

HISTORY WITHIN THESE WALLS

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Ayr, Academy Street, 1973, December. Lawrie and Fran Black have just bought a cosy, hidden basement. Young and in love, they couldn't be more excited to start working on their new restaurant, Fouters.

Ayr again, Academy Street, 2019, December. David Storrie steps into the same basement, fuelled by excitement. From now on, this is his pub, The Smoking Goat.

Two businesses, thriving in the same building, almost 50 years between their opening dates, but the story goes back even further. The basement used to be a bank vault, centuries ago. "Robert Burns used to walk by the front door on his way to the wine merchant," Lawrie explains with excitement. "In Academy Street, were the Whighams of Ayr, who have been there for 250 years, and Robert Burns bought his whisky and ports there."

Back in The Smoking Goat, the Blacks often visit David and reminisce. "They come in and they are very supportive of what I am doing. They see their old restaurant because the outline of it is still there, they feel the history and the memories when they walk in the place," he explains.

The inside of the basement may not have changed much, but outside, few remained the same. "Ayr was a thriving county town [in the 1970s-90s]. We used to get some of the county people in, on Tuesdays, when it was market day. It was a fairly prosperous, nice place," says Fran. Fouters quickly became a favourite of the residents, serving Italian and French cuisine, which was unique to the town's hospitality industry.

The fresh, homecooked food, served to be enjoyed with jugs of house wine, was a staple of the community for 30 years. Lawrie and Fran still run into families in Ayr, who tell them about their memories of Fouters. "We often hear stories about young couples coming in for their first date, to have lasagne and wine in the candlelight," Lawrie remembers. "We got to know these people and whenever they would decide to get married, they would come in for an engagement party and later they would come in and celebrate anniversaries."

The Smoking Goat may not have similar stories yet, one year after opening, but David is confident in his success. "I think Ayr is a great town, it has great potential. The community is good, everyone sticks together and everybody knows everybody." The Smoking Goat, being Ayr's only basement bar, was beginning to pick up before the pandemic, and David's goal is to increase its popularity even more post-COVID.

In another 30 years, it is impossible to tell what kind of business will run from the old bank vault. "I hope it will be a pub," David says. "This building is so unique as a restaurant or bar. Ayr doesn't have anything else like this, I would be sad to see it as an office building."

Whoever may step in the footsteps of Fouters and The Smoking Goat, will be blessed to discover the incredible history within those walls.

