



Glasson has the quay ingredients

This atmospheric coastal community is steeped in history but has a growing reputation for the food it creates. Roger Borrell and photographer Glynn Ward called in



AS undisturbed as the swans that glide gracefully along its canal, Glasson appears to be one of Lancashire's quiet backwaters where the pace of life is, at best, pleasantly relaxed. However, below the calm surface there are busy people who keep this fascinating community flourishing.

The casual visitor – and there are many at weekends, arriving in cars and on two wheels – would probably be surprised to discover that more than 150,000 tonnes of cargo go through the port each year.

Glasson Grain has been a local employer since the mid 1970s handling a wide variety of goods, including animal feed, fertilisers and scrap metal as well as providing a shipping link to the Isle of Man.

The port has been a key component of Glasson since opening in the 1780s and a spur of the Lancaster Canal, completed in the 1820s, provided a connection to Preston and the wider world supplying slate, potatoes, timber and grain.

One of the businesses that has put Glasson on the map in more recent times is The Port of Lancaster Smokehouse, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year.

It's run by Mike Price, whose late father, John, set it up on St George's Quay in Lancaster before moving it to the present location (follow your nose and you'll find it).

John, who had been a fine art teacher, started out smoking trout in his garage. Now run by his son, Mike, with help from his mum, Patricia, and 15 staff, it has grown into a business with around 90 different lines – delicacies such as Tuscan style smoked ▶



Mike and Jade Davis at the smokehouse shop



The artwork of Glasson is by Nick Oliver. See more of his work at www.smilecreative.co.uk or contact him at 01257 427465.

PLACES TO VISIT

pancetta flavoured with rosemary and bay, delicious smoked salmon from the estuary and the increasingly popular Lancashire haggis. The core of the business continues to be kippers and smoked mackerel but a thriving sideline in fresh local game, processed at their farm at nearby Conder Green, and an inventive approach to developing new products has kept the smokehouse on an upward trajectory.

Herring and mackerel come down from Peterhead but just about everything else reflects Mike's 'buy local' ethos. Wildfowl and game is from local estates, such as Abbeystead, and they still use the traditional haaf nets in the summer months to catch salmon in the Lune estuary. As Mike puts it, the fish come in like 'bars of silver'.

He adds: 'This area is what we are all about - we employ local people and use local produce. We are basically curers, smokers and preservers of anything that runs, swims or flies. Our aim is to add shelf-life to it by preserving it and developing it in new and interesting ways.'

It's a business which has always been a favourite with foodies who crowd into the little shop tucked away behind the Dalton Arms. But it is now winning a much wider audience. 'There was a time when smoked food was a little out of fashion,' says Jade Davis, who looks after sales and marketing.

That has all changed with the growing passion for locally sourced food and the smokehouse's development kitchen producing out of the ordinary items which keep the offering as fresh as the Lune salmon. For instance, the wonderful-sounding smoked salmon butter is expected soon.

Their clients include many local restaurants, inns and hotels but it has been mail order through the website that has helped to drive double digit growth in recent times. The quest for premium, high quality food has also seen them secure contracts to supply cruise ships.

There is also the health aspect. 'Many of our products are high in Omega 3 and we see a peak in January when people start to think about eating more healthily after eating too much over Christmas and New Year,' says Jade.

All that good work could be spoiled on Burns



Melonie and Jonathon with cake-maker Billie Menzies

Night which also sees interest peak in their new range of haggis, which picked up two stars at the Great Taste awards at the first attempt.

'The way the business is growing means we will have to take some big decisions in 2017 about the future direction of the smokehouse,' says Mike. 'I think it could be another busy year.'

One of the businesses to forge links with Mike and his team is the Lantern O'er Lune café bistro at the bottom of Tithebarn Hill.

It is owned by husband and wife team, Jonathon and Melonie Wagstaff, who bought what was basically a transport café two years ago. They have transformed it into an quality eating place that changes into a cosy bistro on Friday evenings, so popular that booking is recommended.

The couple quickly became part of the local community and were instrumental in setting up an innovative scheme with Thurnham Glasson CE School. 'We fund the purchase of vegetable seeds and seedlings and the children grow them in their school garden,' says Jonathon. 'Once they've grown it we buy it all from them at market value. The income has paid for extra lessons so the children can learn more about horticulture. The schoolchildren benefit and we know exactly where our ingredients have come from.'

Jonathon has a background in running hotels but more recently the couple founded a successful film company in Lytham St Annes making training videos for professionals. It



A frosty morning at Glasson



Harvest time for Melonie and the Glasson pupils



One of the big cargo ships that call in at Glasson



DOCK DOSSIER

Where is it?

The village is south of Lancaster at the mouth of the River Lune just off the A588. Put LA2 0BY into your satnav and you should be there. Be warned, there are some rare occasions when very high tides and heavy rain mean the village is cut off.

Can I park?

There is a large pay & display by the marina. It's £1 for the day on the rare occasions the ticket machine is working.

What about refreshments?

Apart from the Lantern O'er Lune, at the Dalton Arms you will find a welcome as warm as the fire that roars in the grate. Sadly, at the time of our visit the other pub, The Victoria, built in the 1830s, was shut and in danger of going the way of many of our pubs.

What else is there to do?

There is a busy village shop but you wouldn't go to Glasson for retail therapy. However, there are some great walks from the village around the beautiful coastline. There's one to be found at www.lancashirelife.co.uk.

was something they both enjoyed but the pressure started to tell and Jonathan suffered a mini-stroke. 'The doctor basically told me to change what I did or expect something worse within a couple of years,' he says.

They sold up and Melonie found the café for sale – 'I took one look at it and said "You must be joking!"' Despite this, they took the plunge. A new kitchen was built, the décor and furnishings were thoroughly upgraded and they brought in Teri-Ann Roe as chef. She had previously worked in a well-known Lake District hotel.

'We set out to run a traditional bistro. We don't try to be something we are not. It's all about good quality food sensibly priced. The local people seem to have taken us in their arms,' he says. 'We bought a cottage around the corner because we liked it here so much. It's a bit like living in the TV series Heartbeat. It has real character.'

Not long after they moved in, the village was hit by lengthy power cuts. 'There is no natural gas here but we operate on bottled gas so we just about fed the village. It was a great way of getting to know everyone.'

The café is now popular as a venue for



The old watch house harks back to the dock's early days

anniversaries and birthday parties and they are even expecting to hold their first wedding reception there. They've also received top billing on Tripadvisor.

'Since we made the changes the clientele has completely changed,' says Jonathon, who is 51. 'In the early days, we'd put out a copy of Lancashire Life and it always disappeared after three days. Now people put it back in the magazine rack!' ♦