



KILGRASTON SCHOOL

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Perthshire entrepreneur talks to Kilgraston pupils about things hotting-up in the kitchen

“They used to fill-up socks, tea-towels, even bloomers,” Michelle Maddox told Kilgraston’s surprised senior pupils, “then they boiled them for hours on the fire!”

The inspirational owner of Cloutie McToot was describing the history of Cloutie Dumplings (rich, traditional Scottish fruit puddings) and her own entrepreneurial journey, as part of the School’s Women and Business lecture series: “It’s been a rollercoaster,” said the busy mum and businesswoman, “from making everything in the family’s utility room, we now employ fourteen staff in a professional kitchen.”

Starting just five years’ ago – inspiration came after her son’s appeal for edible donations for a Christmas school fete - Michelle’s traditional Cloutie Dumplings sell like hot-cakes, exports reaching North America and Germany: “I was brought-up making them,” explained Michelle, “it was a family tradition and now we use my granny’s very own recipe, it’s the company’s unique selling point.”

Thankfully, these days, the ‘clout’ (Scottish for cloth) is tailor-made for the job in borders town, Kelso, with no-one, Michelle assured, losing their underwear in the process.

Initially involved with the London food industry, immediately before starting Cloutie McToot, Michelle was employed in the community grant application field, however, sales success at her son’s stall soon had her thinking: “I handed in my notice the next day!”

Based in Perthshire’s Abernethy village, the business consists of a busy café, training kitchen, subscriber demonstrations and tasting sessions, together with a thriving shop and online retailer. Expansion plans are in the pipeline: “Spring 2022 will see a much bigger café and kitchen, allowing 24/7 production,” Michelle explained. Cont/



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2/ The need to be flexible and nimble in business, coping with unexpected obstacles and continually looking to diversify, was a recurring theme: “You’re always learning,” she explained, “For instance, fresh dumplings have a shelf-life of 21 days, which can be difficult for stockists, so we came up with the idea of a clottie kit, where you get all the dry ingredients, muslin cloth and string, just adding butter, milk, egg and an apple at home.”

This new product increased lifespan to a year, making stocking far more attractive to retailers: high-street giants John Lewis soon adopting the dumplings. Additionally, lockdown saw a huge spike in home-cooking interest, offering clottie kits the perfect chance to shine: “We went from making 200 to 1,500 a week.”

Michelle described how she’d learnt the importance and power of great social media, constantly adding to the brand’s story, discussing new ingredients and developments and always responding to comments: “We’d established a very active digital shop and loyal customer base, proving an absolute lifeline when Covid arrived.”

Pupils were fascinated to learn about Clottie’s branding, the whole family initially having had input. But the need to redesign became obvious when one outlet stated that they loved the product, but not the logo: “I was a bit hurt by that one,” said Michelle. However, taking it on the chin, a branding expert was enlisted - a new subtle colour palette decided – with the family’s original design always making a small guest appearance “to remind us what we’re about.”

Concluding her talk, the entrepreneur reiterated how much of a juggling act running your own business is: “Every day is about balancing responsibilities,” she told girls, “it is immensely rewarding, but you do have to be prepared to accept risk, the fear of failure is always there.”

[Dropbox link to pictures](#)

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/pdgtjpywxkqmpd/AABOuZQYl4N6_yv8ZqcTHlMPa?dl=0

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Kilgraston – short biography

Kilgraston is an independent, day and boarding, school for girls aged from five to eighteen and boys aged five to twelve. The Head Teacher is Mrs Dorothy MacGinty. It is based in Bridge of Earn, just south of Perth and has 265 pupils. 2020 marked the School's ninetieth anniversary.

Kilgraston is part of the international 'Sacred Heart' network, having links with over one hundred and forty schools throughout the world. At the heart of the School's ethos is its focus on the concept of the whole person, through the five Sacred Heart goals of a living faith, personal growth, intellectual values, building community, and active social awareness.

The school was founded in 1930 and the original name was 'Gilgryston,' with an early reference to be found in a 13th century charter. The current main building was built by Francis Grant of Glenlochry, in the classic style of the Adam Brothers, around 1800. It was a private house until the First World War when it was used as a hospital for wounded officers.

Pupils attend Kilgraston from throughout the world and study the Scottish SQA's curriculum.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT MAIRI FRASER, PRESS OFFICER AT KILGRASTON SCHOOL mfraser@kilgraston.com or 07713401067