# McDonald’s Dundee turns 36: how Scotland’s first Golden Arches shaped childhood memories and local culture



It is December 3, 1987, and I have obtained a coveted invitation to the birthday party of Michelle Palmer, the first of our class to turn 11. The event is taking place at Scotland's inaugural McDonald’s restaurant, which opened its doors just ten days prior, resplendent with its Golden Arches on Reform Street in Dundee. The atmosphere buzzing with excitement, the smell of fries perfuming the air, and the gleaming chrome interiors were an adventure for a ten-year-old, and an experience I would carry vividly with me throughout my life.

Reflecting on that day, I can still remember the thrill of joining the queue, playfully rolling the unfamiliar terms "Quarter Pounder" and "large fries" off my tongue, as we navigated our first foray into a world that was hitherto unknown to us. Our enthusiasm reached its peak when Michelle’s mum announced we could choose anything on the menu. Her own two Big Mac meals set the stage for what would become a cherished tradition. Fast forward to the present, and McDonald’s continues to be a significant marker in childhood memories.

Recently, while driving home from filming, I was reminded of these nostalgic moments when Johnny Vaughan announced on Radio X that there was positive news surrounding McDonald's: it was reportedly deemed beneficial for those suffering from migraines, with anecdotal support suggesting that fries and a Coke could alleviate pain. Though the suggestion of making fast food a regular dietary staple would be an overstatement, many will agree on the relief a trip through the drive-thru can bring in our busy lives.

Since that momentous opening in 1987, McDonald’s has endured its fair share of criticism, from labour disputes to health-related scandals, yet it has continually found ways to recover. Remarkably, the restaurant in Dundee accounted for the second busiest opening week in McDonald’s UK history at that time, necessitating additional staff and stock due to the fervent demand, a level of enthusiasm that, while perhaps difficult to replicate, underscores the brand's presence in the collective memory.

The cultural significance of the Dundee branch illuminates how it has transcended mere fast food to become a cherished parental reward. Many parents, from Fintry to the Ferry, still echo similar words: “Do your homework, be good, and we might just swing by McDonald's tomorrow.” This notion of McDonald’s as a treat after school or sport reinforces its role as more than just a restaurant; it has become integrated into familial traditions.

As our society assimilates various trends, I often voice my concerns over Americanisations seeping into our language. However, the influence of McDonald's has shown that some American ideals—revelry in celebrations, for instance—can be welcomed in moderation. The restaurant that once burst onto the scene in 1987 has not only survived but thrived, now firmly establishing itself in Dundee, where it has provided countless locals with their first jobs, many of whom advanced to managerial positions.

Today's children, just like the girl I once was, beam with joy after hearing the words “let's go to McDonald's.” Both then and now, this simple phrase can invoke a sense of delight that transcends time. Nearly four decades later, the presence of McDonald’s continues to be a mainstay, offering a blend of nostalgia and novelty for both parents and children alike.

In the ever-evolving landscape of the food industry, McDonald's remains steadfast, serving as a reminder of how a single restaurant can change not only culinary preferences but also become embedded in the fabric of family life, catering to both the tastes and aspirations of generations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/opinion/5251910/dundee-mcdonalds-martel-maxwell/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://news.stv.tv/north/remembering-the-day-scotlands-first-mcdonalds-opened-in-dundee> - This article commemorates the opening of Scotland's first McDonald's in Dundee on November 23, 1987. It highlights the excitement surrounding the event, with hundreds lining the streets to taste their first Big Mac. The restaurant's design, featuring stainless steel and chrome, was a significant departure from local establishments. The opening week was the second busiest in McDonald's UK history at the time, leading to the need for additional staff and stock. The piece also touches on the cultural impact of the restaurant's arrival in Dundee.
3. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/past-times/3904723/mcdonalds-in-dundees-reform-street-turns-35/> - Celebrating the 35th anniversary of McDonald's in Dundee's Reform Street, this article reflects on the restaurant's journey since its opening in 1987. It discusses the initial public reaction, the restaurant's design, and the menu offerings of the time. The piece also mentions the creation of a special McDonald's-branded whisky to mark the launch in Scotland. Over the years, the restaurant has become a permanent fixture in the city, with many locals starting their working life there and some advancing to become restaurant managers.
4. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/20-years-of-big-macs-as-mcdonalds-marks-scottish-anniversary-2452091> - This article marks the 20th anniversary of McDonald's in Scotland, focusing on the opening of the first Scottish store in Dundee on November 23, 1987. It features insights from Dave Jeffrey, the first manager of the Dundee branch, who recalls the initial public reaction and the challenges faced during the opening. The piece also touches on the cultural significance of McDonald's in Scotland and its evolution over the years, including the expansion of the menu and the introduction of new services.
5. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/past-times/1493728/from-a-drunken-pete-doherty-to-a-cheery-andi-peters-we-remember-some-of-the-celebrity-customers-at-scotlands-very-first-mcdonalds-in-dundee/> - This article reminisces about the celebrity visitors to Scotland's first McDonald's in Dundee. It highlights encounters with figures like Pete Doherty and Andi Peters, sharing anecdotes from the restaurant's early days. The piece also reflects on the restaurant's impact on the local community, noting how it became a popular spot for both locals and celebrities. Additionally, it discusses the restaurant's design and the initial public reaction to its opening in 1987.
6. <https://www.heart.co.uk/scotland/news/local/mcdonalds-adds-70m-to-economy/> - This report discusses McDonald's significant contribution to the Scottish economy, estimating an addition of £170 million annually through its business and suppliers. It highlights the employment of around 9,100 people directly and indirectly, including at major suppliers such as Smith Anderson in Kirkcaldy, Fife, and Arla Foods in Dumfries and Galloway. The report also notes that Scotland-based businesses sold almost £90 million of goods and services into the McDonald's supply chain in 2013, underscoring the chain's economic impact in Scotland.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/read-this/mcdonalds-contributes-ps4572-million-to-the-scottish-economy-employing-more-than-15000-people-4752636> - This article details McDonald's substantial contribution to the Scottish economy, reporting a £457.2 million annual impact and employment of over 15,000 people. It provides a breakdown of McDonald's economic impact across Scotland's major cities, including Dundee, where the company supports 395 jobs. The piece also highlights McDonald's role in the local supply chain, mentioning suppliers like Smith Anderson Group in Kirkcaldy, Fife, which supplies paper bags and food packaging to all UK restaurants.