profile although feels that local word of mouth recommendations cannot be bettered.



All beef and lamb is brought in on the bone and matured on the premises. Traditional skills are used to present raw product and cooked gammons, beef, meat roll and potted meat.

The shop stocks up to 50 cheeses sourced through Wholesaler Anthony Rowcliffe and local cheese producers.



Kenny Owen continues the local produce through to Cream of Galloway ice creams and local preserves:- "People are more aware of food province and food miles. To that extent we have always tried to have local produce and provide that service."

One thing that is not local (yet) are the olives but there are obviously Mediterranean tastes in Galloway as Owens sells an extensive range.

The shop is a member of the Guild of Q butchers and Kenny feels that it is worthwhile especially if you enter into the competitions but it needs time and effort:-

"It is not always easy to attend meetings. I would like to attend two thirds of them but end up attending just a third. You can get a lot of value out of Q Guild if you enter competitions. It is worth it for that."

The competitive streak comes through in the ethos of Kenny Owen. His policy while recognising that his patch is not entirely filled with high spenders, is to "try to be as best as I can be. We are not a wealthy area and I cannot get Edinburgh prices and clever products. We are a conservative, rural area and there is a ceiling on what I can do."



But under this ceiling the shop has an appealing ambiance. Care has been taken with attention to detail. There's no one thing that stands out at Owens just lots of things all well done. Kenny freely admits that "certain parts wouldn't work on their own" but all put together the result is that the public of Newton Stewart have a first class food shop.

Good honest Scottish realism perhaps but the shop maintains good honest Scottish products sold with a welcoming smile and chat.

