



Ramside Estate

The Ramside stock bull is Killiebrize I Yan and his genetics will be supplemented by leading AI bulls.

When Co. Durham hotelier, John Adamson, decided to open Rib Room steak bars in two of his hotels he was determined that the beef on offer should be world class. After testing beef from a range of breeds and crosses he decided there was a clear winner – pure Hereford beef.

In fact John was so impressed that he went on to link up with a farmer friend, Jonathan Craggs, to found his own Ramside Hereford herd and plans to run pure Herefords in

John Adamson has one ambition for his family run hotels. It is to be simply the best. It was no surprise therefore when Ramside Estate decided to open Rib Room steakhouses and grills in its two four star hotels that this included the beef on offer. After trying beef from both the UK and overseas, he decided that for the Rib Rooms one beef stood out from the rest – pure Hereford grass fed beef hung for 28 days. John told his story to Neil Ryder – over a steak meal of course!

a field in front of the family's Hardwick Hall hotel.

John is the third generation of his family to head the family

business of Ramside Estate founded by his grandfather. The business was carried on by John's father, the charismatic Michael Adamson, who died last year (2010).

John, himself, grew up in the family business leaving home to study at hotel college in Switzerland followed by working in top hotels in Paris, Brussels and then London before rejoining the family business now based at Ramside Hall Hotel and Golf Club at Carrville, Co Durham – just off junction 62 on the A1 motorway.

The modern business takes in Ramside Hall at Carrville and Hardwick Hall, near Sedgefield both former stately homes and now four star hotels plus the smaller three star Bowburn



Farmer, Jonathan Craggs, runs the Ramside Hereford herd and shares ownership on a 50/50 basis with John Adamson of Ramside Estate.

Hall Hotel in Bowburn village, a few miles south of Carrville. The business also takes in a thriving outdoor events catering business including hog roasts plus popular bars and restaurants in Newcastle. The group has a turnover of about £20 million of which about £12 million is generated from food sales. It takes some £60,000 per week in food sales.

"I try and eat out at least once a week to see what other hotels and restaurants are offering and whether there are any ideas that we can use in our own business. I have also travelled abroad to learn more about our industry. It was clear that steak houses and restaurants remained popular from the large chains through to more upmarket, independent businesses like our own.

"In our own business we have



The next generation in the Ramside Herford herd - calves Ramside Helen and Holly.



This chalk board tells customers where their beef was produced.

found that food sales have held up well throughout the recession, though there has been some pressure on room rates with budget hotels in the area. Two years ago we decided to open The Rib Room restaurants here at Ramside Hall and at Hardwick Hall. It was also decided that the beef used in these restaurants would be the best available for this purpose and that it would be handled and cooked to as near perfection as we could manage.

“We looked at a wide range of beef breeds and crosses narrowing them down to a shortlist which included Limousin, USDA Creekstone Prime Black Angus, Hereford, and Argens – Argentinian – beef. Limousin is a good beef but too lean to use in our Rib Rooms, the Argentinian beef was excellent but very expensive as was the Pinstone Angus.

“Simply the Hereford beef stood out giving us excellent, succulent steaks, at a price that leaves a fair margin for everyone – the farmer, butcher and, of course, ourselves. In addition all our Rib Room beef is sourced locally from farms in Durham plus slaughtered and butchered locally at Sedgefield.

“This means the cattle are grass fed under high welfare conditions and the short journey to the slaughterhouse keeps stress as low as possible all of which enhances meat quality. It also keeps food miles low and fitted in with our policy of using local suppliers wherever possible.

“We take the whole carcass as prime cuts – a full side would create handling problems for us – which are butchered in our kitchens. Each of the new Rib

Rooms has its own dedicated kitchen and team of chefs. The meat has been hung for 14 days by our butcher and we will hang it a further 14 days in the hotel. Each cut is tagged with the date of arrival at the hotel. Currently we are taking three beasts per week between Ramside and Hardwick.

“The Rib Room kitchens also have a bespoke French cooking range with both gas fired and electrically heated surfaces designed specifically for steak restaurants. Apart from beef steaks the Rib Rooms also offer a range of other dishes,



John Adamson is the third generation of his family to head the Ramside Estate hospitality business.

including vegetarian, to cater for all tastes,” he said.

“The farm supplying the beef is always shown on a chalk board and we have a glass fronted beef locker where diners can see the beef being hung. I went to a steakhouse, Gallaghers, in New York where they have sides of beef hanging behind glass as you go in so included our own version here.

“Just occasionally customers will ask for a table away from the locker, but most find it all adds to the atmosphere of The Rib Room. It is important that we offer our customers a great atmosphere and experience when they eat here and that includes our overall presentation and service. So far, at least, the Rib Rooms have been extremely busy and, businesswise, a major success.

“Our menus may vary from month to month, but as we talk [October 2011] the steak range runs from a 20 oz Rib Eye special at £29.95 to a 10 oz rump steak at £15.95 and a 6 oz fillet popular with our lady customers. The range includes a 12 oz fillet on the bone which I have only seen elsewhere at the top Rules Restaurant, claimed to be the oldest restaurant in London, and is now proving a success at Ramside.

“One of the advantages of having a diversified business is that we can make full use of the beef carcass. One of the more unusual uses includes carving a full leg of beef for an event,” said John.

Sedgefield butchers, George Bolam (Foods) have supplied the meat to Ramside Estates for almost 30 years.

George said: “For use in the Rib Rooms we look for a 550kg pure Hereford beast as we



Presentation is an important part of the Rib Room experience with all steaks served on these wooden chargers. The steak here is an 18 oz porterhouse.



The meat lock visible to diners is an adaptation of an idea seen in New York.



The first calver, Brackenwood Mandy took the active breed championship at the 2011 Cleveland Show. Jonathan Craggs says she is very much the type of Hereford female needed for the Ramside herd. He sees her as a modern type of animal with frame and strength.

need this to provide the size of steaks required. The fat cover will be about H – a typical grade will be 4H. This is important as a leaner meat will have less flavour.

“The animals requested for the Rib Rooms must be pure Herefords, grass fed and from designated farms. One of our problems is the limited supply of these animals and we would welcome more.

“We are unusual here in that we are probably the only meat company buying stock from the livestock market, putting it through our own abattoir, and then selling it to the end user, both wholesale and to the public, through our own food supermarket. While we supply grass feed native breed meat to hotels, like Ramside, we do not sell it through our shop as

we find joe public prefers the leaner continental cross type of beef,” he said.

For farmer, Jonathan Craggs of Glower-oer-Him, Sedgefield, the need for Hereford beef for the Rib Rooms took his farm business in a new direction. Jonathan and John Adamson have known each other and been friends for much of their lives. Jonathan had virtually given up his farm business after losing his three-year-old son Ben in a tragic accident at the 2008 Royal Highland Show.

Then John came forward with the idea of establishing their own Ramside pedigree Hereford herd with the aim of eventually supplying beef for the Rib Rooms. The friends went forward with the project on a 50/50 basis, meanwhile they would buy in and finish pure

Hereford store cattle as and when they became available.

The Ramside herd is based on the stock bull, Killiebrize 1 Yan and just a few cows. Jonathan plans also to make use of AI bulls to spread the genetics within the herd. As long as they are suitable, all females born in the herd are being retained for breeding and additional animals will be bought in to enable some pure Herefords to be run at Hardwick Hall.

It is hoped to take the herd size up to around 30 breeding cows. All male calves are castrated and reared for beef with these supplemented by bought in pure Hereford stores when available.

“At first we tried using a little feed to finish the Herefords, but found they got a little too fat and finished much better off grass and is the cheapest feed anyway.

We finish the steers at about 24 months of age and heifers at about 18 months. It is important to build frame and size to carry meat and you will then get the weights needed,” he said.

Glower-oer-Him is a 130 acre tenanted farm owned by the Church Commissioners. Formerly carrying commercial beef and sheep enterprises, Jonathan has retained his interest in rearing and showing commercial beef cattle with a string of leading show awards to his credit.

He has also shown Brackenwood Mandy, a first calver in the Ramside herd leading her to the native breed championship at his local Cleveland Show.

Jonathan also uses the Hereford bull on his Limousin and British Blue cross commercial suckler cows.



This French made Athanor range is designed specifically for cooking and holding top quality steaks. Both Ramside Hall and Hardwick Hall have these ranges in their Rib Room kitchens.