



## THE OBAN SEAFOOD HUT

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Stinking of fish, John Ogden sat by his seafood hut on the pier in the small Scottish seaside town of Oban some 12 years ago and watched a helicopter touchdown. He was waiting for Brad Pitt, who was in Glasgow filming *World War Z* at the time. A lad on set had been gushing about the hut's butter-poached shellfish and oysters so fresh they had barely touched the air. Pitt decided to pop over for lunch.

When a weather-beaten man with long hair and a scraggly beard stepped out and approached him, the fisherman was taken aback. He asked the man, in his Yorkshire lilt, when the Hollywood heavyweight was due to arrive. Confused, the man replied that he was, in fact, Brad Pitt. Ogden was astonished. "What?! You look like a fucking homeless man."

Brad Pitt bought 15 prawn sandwiches and an Irn-Bru and flew away.

That's the way Ogden's son, and current manager of the Oban Seafood Hut tells it, anyway.

John Ogden passed away earlier this year at the age of 74. A fixture of the community, he was dedicated to bringing delicious, simply prepared seafood to people at affordable prices, and is credited with earning Oban the title of 'Seafood Capital of Scotland'.

"He spoke his mind. A lot of people liked that. He was quite blunt and funny," says John's son and manager of Oban Seafood Hut, Tony Monaghan. "John would really go out of his way to give people his honest opinion and he would actually help people. He would never want to see anyone stuck."

Ogden was an all or nothing kind of guy, especially when it came to seafood. He would cram prawns into sandwiches until bursting; his seafood platters were topped with a meaty lobster,

and his garlicky mussels spilled from their container enveloped in billows of steam. His family lovingly continues this legacy.

John started the Oban Seafood Hut in 1990 when a recession in the United Kingdom tore apart the fishing industry. John, who had been a fisherman for decades, started cooking catch and selling it from his baiting shed.

"He and other fishermen went from working manually at sea to buttering sandwiches. There were no counters, just fish boxes," says Tony. "There'd be guys changing oil pumps before making sandwiches, and cooking lobsters with a little boiler in the corner. It had very humble beginnings, and it grew from there."

Two years later, a journalist propelled the hut to cult fame, after naming the prawn sandwich the "best in the universe". In the decades since, John Ogden has been visited by celebrities, politicians, tour groups and locals alike, all vying for seafood caught just a few metres from their queue. Not bad for a former baiting shed with only a couple of shared outdoor tables for seating, in a fishing village two-and-a-half hours drive from Glasgow (or 20 minutes by helicopter).

The day John died, his family received over 600 phone calls. The day after, they received a letter from Scottish politician Nicola Sturgeon.

John was famously grumpy, dazzlingly charming and would always be seen in a flat cap, a shirt, tie and braces, and dirty yellow gumboots. "He wore a tie almost every day of my life. Even when we were on holiday in Barbados, it's like 40 degrees there," Tony said, laughing. "He was a real character, and he's really missed." 🐟