

Fit Like? Fit for a Queen.



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." In Ballater on Deeside however customers using H M Sheridan can rub shoulders with royalty as they all descend on this rather uniquely special butchers shop for their meaty purchases.

While the rest of the retail meat industry may turn to the Scottish Craft Butchers logo or Guild of Q for some sort of seal of approval, few could even dream of a Royal Warrant to supply the royal household as their badge of guarantee.

H M Sheridan has been granted three Royal Warrants, which is quite an achievement. The first Royal Warrant, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother's Warrant, was granted in 1981.

Six years later Her Majesty The Queen's Royal Warrant was granted and His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, Duke of Rothesay, granted his warrant in the same year, 1987.

When Mike Sheridan passed away the Royal Warrants for Her Majesty The Queen and HRH The Prince of Wales were then assigned to the new proprietors, Barry Florence and John Sinclair.





This is a very important part of the business and they are rightly very proud to supply The Royal Households. When The Royal Households are in residence at Balmoral and Birkhall, both close to the village of Ballater, it is H M Sheridan who is their purveyor of meat and poultry.

There are rules and regulations accompanying such important business and responsibility but these were personal awards to Mike Sheridan. Fortunately their services had been noted; Barry was awarded the appointment to the Queen and John to the Prince of Wales. Both Barry and John consider themselves to be very lucky to be awarded the coat of arms since there was no guarantee of continuity.

Barry explained that Prince Charles and Camilla have called to take a tour of the shop, the Duke of Edinburgh is a very enthusiastic barbecue chef and Princess Anne is a regular. He continued to relate one embarrassing yet amusing incident they had with Princess Anne:-

"She just comes in and shops. On one instance she came in and asked for a certain type of sausage and the guy who was serving her didn't realise who she was. On a very busy Saturday morning he said "oh you'll have to wait while we make them for you, can you come back later" to which she said "of course I could" and she did!

Of course the Metropolitan Police and the paparazzi appear in the village too but Sheridans just view them as more potential customers. They stock up before they go back south and it is all good for business.

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 Scotch Premier. 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.

A variety of ready meals are produced by their two chefs, Catherine and David who are constantly looking at product development potential and with the help of Helen they keep 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. When you are up against supermarkets it is the good quality products and service that you provide that keeps you a step in front of them."

Training too is vitally important to the business as Barry expanded:-

"The training schemes set our staff goals. Our assessor from Scottish Meat Training, John, is encouraging and thorough. They know when he comes that they have to be on the ball.

In 2010 the business goal is to get Sheridans online with a fully functioning selling capability. Barry and John would also like to develop the outside catering market that has evolved from their spit roast barbecue business.

"We have two now. We bought the first one as a toy for ourselves because we had always fancied one of them. We can spit roast chickens on them and mixed meats like a haunch of venison, legs of lamb, turkey saddle so it becomes a carvery."

This business is not as seasonal as it might seem and Sheridans have bookings even in mid February. Spit roasts have proven popular for weddings with a 55 kilo pig providing 100 main courses or 150 filled rolls. Barry continued:-

"It is the proper machine for the job, it's regulated and there is no risk to it. The service includes the Spitting Pig machine, the pig and the butcher carving.

"Through doing spit roasts and barbecues, people have asked us to take on whole functions. We have done a few of these now but we are still working in conjunction with a catering company as well and so anything that we feel is beyond our capabilities at the moment then we play our part and the catering company does the rest."



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.



Katrina Farquhar (left) joined the business in 1986 and was a great asset to Mike Sheridan and continues to be such for John and Barry. She knows the business inside out and all administrative matters are dealt with by her. Coming from a farming background Katrina also does some sourcing for the business.

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, they confess to there having 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!"

