



Judge for Scotland and the North, Clarissa Dickson Wright, always visits Fletcher's of Auchtermuchty because of its range of venison products

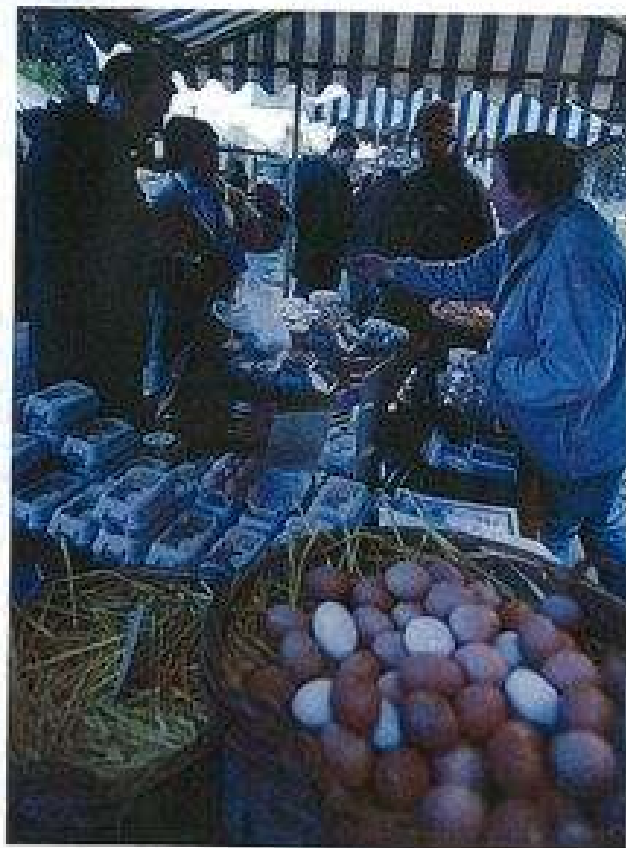


One of the advantages of a farmers' market is the ability to try before you buy

*'The positivity that went into the creation of the market surrounds you as you step onto Castle Parade'*



When in Scotland, do as the Scots do: start the day with a bowl of porridge like Stoats'



All products must be grown, reared, caught, baked, pickled and made by the producer

Council grudgingly allowed the market to set up on what is, in reality, a windy car park rather than in any of the more suitable old market sites, the organisers were undismayed. Look to the positive, they said. It has, as a backdrop, the most magnificent of views, Castle Rock with the fortress towering above it. The rest of the car park underneath is perfect for customer parking and, if it's a bit windy, well, it will keep it cool in the summer.

The market is a weekly event, held every Saturday from 9am to 2pm, with a wide variety of stalls. I start my visit with a bowl of porridge, as every good Scot should. *Stoats*, the porridge stall run by two enthusiastic young men, offers a variety of choices from the stouter itself—traditional porridge with salt and milk, or with accompaniments such as fruit, dried fruit and nuts, marmalade, whisky and many others. I sit and eat mine to the tunes of a traditional Scottish fiddler, and think about what I am going to buy.

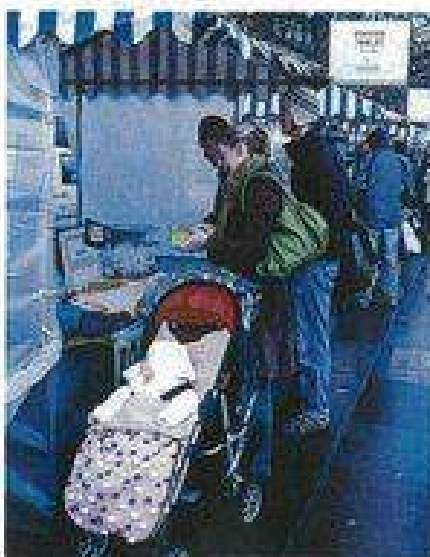
I always visit *Fletcher's of Auchtermuchty* and take home a venison haggis, some venison kidneys or their delicious *carpaccio* of venison, and I always buy two of their delicious little pies to eat later. Their stand is next to the coffee stall, so I sip an *espresso* as I talk to John Fletcher about food in general. This is farmed venison at its best. The 'antis' let all his deer out recently, and when John and Nicola opened the front door, the deer were all standing round the house waiting for their breakfast!

Next, I stroll up to *Ballenerieff Bacon*. The owners keep rare-breed pigs in East Lothian, and, when I was catering, I won best bacon butties in Scotland with their product. Their cured pork is delicious, and sometimes I buy fresh pork, too, although usually I am tempted by the wild-boar chops and sausages on a nearby stall. Across the aisle is the preserve of *Carroll's Heritage Potatoes*. She grows 12 varieties, some of which date back to 1836, and, if you tell her what you are eating, she will give you guidance on the best potatoes to buy. Once, I was pointing out the purple-truffled and the red King Edwards to someone and received a firm lecture that they wouldn't go with my salmon dish and I must buy *ratte* instead—she was, of course, quite right.

One of the things that gladdens my heart is that the market provides an outlet for the East Lothian vegetable growers. In the mid 18th century, the county led Britain in its development of recognised



The *Caurnie Souperie* boasts that it is the oldest cold-processed soap maker in Scotland



Running every Saturday, with up to 35 producers from all over Scotland, this is the largest market north of the border

plants such as the *Musselburgh leek*, and now there is an enthusiastic market for the more unusual varieties. One of the stalls sells what a friend calls *weeds*: a mixed collection of salads including pot marigolds, nasturtiums, *Good King Henry* and *Fat Hen*, a far cry from your chlorine-covered, tasteless super-market salads.

No visit would be really joyous without seeing *Brenda Liddy* on *Stichill Jerseys*. *Brenda* is quite indomitable, and produces lovely butter and clotted cream, as well as her own *Jersey cream*. She has recently won a major award with her *panna cotta*, beating off all the Italian Scots, and her meringues are so superb I have stopped making my own and just buy them from her. Her butter-scotch sauce is much sought after, as

is her cream of horseradish dip—when she has it.

Proper lamb and mutton are to be had from *Mrs Hamilton*, and there is good beef on offer from various stalls. You can buy the exotics, too. Ostriches do very well in the long daylight hours of the Scottish summer, and although I only buy the liver, which is as good as the best calf's liver, it is a fat-free meat for those who care for such things. I sometimes have an ostrich burger, which are good to eat on the hoof. *Water buffalo* is another meat on offer. I first ate it in *Tobago* and thought it very good, although it's not quite as lean as *Highland beef*, which is also available.

One of my greatest delights is the *I. R. Spink Arbroath smokie stand*, which, sadly, is not there every week. This is pure theatre. They bring two large half-barrels full of oak chippings and smoke the fish before your very eyes. The smell is pure magic—the whole smoked haddocks are taken hot from the tubs, easily de-boned and individually wrapped for you to take home. The aroma is such that you want to eat them on the spot. They also smoke trout, but, to be honest, I never get past the 'haddies'. Cold smoked fish is one of Scotland's legacies to the food world, and I am so glad to see this ancient rite surviving. They could have written the 12th-century *Declaration of Arbroath* to a supper of smokies, they have been around that long.

Fresh fish is to be had, too, particularly on the *Creelers stand* where you can buy hand-dived scallops or fresh fish from the *West*. *Creelers* has a good fish restaurant on the *Royal Mile*, so it has a high turnover, which is always excellent.

One stand I seldom pass by holds the



market's emphasis is on freshness, quality and value for money. Buying locally means you can ask how the food is produced, what's in it, and, at the same time, customer feedback is appreciated by the producer



The variety of foods you can buy at the market is astounding: bacon, clotted cream, award-winning pannacotta, lamb, mutton, beef, ostrich, hand-dived scallops, water buffalo and local vegetables (Right) Cairnie produces shampoo as well as soap



cessed soaps from Cairnie, of loch. It boasts that it is the oldest in Scotland, and I see no reason it. It has nettle, which is good for relaxation, plus many other herbs. It cuts like cheese with a knife, makes shampoo and shower gel, and you can discuss your wants with the friendly staff. It may take a little longer but it's surely that's what farmers are all about—an escape from the

unhelpful world of the supermarket. They are an event to be savoured and enjoyed, a chance to talk to producers and like-minded people in queues.

Here, you can meet Edinburghers, foreign students from all over the world, tourists and people in from the country for the day and for the market. People say it is expensive; I don't find it so, but then if you are what you eat, you should make sure it's the best and properly produced. See you all on Castle Parade.

Photographs: Glynn Satterley.