

Wishaw Abattoir: contracted to kill



Abattoirs serving Scottish butchers have declined in number over the years but there is still a need for good efficient state of the art facilities to service those who are buying live either at the auction mart or direct from farmers.





In Caledonian Road, Wishaw there is a good example of an abattoir that has re-invested wisely to now have a modern plant where everything is done in the best possible way, everything has its place. Especially during the last two years, throughput has increased impressively, yet there is still scope to expand business.

Back in 1975 when the local authority wanted to off load its responsibility for running the abattoir a group of butchers, auctioneers, wholesalers and farmers led by Robert Smellie, John Chapman and Jim Alexander created Wishaw Abattoir Company.

Their aim was to supply local butchers with meat from livestock raised or sold locally. That ambition was met early on but the progress of the abattoir in meeting the challenges from every tightening regulation is to be applauded.





Current Abattoir Company Chairman, Bellshill butcher Sandy Cooper (above left) had been buying his meat through wholesaler Borthwicks but encouraged by the then abattoir manager, Jimmy Goodwin, Sandy started buying live at Hamilton Mart. Now he buys live at both Lanark Mart and Caledonian Mart, Stirling and in a strange 'squaring' of the circle it is Jimmy Goodwin's son Philip who is the manager of the abattoir now.

Philip (above right) took over as manager in October 2006 but he was no stranger to the abattoirs workings. He was a slaughterman there from 1968 until 1974 when he joined the Meat and Livestock Commission as a grader. 18 years later he joined Caledonian Markets and was there for another 14 until his return to Wishaw.

Sandy and Philip have proven to be a good team but the foundations had already been well laid. Meat wholesalers operate from the premises boosting throughput and supplying the cuts that butchers always need to balance up their purchases. PR Duff, Barclay & Newton, JF Finlay and more recently Irvines of Perthshire have based their operations at Wishaw.

The Wishaw Abattoir undertakes what is termed 'contract kill', which means that they do not own or sell cattle, their only interest is to provide service for their customers who have animals submitted to them for slaughter. Wishaw Abattoir takes pride in making a first class job. The specifications e.g. kidney knob in, MLC national spec or MLC new spec etc are all performed to the owners' requirements.

As the company strives to optimise returns from the 'fifth' quarter, Philip's involvement at executive level with the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers keeps him up to speed with all developments. Following his father's doctrine of making the most of your stock, little is ever wasted.



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Butchers get all their offal and 14 days of free chilling while their beef is maturing. The cost to kill a cattle beast is £61.70 plus statutory charges and VAT but the price of the hide or lamb skin (currently £30 and £5) is deducted from the butcher's bill. Deliveries are organised through J. McSeveney who covers the area from Ayrshire to Angus.

The closure of Scottish Borders Abattoir introduced new customers to Wishaw and they have all been more than satisfied by the service they have received. Over the last two years funds including a £400,000 grant have been spent on chills, floors and replacing plant with more efficient mechanics. This created the platform for Wishaw to take on new business yet Philip reckons that the abattoir is still possibly only running at between 60% and 70% capacity. He is always on the look out for new customers.

The Abattoir Company likes to encourage its customers to become shareholders and regularly offer that opportunity to them. This is no poor investment since the annual dividends are always good.

Everything at Wishaw seems to work very smoothly. The deadweights of Sandy's purchases at Lanark Mart are emailed to him by Tuesday lunchtime, not because he is the Chairman but because it is a simple process using an electronic system that links killing floor through the administration office then out to butchers.

Twenty jobs are sustained by the Abattoir Company and it supports another 40 jobs from the site. Sandy Cooper and Philip Goodwin are clearly extremely hardworking even though they hide it as they calmly spend time out to tell this story. There is great pride there and they instil a feeling of great confidence for the future.

