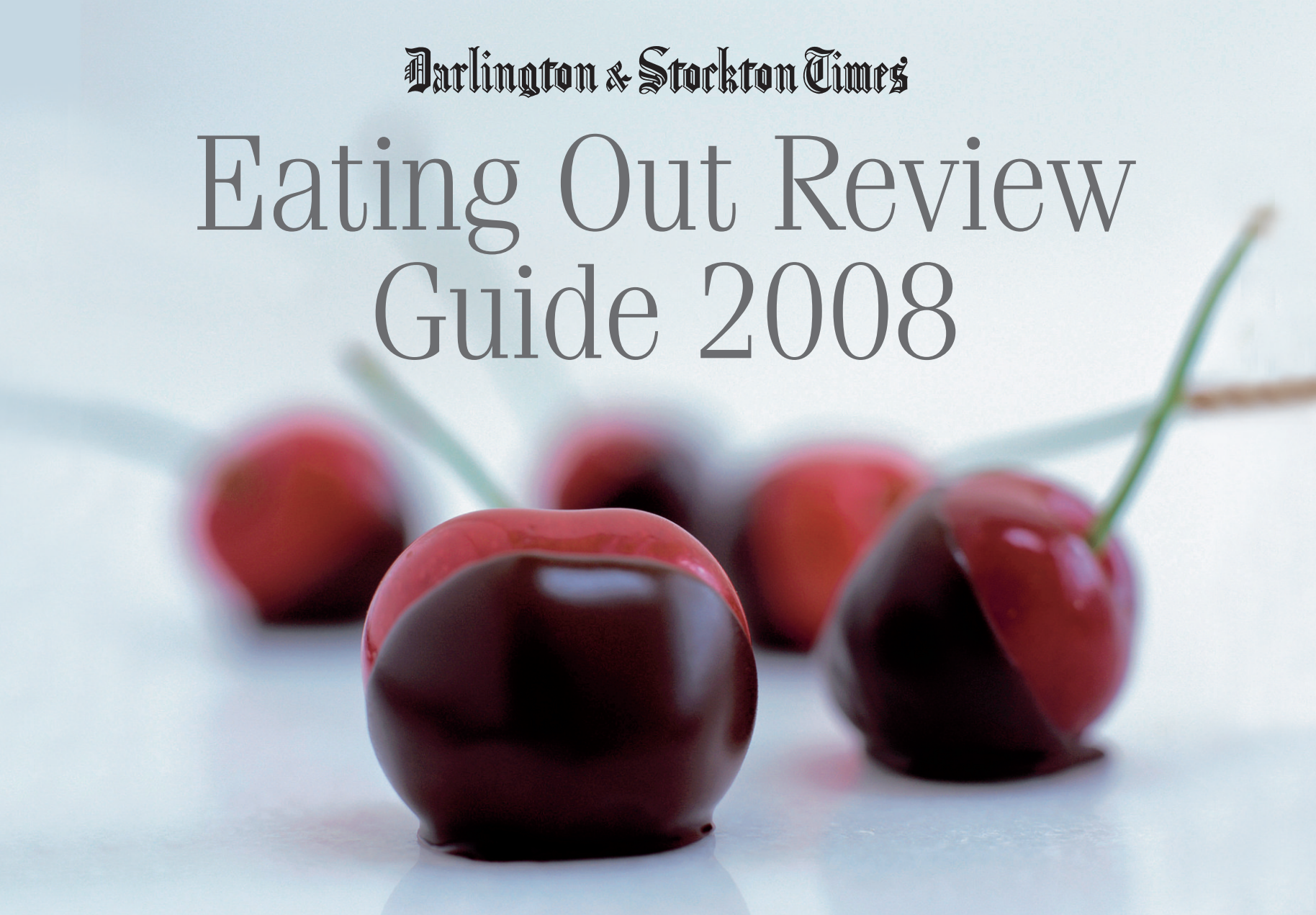


*Darlington & Stockton Times*

# Eating Out Review Guide 2008



# Your guide to eating out in North Yorkshire and County Durham

**A**NOTHER year, another 52 restaurants, pubs and hotels sampled in our quest to find the best places to eat out in North Yorkshire and South Durham.

Many of the better establishments are featured in this guide – our third – and we hope you enjoy sampling them yourselves.

At the time of writing, the economic climate is not as bright as it was and for many people that means belt tightening and cutting back on luxuries. For many people, that includes eating out but whether you eat out once a week or once a month, you want the occasion to be enjoyable and good value. Hopefully that is where this guide will prove to be handy, providing information about some of the area's best-value eateries.

The major trend we have identified this year during our travels has been the growing use of local produce on menus. We applaud this development. Seven years ago we championed the cause of our local food producers in our Great North Country Fare campaign and it is gratifying to see so many pubs and restaurants starting to use the excellent fresh ingredients on their doorsteps.

But it is also important that diners remain cautious about local food claims. Although our team of reviewers has not found evidence so far of this practice, there is evidence that some unscrupulous restaurateurs are exploiting this enthusiasm for local food with fanciful menu descriptions

which bear no relation to reality. There is, of course, no precise definition of localness but diners should be prepared to ask questions if menus, or waiting staff, are not explicit about the provenance of the eagerly-promoted "local ingredients".

Our message for pub, hotel and restaurant owners is to concentrate on service. This year we have found many establishments where the food has been let down by the quality of service. Good service is an art every bit as valuable as good cooking but you would not think that is the case in too many pubs and restaurants. For every smiling, courteous, attentive and efficient waiter or waitress we have encountered, there has been a bored-to-the-point of surliness, clumsy automaton, lacking the basic training and personality to make diners feel welcome.

Diners should learn to be brave when not satisfied. Don't reward poor service and be prepared to let proprietors know when things are not right. They can't do anything about it if we don't let them know.

So, here's to happy eating in 2008. I trust you find this guide, and our weekly reviews in the *Darlington & Stockton Times*, entertaining and useful.

**Malcolm Warne**

*Editor, Darlington & Stockton Times*



# Culinary encounter at The Station

**Seasons Restaurant is in the wonderfully refurbished Station but it is not run by the trust that looks after the building. Restaurateurs Jane Galloghy and partner Ian Woodcock lease the space and run it as an independent business.**

But what they have created seems to fit well with the rest of what is the most exciting thing to happen in Richmond for years.

Firstly, the old Victorian Gothic station building which opened in November last year is a wonderful structure in which to create a restaurant. Seasons occupies the central area where, until the closure of the station in 1968, the trains used to depart from Darlington. It is split into a formal dining area and a lounge /café / bar area by see-through screens which cleverly separate without destroying the sense of being in one space. No so clever is the rather leaden and sentimental prose about the wonders of seasonal food which adorn the screens but we will not comment further on matter of literary taste for fear of readers thinking of pots and kettles (black for the calling).

Despite the high roof with its ornate ironwork, the ambience is surprisingly intimate, assisted greatly by the tables being decently spaced out and a subtle lighting scheme which brings out the warmth of the stone walls. It also helped that, on the midweek evening we visited, we were the only diners, although there did seem to be a few customers using the café / bar. It was also cosy which was something of an achievement in itself given the cavernous space and the mid-January chill outside.

We had heard reports about the service being somewhat erratic in the early days but we had no complaints about the young and charming staff who looked after us. Granted, they were not run off their feet but they managed not to hover too obviously and sensed when their presence was required.

Sylvia started with seared queen scallops, crispy black pudding and pancetta on honey mustard dressed leaves (6.95) and enjoyed two plumb and perfectly soft bundles of melting flesh. She thought the small triangle of black pudding a little meagre but said the dressing of the salad was superb.

My Jerusalem artichoke soup (£4.95) was thick, creamy, delicately flavoured, served in a giant soup bowl, and came with some great crusty bread and plenty of butter and balsamic / olive oil.

Sylvia's eaten a lot of steak over the years but rated her peppered rib-eye with skinny fries (£13.95) among the best. A large and well-aged piece of beef, it was tender and flavoursome. The chips were perfectly crisp.

The sure touch shown with the scallops was well to the fore again in the grilling of my halibut (£15.25), which was served on a bed of wilted spinach and came with a patty of herby crushed new potatoes. A beautifully presented dish, I though it could only have been bettered by a slightly more generous serving of an excellent cucumber butter sauce.

We finished with a faultless pannacotta with clove-scented



blueberry compote (£5.50) for me and a decent latte (£2) for her.

After lingering for a while, enjoying the splendid ambience of this remarkable converted space, we settled a bill which initially we thought incredibly reasonable until we realised the dessert and coffee had been missed off.

A lesser establishment, we might have been tempted to let them pay for the mistake, but as the corrected bill was £53.90, which included two small glasses of Pino Grigio, we felt honour-bound to point it out.

This was good value for a beautifully presented and an almost perfectly cooked meal.

By Malcolm Warne

Seasons Restaurant  
The Station, Station Road, Richmond  
Tel: 01748 825340 / [www.restaurant-seasons.co.uk](http://www.restaurant-seasons.co.uk)

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓✓✓** Value **✓✓✓✓**

# Glorious vegetables, a smart interior - and posh loos too

**T**hose of you who don't eat your greens as mother said you should might look away now, because this week I'm going to talk about vegetables.

Don't panic, I'm not going all veggie on you. But, as a general rule, vegetables are much under-rated in pubs and restaurants. In the fanciest restaurants, they are frequently relegated to the role of stand-in garnish, for illustrative, elaboration purposes only, and in too many pubs they consist of the standard medley of carrots and broccoli/cauliflower and peas, pre-cooked and zapped in the microwave to nuclear meltdown point just before serving.

To find a place where the same care and attention is given to the vegetables as to the meat and fish is rare indeed, so we were pleased to find the Vane Arms, in the delightfully-named Thorpe Thewles, just a few miles northwest of Stockton.

The vegetables here were superb. Some strongly flavoured creamed leeks, lightly browned on top, glazed carrots cooked just beyond crunchiness but before soggy squidginess and cubed, roast parsnip and sweet potatoes, slightly crisp on the edges - a beautiful, classic combo as Jamie Oliver would say.

The main event is equally well-prepared and presented. Sylvia enjoyed her chicken saltimbocca (£9.95), a variation on the Italian standard usually made with veal. Three pieces of chicken breast had been beaten flat, and simmered in a Marsala sauce with sage leaves and Parma ham. Sylvia said it was good as anything she had eaten for weeks.

My Cajun blackened snapper with tomato salsa and sour cream (£10.25) was a lovely, meaty piece of fish. The spicy

coating added a little heat but the salsa and sour cream provided a balance.

We had skipped starters, having had a substantial lunch that day, but enjoyed picking at a bowl of marinated olives (£4.75) which came with warm ciabatta bread and top-quality olive oil and balsamic vinegar for dipping/soaking.

I did manage a dessert, an intensely-rich and velvety chocolate creme brulee (£5.25) which had a nicely brittle burnt sugar topping and was accompanied by butter shortbread biscuits.

All of the above was prepared single-handedly in the Vane Arms' tiny kitchen by chef Joanne Tough, who sensibly sticks to a short-ish menu plus a handful of daily specials with the emphasis on simplicity and quality ingredients.

Most of the main course choices are under £10 which is pretty remarkable value for this sort of quality in 2008. Our total bill was only £36, which included a couple of drinks and some mineral water.

Last Saturday night, the Vane Arms was not packed because landlord Gordon McPhail clearly only takes the number of bookings the aforementioned Ms Tough can comfortably handle. Service was bit patchy because Mr McPhail was running front-of-house virtually single-handed, but he did so with a great deal of charm and refreshing honesty. He seemed a thoroughly likeable chap with a good idea of how to create a relaxing atmosphere for his customers.

Although the Vane Arms is still a pub, Mr McPhail, whose previous jobs have included running a Las Vegas guest house and looking after quality control at NASA, has carried out a gradual transformation of the building over



the past four years. It has been extensively modernised but the period features have been retained and few added, like a spectacular stone fireplace in the main dining area.

Bare floorboards, exposed brickwork, squashy leather sofas, art deco-style lighting and a creamy mocha colour scheme create a comfortable, almost sophisticated, contemporary bar-like ambience, but it is still a place where the locals can call in for a pint and a formal meal can be enjoyed.

Outside, the exterior lighting shows off the 18th century building at its best in the evening and there are also tables and chairs for al fresco eating and drinking with a view of the village green in the summer months.

Finally, we also approved of the toilets. Like vegetables, they are frequently forgotten. Thousands are spent on pub interiors to attract diners but the toilets remain the glorified cesspits found in old fashioned boozers. That certainly wasn't the case here. The pristine white tiles looked clean enough to eat your veg off.

By Malcolm Warne

Vane Arms  
Thorpe Thewles, near Stockton  
Telephone: 01740 630458

Open: noon-9pm, seven days

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓✓✓** Value **✓✓✓✓**

# Simple classics in the old school house

**T**wenty or more years ago, a couple called Gerd and Peter Handley opened my eyes to what a good country pub should be.

They had taken over the Abbey Inn at Byland Abbey, near Coxwold, Thirsk, and turned it from a beer only country boozer into what today is usually called a gastro pub. I hate that description but it best defines what the Abbey Inn became - a great pub serving exceptional food. There were also the added ingredients of the inn's unique setting next door to Byland Abbey and Gerd's flair for interior design which made what was an old farm into a truly delightful restaurant. The stone flagged floors, exposed brickwork and the fabrics, furnishings and decorative bric-a-brac made for a uniquely relaxed and charming atmosphere. Even though the Handleys moved on, the Abbey Inn has remained a favourite destination for a special meal ever since.

After a spell running a fine country hotel in the Nunnington area, the couple have resurfaced near Thirsk, having taken over what used to be The Gables restaurant at Birdforth on the A19. The Corner Cupboard, as it now called, is not a restaurant in the sense of a place where you can eat lunch or dinner. It is only open 9.30-5.30 as the Handleys have decided that after a lifetime in the hospitality business, they fancy living a rather more normal lifestyle.

The Corner Cupboard does lunches, teas and what might be termed snacks, although I struck me that to call in here for a just cup of tea and a cake is rather like owning a Ferrari and only using it to get to the corner shop.

The dining area is in a light and airy conservatory-style extension to the main building, which was originally used

as a school. Although it has rather uninspiring views of the A19, it is a beautifully furnished room, demonstrating that Gerd has lost none of her interior design touch.

We had lunch and we don't think we have had a better one in a long, long time. As in the Abbey Inn days, the cooking is fairly simple with the emphasis on top quality ingredients and natural flavour combinations. There's nothing whacky and Amen to that.

So Sylvia had oven baked chicken breast with a tarragon and lemon cream sauce (£8.95). The sauce is a French classic and just goes so well with chicken but I haven't seen it served anywhere for years. Sylvia was well satisfied.

I chose salmon cakes (£8.85) which were rather more novel in that they contained no potato, just chives and creme fraiche and possibly egg. At first I was puzzled by what, in the absence of potato, was holding the cakes together but I soon stopped analysing and just enjoyed the light fishy herbiness and the accompanying fennel sauce - again a classic flavour combination.

There was choice of new potatoes or chips and salad. The salad was beautifully prepared and came with a gorgeously thick, creamy and unctuous dressing.

These dishes were accompanied by good quality bread rolls and butter so Sylvia was stumped for anything else. Purely in the line of duty of course, I felt I had to put myself through the ordeal of dessert. I turned down Eton Mess, banana and toffee pancake, sticky toffee pudding and Drambuie slice, tiramisu, Bakewell tart and vanilla panacotta to select a brioche bread and butter pudding with custard (all desserts £4.25).



This was light, full of currants with good vanilla flavour and the custard, served in a separate little dish, was sublimely good.

All this classical goodness cost a measly £29. Mind you a visit to The Corner Cupboard can prove to be a rather more expensive as Gerd Handley has a beautiful collection of household furnishings and decorative art for sale which one encounters on the way to the till.

Provided that temptation can be resisted, this is the best value lunch to be had for many a mile.

By Malcolm Warne

The Corner Cupboard  
Birdforth, near Thirsk  
Telephone: 01845 501495 / [www.theolddeanery.co.uk](http://www.theolddeanery.co.uk)

Open: Tues to Sat, 9.30-5pm

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓✓✓** Value **✓✓✓✓**

# Still Star-struck after all these years

**M**ichelin stars, the supposed gold standard of the restaurant business, are few and far between in the North of England.

Apart from a small cluster in the Lake District and a couple in the area just north of Leeds, they are as rare as foie gras in Ferryhill. In the North-East there is just one - Seaham Hall - and it's the same in North Yorkshire where, outside that Ilkley/Pateley Bridge hotspot, the only culinary shining star, according to the Michelin inspectors, is the appropriately named Star Inn at Harome, near Helmsley.

Given the truly excellent establishments that can be found, what does this say about the Michelin inspection regime? Is it overly obsessed with metropolitan Britain? Does it tend to ignore the less fashionable parts of the country? Most controversially, is it the eating out guide for people with more money than sense?

It's been at least seven years since this column last visited the picture-perfect pub in the picture-perfect village just a couple of miles west of that picture-perfect market town.

Then we thought the Star brilliant, albeit pricey. The Michelin star was awarded in 2002. It has been re-awarded every year since. What does that mean?

All these questions were in my mind as we made our way up Sutton Bank and then gradually downhill into Helmsley and Harome as the most bitter of north winds brought a hint of the Easter snows still to come.

The Star is easy to spot, even on the darkest winter night, because a lighted wood-fired brazier is stationed just outside the entrance as a symbol of the warm welcome that lies within.

It was as promised by the brazier, prompt, warm and smiling. With the minimum of fuss, we were soon sitting in a corner of the bar with a drink and the menus, taking in the cruck-framed antiquity of the 14th century building and the tasteful refurbishment - plum coloured walls, minimum knickknackery, candlelight - carried out by owners Andrew and Jacquie Pern after they rescued it from near dereliction just over 10 years ago.

The atmosphere is marginally more formal in the dining room but that seemed appropriate for the consumption of some seriously good food, starting with Yoadwath Mill (at nearby Kirkbymoorside) oak-smoked salmon with toast (£9). On the menu it was described as a "plate" of salmon and the menu wasn't kidding. It was a full plateful with more than enough for Sylvia to nick a sliver or two of the softly-smoked fish.

My calves liver with bubble and squeak rosti, smoked bacon and green lentil juices (£18.95) was simply the mostly delicately seared piece of animal innards I can remember. Pink and pillow-like, it was velvet on the tongue with the bacon adding a savoury edge.

Sylvia's pan fried halibut with Montgomery cheddar cheese rarebit topping, Waldorf salad and shellfish vinaigrette (£19.95) was equally well received, the fish as fresh as the sea and the dish perfectly presented.

Accompanying greens (organic purple sprouting broccoli among them) were served in a dinky copper pan and just as good Sylvia was all done but I wasn't going to resist a brioche bread and butter pudding with hot syrup and black treacle ice cream (£8). Writing this four days later I can still



taste the slightly sticky, softness of the brioche and the crumbly texture of the ice cream. Absolutely dreamsville.

Prices, you will have noted, are steep. Restaurant diners will pay about £40 for three courses without wine but the quality was consistent throughout and service was special, and not just because the staff smiled sweetly and the food arrived at the appropriate time.

It was thoughtful service. Like when a jug of water was brought to our table. The jug was turned so the handle was towards us and, when we spilled a little, it was immediately spotted and wiped up. Little things but they spoke volumes for the care the staff took.

Excellent food, beautiful surroundings and truly impressive service that makes a real difference to the experience because of its unfussy, informal thoroughness. That's the star quality which merits a stellar Michelin rating

By Malcolm Warne

The Star Inn  
Harome, near Helmsley  
Tel: 01439 770397 [www.thestaratharome.co.uk](http://www.thestaratharome.co.uk)

Open: Tues-Sat 11.30-2pm, 6.30-9.30; Sun noon-6pm.  
Closed Mon LUNCH only.  
Open Mon Eve from 6.30-9.30

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓✓



# Riverside Swan is a worthy rival to Bowes museum icon

**A**fter a period of decay, when it seemed that the White Swan at Startforth would fall into permanent disrepair, new life has been breathed into the building which sits on the "Yorkshire" side of the County Bridge at Barnard Castle.

Andrew Rowbotham, 29, took over the lower half of the premises in February, named it Riverside @ The Swan, and vowed to serve quality English food worthy of the historic market town; in complete contrast to the Italian it replaces, which opened and closed again before this column got round to trying it.

Andrew, a Consett man, has spent the last three years in Spain, where he ran his own American steakhouse. Keen to return to England, he alighted on the Swan via his mother Avril, whose daytime boss is the landlord of the recently refurbished building.

I sometimes bemoan the lack of social skills in Teesdale restaurants, but there are exceptions, and the Riverside is one, probably because it is family run. Avril is front of house when she finishes her day job in Shildon, and her pride in her son's skills shines through in the service, which filters down through the enthusiastic young staff.

The low-beamed restaurant feels light and spacious, its cool quarry tiles and plain furniture lifted by huge Moorish scatter cushions, possibly influenced by Andrew's time in Spain, that serve as comfortable backrests for the cosy alcove seats.

There is room for 40 diners, but we had to eat early doors after leaving it too late to make an 8pm reservation.

However, we were not rushed, and the staff found time for a friendly word as they waited on us.

From a choice of eight starters Peter, who rarely chooses fish, threw caution to the wind at the description of the

seafood platter. Although a tad expensive at £7.95 he felt quality overruled price, with a selection of prawns in Marie Rose sauce, gravadlax, smoked salmon and mixed leaves, accompanied by warm bread rolls.

I went for garlic mushrooms in a filo pastry basket, at £5.95 a combination and texture that worked well.

The sauce was thick, creamy, not overdone with garlic, and didn't make the pastry soggy, while the mushrooms were plump and plentiful. Set out on a bed of salad, it was a tempting appetiser.

Mellowed by a glass or two from a bottle of excellent Chilean Merlot, a reasonable £10.95, we devoured our choices from the 14 mains. Peter went for pork, pudding and champ; the pork's provenance the prize-winning Broom Mill Farm at West Auckland. The fillet, on a wedge of traditional black pudding with a bed of mash, was served with a boat of leek sauce. He declared it the rival of the Gloucester Old Spot he sampled on a birthday treat at Fortnum's a couple of years ago, and at £12.50 had no complaints.

Having resisted the seafood platter I succumbed to the halibut. Baked in butter, it came with king prawns complemented by a creamy lobster and prawn sauce. What a delight to find halibut on the menu, and at £16.95 worth every perfect mouthful.

Both our dishes came with simply cooked vegetables, including new potatoes in their skins, carrots, cauliflower and turnip.

Nicely replete and with room for a pudding we lingered over the seven choices, all £4.95. And when mine came I thought I had died and gone to creme brulee heaven.

Barney must be the mecca for this particular dessert, as this was a match for a similar treat previously enjoyed up the road at Baillie's.



The brittle topping was superb, the custard delicately set and liberally dosed with Bailey's Irish Cream.

Peter went for the only pud not home made, but wasn't disappointed with his marbled chocolate truffle with fresh strawberry pesto.

We rounded off with coffee, accompanied by home baked shortbread, and a single malt. Lying back on the cushions, it took a considerable effort on Peter's part to shift me.

At £72.80 it was a treat, but there is a table d'hote menu available from Tuesday-Thursday, priced at £15.95 for three courses.

Barnard Castle is famous for its silver swan at The Bowes Museum, but at the White Swan Andrew Rowbotham has created a rival in the shape of the Riverside. In the words of author Bill Bryson, if you haven't been there yet, go at once, take my car.

Restricted disabled access.

By Sheila Dixon

Riverside @ The Swan  
Bridge End  
Startforth, Barnard Castle  
Telephone: (01833) 637576

Opening Hours: Open from 6pm daily,  
excepting Mondays, and for Sunday lunch.

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓✓

# Happier reflections and excellent value

**T**he last time we wrote about La Sorrentina, an unassuming Italian restaurant near Darlington's Civic Theatre, it brought the owner to the doors of the Darlington & Stockton Times.

Peppe Terminiello was not best pleased. In fact he was absolutely furious. He had not owned the restaurant for very long and our reviewer had not been overly impressed by her meal. What's more, she had said so in no uncertain terms.

The key issue for Mr Terminiello was the vegetarian pizza and the cauliflower, the presence of which in the pizza topping our reviewer thought wholly inappropriate.

A seething Mr Terminiello confronted yours truly with the incontrovertible truth: "Cauliflower ees a vegetable. She ordered a vegetarian pizza. So whata the problem?"

We couldn't deny it but we couldn't offer Mr Terminiello any comfort. Our reviewers are always urged to speak as they find and she had done just that.

The Italian restaurateur stormed out of Priestgate threatening the imminent dispatch of a writ. It never arrived, perhaps because m'learned friend advised Mr Terminiello that a critical opinion about cauliflower and vegetarian pizza was not promising grounds for a damages claim.

That was in 2004 and last week we decided to keep our promise to Mr Terminiello that we would return for another visit. It was a rather different experience, although we thought it best to steer clear of vegetarian pizza.

La Sorrentina is a traditional Italian. It offers a full range

of pastas, pizzas, chicken dishes and steaks. There are also fish dishes which change daily according to what's available.

The interior is simple. White walls, bright blue blinds and lights create an atmosphere which if not quite evocative of Sorrento does try to make diners ignore the rather less exotic surroundings of Parkgate. The Neapolitan Riveria it ain't.

We found the food to be authentically Italian too if not groundbreaking. My Carpaccio di Filetto (£6.95) was thinly sliced beef fillet marinated in lemon juice and sprinkled with Parmesan shavings.

The beef was softly tender in texture and the lemon and Parmesan made for a tart - almost wincingly so - foil. It made for a bracing start.

Sylvia's Cocktail di Gamberetti (£5.25) was a small mountain of juicy Norwegian Royal prawns folded into a Marie Rose sauce which was not too sweet and was a consistency the right side of gloopy.

Her Pollo Boscaiola (£9.95) was an equally traditional dish - a plump chicken breast served with a mixed pepper, mushroom, onion and tomato sauce. Sylvia couldn't fault it.

I loved my Spaghetti Pescatore (£10.95). A large oval plateful of al dente pasta tossed with a trawlerload of seafood which included king prawns, clams, mussels, tuna, salmon, a firm white fish which could have been cod and other piscatorial delights we couldn't quite identify but was fresh and, unlike a lot of seafood served in restaurants these days, tasted of the sea.



We shared a generous mixed salad (£3.25) notable for its size and its excellent dressing.

Things were brought to a close by an acceptable if unremarkable amaretto tart (£3.75) and a very reasonable bill of a smidge over £40. That was without the benefit of the various happy hour promotions available for those prepared to dine early in the evening (5.30pm Sunday to Friday) and there are also special deals for Civic Theatre patrons after 10pm.

Before we left we had wanted to make peace with Mr Terminiello, but unfortunately he wasn't on duty the Friday evening we called.

We interpreted that as a further sign of a well-run establishment. It doesn't fall apart when the boss is away.

By Malcom Warne

La Sorrentina  
77-70 Parkgate, Darlington  
Telephone: 01325 467991 / [www.lasorrentina.co.uk](http://www.lasorrentina.co.uk)  
Open: 5.30-11pm, seven days

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓✓

# Good food - pure and simply made

**In all the years of writing this column (four) we have never witnessed a full-scale domestic incident in a restaurant.**

That's still the case in truth because the saga we saw played out in the Travellers' Rest at Dalton, near Richmond, was rated barely one on the Richter Scale of lovers' tiffs. There was no sudden outburst, no stinging accusations, no pushed-back chairs and turned over tables. There wasn't even a glass of wine flung in anybody's face. In fact we almost didn't notice it all because the young woman made her exit with such discretion most people thought she had just gone to the loo after her starter.

When she hadn't returned for the main courses, her companion came clean to the waitress saying that he didn't think she was coming back. That was a crying shame because what looked like a gorgeous plate of tortellini was going to go to waste.

But the abandoned young man clearly had a proper perspective on life because he wasn't going to send his main course back. He tucked in with no obvious sense of embarrassment. Quite heroic really.

What would I have done had Sylvia taken the hump and done a runner? Call me a wimp if you like, but I don't think I would have sat there and done justice to my grilled sea bass with tomato vierge sauce (£13.95) for the following reasons.

For one, it was a filthy night outside. Secondly, it was an awfully long walk back to Darlington for a woman in high heels. Thirdly, I valued my marriage rather more than an ever-so-slightly overcooked but otherwise admirable piece of fish.

Happily, Sylvia was in her usual good spirits. After a long working week, the Travellers' Rest was just what the doctor ordered. It was a terrible night for mid-August with low cloud swathing the A66 and persistent rain turning the narrow lane down to Dalton into a small stream. But on opening the door of the inn a blazing fire greeted us. A simple thing but it set the tone for the evening.

Landlady Anne Morillon and her staff were equally welcoming and served us drinks at the bar while we studied blackboard menus and a concise but well-considered wine list.

There was a decent crowd in but it didn't feel packed. Although the pub is split into two small dining areas and an equally compact central bar/eating area, tables are reasonably well spaced-out so conversations are not easily overheard (handy for rowing couples - slightly irritating for nosey journalists).

Our table was in one of the side dining areas, with a fire, a sage and deep red colour scheme and William Morris patterned curtains. The chairs were comfortable, the table linen good quality.

Aside from that tiny weeny bit overdone sea bass which came with a wonderfully delicate and olive-oily tomato salsa type sauce, everything else we had surpassed expectations. Sylvia had a firm and fishy salmon and prawn fishcake with a sweet chilli dip (£4.95) to start followed by a moist and tender chicken breast wrapped in bacon with a strong but not overpowering Stilton sauce (£11.25).

My starter of chicken liver terrine was packed with herby liverishness and came with a spicy-sweet apple, apricot and peach chutney (£4.50).



The best was left until last. We shared a gorgeous apple tart with cinnamon ice cream (£4.25). The flaky pastry base was light and crisp and slightly caramelised at the edges. The apple was the right balance of sweetness and tart.

A latte, a G&T and a small glass of house Pinot Grigio made up a bill well under £50.

With local ingredients well to the fore (meat from McFarlane's - formerly Tarn's - of Barnard Castle, fish from Inshore Fisheries at Redcar and veg from Carricks at Bedale) the Travellers' Rest provides simply but carefully prepared food that lets good quality ingredients speak for themselves. It is an approach which has much to recommend it.

We left Dalton feeling replete and at one with the world, despite the misty gloom. We hoped our rowing couple had kissed and made up.

Since this review has been written a full refurbishment has taken place.

By Malcolm Warne

The Travellers' Rest,  
Dalton near Richmond  
Telephone: 01833 621225

Open: Tues-Fri 6-11pm; Sat 7-11pm; Sun noon-2pm

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓✓

# A damn fool question - the answer's yes

**W**hinstone View, under the management of sisters Amanda Wray-Ward and Jacqueline Ward, stopped being a caravan park some months ago and is in the process of being converted into a luxury log cabin development, with the Bistro at its heart, housed in what was originally an old cow byre.

The byre has been considerably extended and is now a large and long building with a bar at one end and tables stretching down to the other end. The atmosphere is nevertheless quite intimate. Outside, there is an attractive terrace for summertime eating (what's that you might well ask) and sweeping lawns. There's not a caravan to be seen anywhere.

My dining companion on this occasion was business colleague, Ian, who had arrived before me (I wasn't late but Ian's always early) and was enjoying a pre-prandial drink on the lawn with the last of the early evening sun.

Inside, we examined a lengthy evening a la carte menu plus some specials which covered, most culinary bases, steaks, pasta, rice and egg dishes plus fish and poultry.

Ian's starter choice was a simple one - pan-fried flat field mushrooms tossed in garlic butter on char-grilled toast (£.95). He had no complaints other than that the serving was on the generous side for a starter and he judiciously decided not to finish it in anticipation of his main course - a char-grilled rib-eye steak served with cherry tomatoes,

more mushrooms, a bearnaise sauce and chunky chips (£14.95).

The steak passed muster. It was spot-on-medium as requested, well-flavoured and tender. The chips were excellent.

My starter - salmon and prawns (£5.95) - was also rather ample. A small molehill of prawns wrapped in a layer of smoked salmon accompanied by fresh asparagus and hollandaise sauce. It was simply delicious, the fish was so much better for not being too chilled.

It was followed by an equally praiseworthy rack of lamb served with a bed of ratatouille made slightly sweet with lots of caramelised onions and topped with a small tower of duchesse potatoes (£14.95). The lamb was still nicely pink and very juicy thanks to a thick layer of fat which had provided the flavour-boosting auto basting as the lamb roasted. The dessert menu was perused rather half-heartedly. Although tempted by, among others, capuccino creme brulee and pineapple tarte tatin (both £4.95) we abstained in the interest of constraining middle-aged waistlines.

With both of us driving, the comprehensive wine list (a good blend of European classics and New World standards) had been ignored so the bill, including a couple of fizzy waters, totalled just under £45.



So, was everything alright with our meal? Unequivocally yes. Except for that damn fool question.

By Malcolm Warne

Whinstone View Bistro  
just north of Great Ayton on the B1292  
Tel: 01642 723265

Open: Mon-Fri noon-9pm, Sun noon-4pm

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓

# Revitalised pub could become a habit

**T**he British countryside is littered with the broken dreams of couples who sank their savings into a country pub and found the rural idyll to be anything but. Running a country pub is not easy and it's getting harder.

In fact, they may well be on to a winner. The refurbishment has been done very effectively. The bar, serving excellent Marston's Pedigree with other real ales on the way, remains at the pub's heart, but a number of very pleasant separate dining areas have been created just off it. The main one where we sat is attractively done out in shades of white and cream. There's a stone-flagged floor and a mix of tables, white-wood chairs and banquette seating.

Over a drink in the bar we had looked at the brief a la carte menu with the chatty and helpful assistance of Carol and Mike's son Craig (previous waiting-on experience: nil) who ran through the specials and told us the scallops and the red mullet were off. There was, however, some rainbow trout which chef Paul came through from the kitchen to explain how he would cook. It sounded good to me.

At the table our starters arrived with olive bread, which came in particularly handy for Sylvia's grilled crevettes which were, as the menu described it, "soaked" in oodles of garlic butter (£5.95). There were three large monster prawns, head and tail on. She decreed they were delicious.

My black pudding and goats cheese tower (£5.95) was a substantial structure, perhaps a wee bit too much so. Certainly the rich apple chutney which accompanied it was essential to leaven the essentially stodgy if flavourful nature of the dish. It was a good example of the maxim less is more.

Moving on, Sylvia thought her seared supreme of chicken resting on grilled black pudding with a Famous Grouse and chive sauce (£13.50) pretty much perfect. She wasn't a fan of the black pudding either but only because it wasn't cooked enough for her taste (she's wrong in my view but we'll not start an argument about it).

Chef did as good a job as he promised with the rainbow trout. Two fillets had been sauteed and served with a simple, well-executed, butter sauce. The fish was firm without being over-cooked and seemed pretty fresh.

Bowls of steaming new potatoes and vegetables (cauli, carrot, courgette and baby sweetcorn) came with the main courses.

Sylvia skipped dessert but I managed an acid-test creme brulee (£4.95) with amaretti biscotti. This one was rum and could have been crisper on top but the custard below was excellent, smoother than silk and with not too much alcohol.

A £59 bill, which included £9 for drinks, was fair we thought.

The new landlord and lady acknowledge they are still learning their new trade but we think their instincts are right (for example, a commitment to introduce more locally-sourced produce on the menu). Sunday lunch is £11.95 for two courses and there's an early bird menu served 5.30-7pm at just £10.95 for two courses.

The Monk's Table has considerable promise.



## LUNCHTIME MENU

2 Courses  
**£9.99**

served in our  
beautiful restaurant

By Malcolm Warne

The Monks Table  
Welbury, Northallerton  
Telephone: 01609 882464

Open: Tues to Sat Lunchtime 12 noon till 2pm;  
Evening 6.30 till late; Sunday Lunch noon-3.30pm;  
Closed All day Monday

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓

# Faintly ecclesiastical, definitely fine food

**I**t's a wonderfully impressive building. Dating back to 1625, it has beautiful features such as the massive staircase, original fireplaces - the one in the bar cracking out a great log blaze - and the only sort of floorboards that should be allowed to go bare.

And there's a comfortable, slightly knocked about feel to the place as if the men of the cloth in the past were not quite as Puritan as they would have us believe and, in fact, rather liked a bit of a party and didn't mind if someone chipped the odd lump out of the wainscot.

The place was refurbished in 2003 with lots of cream paintwork, brown leather chairs and some designer fripperies. It's a look that works well - and so does its food.

As a garlic-phobe, I thought Peter was being a bit adventurous with his choice of mussels in a cream, white wine and garlic sauce for starters.

But he declared the mussels the nicest he'd ever had, the sauce so rich and creamy that he would have appreciated more bread to mop it up.

My pan fried king scallops with leaf spinach, carrot syrup, chilli and ginger were a revelation - the spices adding a subtle touch of glamour to what can sometimes be a fairly plain dish.

Before our starters arrived, we were treated to the chef's amuse bouche - a little cup of the creamiest pea soup served with a selection of posh bread.

Peter's main choice, a trio of pork: roast pig's cheek, pork fillet and pressed belly pork with cider vinegar, apple and vanilla puree and mustard mash was an imaginatively presented ensemble and was pronounced as delicious in taste as it was a delight to the eye.

I choose the lamb from Weatherheads of Pateley Bridge - a dish so beautifully presented I almost felt I should just sit back and admire it, but I'm glad I didn't.

The ever-so-slightly pink pan fried loin of lamb served on carrot puree was melt-in-the mouth delicious, the confit of lamb shoulder contained in a little tower of chillidusted pastry tasted so much of young lamb you could just smell that aroma of warm lanolin wool on a sunny spring day.

My choice came with a prettilytied bunch of green beans and a bowl of Lyonnaise potatoes.

Having seen that the coffee came with a selection of handmade chocolates, I declined pudding.

Peter gave in to an apricot and almond strudel with cinnamon custard (which came in its own little jug - extra points) and was sweetly impressed.



The mainly young staff were helpful but, thankfully, not over enthusiastic, the only tiny criticism that, when they became quite busy later in the evening, they appeared to forget our pudding and coffee for a while, but when you're in such beautiful surroundings, overlooking the garden being periodically illuminated by a distant fireworks display, what is there not to like about being left undisturbed for a while?

Dinner at The Old Deanery is £22.50 for two courses, £26.50 for three, with coffee and chocolates an extra £2.95. It's seriously good food and I would defy anyone to find better value anywhere.

By Peta King

The Old Deanery  
Minister Road, Ripon  
Telephone: 01765 600003 / [www.theolddeanery.co.uk](http://www.theolddeanery.co.uk)  
Open: Monday to Saturday Evenings

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓✓✓** Value **✓✓✓✓**

# Patience rewarded at Reema scrum

**I**t wasn't the best start to a meal out. It was a Saturday and we had taken the precaution of booking a table for 9pm. We turned up at the appointed hour only to be told we would have to wait for our table, a wait which stretched to almost half an hour.

The place was packed, there was nowhere to sit and we stood there like lemons, watching as the seated diners finished their meals. It can't have been much fun for them either as our hungry eyes bore down on them willing them to finish and vacate the table. There wasn't even the offer of a compensatory complimentary drink.

The numerous staff seemed on the point of blind panic as more people poured through the door, some with reservations, some without others to pick up takeaway orders. It was chaos and at one point the manager disappeared into the gents for what seemed like rather a long time. I know this because as I was waiting to use the same facility. Following him in, it was obvious his need had been for soothing nicotine rather than the call of nature.

Where was this apparent hell-hole? In Coniscliffe Road, Darlington, at an Indian restaurant called Reema and the reason why it is so popular is that it serves the best curry in the area. Its only rival is the Balti House in Yarm and possibly the Asha Tandoori at Catterick Garrison.

It's hardly surprising given the place's provenance as a creation of Darlington curry kin Mohammed whose speciality is make a success of place (Garden of Indian, the place of the A66 near Sadberge and, most recently, Radhuni) before getting bored and moving on to this next project. He still has an interest in Reema but it is not day-to-day variety. He would not allow this kind of pandemonium, surely.

Once we finally sat down and the poppadums and pickle tray arrived, serenity seemed to descend. Irritated anxiety turned to quiet smugness as we observed the queue at the door. It's amazing what you are prepared to forgive once the prospect of food is imminent.

The menu is fairly standard Bangladeshi-influenced fare although there seems to be a certain confusion about what exactly it claims to be. As our photographer was spotted, Reema is either "contemporary Indian cuisine" or the "traditional" variety, depending on whether you look at the sign above the door or the front window. Given that we haven't a clue what the definitions of these over-used descriptions might be, perhaps it doesn't matter. The point is the grub's good. Sylvia started with chick tikka (£2.5) which was tenderly aromatic and served with a surprisingly delicate butter sauce. She followed up with lamb resala (£6.95) which she declared the best she had sampled in many a moon. The lamb pieces had been simmered in red wine with braised onion, mixed pickles, lots of coriander and a little cream.

I tried the hamuk on puree (£2.90) in which the mussels had survived a potential mismatch relationship with some medium spices, the taste of the seafood managing to remain intact through the garlic and coriander garnish. The puree was good but perhaps just a bit too saturated with fat to consider eating all of it.

My main course Delhi korahi (£6.95) was billed on the menu as "fairly hot" but registered only about three on the Richter Scale. That was not a bad thing because the mussels had been hotter than expected and thanks to some fairly incendiary lime pickle with the poppadoms, some of my taste buds were becoming de-sensitised. So I was able to savour the garlic, green chillis, green and red peppers and tomatoes which bathed the cubes of chicken.



Sharing a portion of boiled rice (£2.20) and a plain nan (£1.90) washed down with a couple of rather expensive Indian lagers each brought the bill to just short of £32. Not the cheapest Indian in town but certainly the one with the best chef.

So what about the fiasco at the beginning? Did the quality of the food outweigh the almost laughable staff attempts to manage the relative small number of tables and the frantic demand? To a large degree it did and we would recommend a visit but pick your time. Avoid the Saturday night scrum.

By Malcolm Warne

Reema  
18 Coniscliffe Road, Darlington  
Tel: 01325 383337 / www  
Open: 6pm until late, seven days

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓ Service ✓ Surroundings ✓✓ Value ✓✓✓

# Brasserie is a welcome period piece

**S**tumbling across an unreconstructed 1980s-style brasserie - in ultra trendy Yarm High Street of all places - was something of a revelation to the jaded eye and palate.

The owners of The Brasserie may well bridle at that period description because the establishment has been open only 12 years but they should take it as a compliment. We liked the warm and dark interior (reminding us somewhat of Middlesbrough's Purple Onion), with its low ceilings and half-timbered and herringbone brick walls which hinted at the building's original role as a cloth mill. We also liked the worn wooden floors, the sturdy furniture and the cosy little snug area which almost forms a tiny private dining room. We were not quite so keen on the loudness of the "background" music (an eclectic selection including Glen Campbell, Pet Shop Boys and Madness) The menu (nine starters, 10 mains) is described as featuring fine French, Italian and Traditional cuisine which sounds rather grand.

The reality is a selection of dishes where the influences are rather more far flung, but underpinning it is a good understanding of what works well on a plate.

Sylvia kicked off with a chicken liver parfait with fruit chutney and Melba toast (£5.95). It was firm, nicely liver-ish and not overly rich.

My spinach, sun-blushed roasted red peppers and parmesan risotto with aubergine crisps (£6.75) was enjoyed for its oily nuttiness. There were plenty of peppers,

the spinach rather less evident, but it was a good portion, which had consequences for enjoyment of my main course.

I'd really wanted the slow-cooked pressed belly pork and roasted loin of pork with glazed spring vegetables and Calvados baby apples (£13.50) but that wasn't available so I went for another British dish - braised oxtail faggot in Savoy cabbage with pureed parsnip (£13.95).

I knew as soon as it was put in front of me that I wouldn't finish it. It was massive, the size of half a football filling the plate bar the pureed parsnip which formed a decorative surround. It was rich and with a depth of flavour that stays with you. The cabbage that formed the shell of the faggot was perhaps a tad undercooked but that's a quibble. The main thing is that if you choose this you really don't need a starter, unless of course you have just finished a full shift as a hod carrier.

Sylvia's char-grilled rib-eye steak with Madagascar sauce, chips and salad (£16.95) rather unusually was cut to the thickness of a fillet steak.

But it was clearly well-aged and flavoursome but perhaps not as moist as rib-eye can be due to the thickness. The clearly-home-made chips and salad were very good.

Desserts, I'm afraid, were out of the question. There was a typical selection of standards like sticky toffee pudding and creme brulee for £4.95.



A couple of coffees brought our bill excluding drinks to a smidge over £50, pretty good value for an establishment in Yarm.

Service was informal but efficient.

Our waiter was chatty and personable and everything arrived pretty promptly without us feeling rushed.

The Brasserie has a period feel which might not be to everybody's taste in 2007 but the cooking is a good blend of the traditional and modern. Take a trip down memory lane.

By Malcolm Warne

**The Brasserie**  
16 High Street, Yarm  
Tel: 01642 890020

Open: noon-2pm Tues-Sat, 6-10pm  
Mon-Sat, 12.30-3pm Sun

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓✓** Value **✓✓✓**

# Very nearly the perfect breakfast

**N**ot very long ago, the idea of eating out for breakfast was rather novel. For those of us who were not long-distance lorry drivers, a bacon butty from a greasy spoon cafe was about as far as it went.

Today, with the growth of a continental cafe culture, breakfast out is as unexceptional as any other meal away from home - and very good it is too, especially when you don't have to bother with dealing with the pots and pans involved in the traditional full English.

One recent Saturday morning, a shopping expedition in Northallerton was preceded by fortifying sustenance at The Cafe at the southern end of the High Street.

The Cafe's been open since 2003 when, virtually overnight, it set the standard in a town generally not highly rated for quality restaurants since the better days of the long-gone Romanby Court. Run by James Butterfield, a chef who managed the Imperial Express cafe in Darlington - arguably the region's first modern cafe - the son-of-Imperial Express was a real trend setter in the county town.

From the start it looked more modern than anything Northallerton had previously experienced and, subsequently, it developed a reputation for reliability, evident in its regular appearances in the annual Flavours of Hambleton awards, having won both the breakfast and restaurant categories.

We'd best declare an interest here. Your reviewer was on the judging panel when it won Restaurant of the Year so we can vouch for the quality of the lunchtime meals and also its evening fare which has a distinct Italian flavour.

But it was the traditional full English which caught the attention of the 2004 breakfast judges and we thought it was time we sampled it.

As it turned out, I didn't because I was distracted by the

battered scrambled eggs served with smoked salmon served on a muffin. Scrambled eggs are rarely served correctly, even when you are doing it yourself at home. That precise moment when the egg has developed enough solidity to hold together but before it takes on the consistency of egg custard is fiendishly difficult to achieve. This was near to perfection. The smoked salmon was of decent quality too, if a little bit chilled.

The muffin was toasted to a light surface crispness and there was a good wedge of lemon as well. It was simply excellent.

Sylvia had gone for the full English which consisted of fried egg, bacon, sausage, mushroom, tomato and black pudding. The egg was golden yellow, cooked so there were no crispy bits at the edge and no uncooked white. The sausage and bacon, from Thompson's butchers across the road, was everything one might expect from a high quality supplier and again it was expertly cooked.

Sylvia had shifted all her mushrooms to my plate and these were sauteed with lots of herbs and butter.

Talking of butter, Sylvia's usual test was passed with flying colours. There was plenty served with the wholemeal toast and it was well salted. Jam and marmalade were of good quality and there was more than enough. The pot of tea was strong and came with plenty of hot water.

The bill for the two of us was just over £15 and that included extra toast for me. James Butterfield was at pains to point out that you don't have to have the full English. Select those bits you want and the price is adjusted accordingly. There's also a vegetarian selection.

Service was friendly, informal but efficient with James ever-present. It is also very child-friendly, with all sort of amusements provided on tables as soon as toddlers hove into view.



Apart from the slightly chilly smoked salmon, we couldn't fault anything. It may be argued that serving a decent cooked breakfast is not exactly haute cuisine but, because of the number of component parts, there's a lot to go wrong. Providing a good breakfast is easy. Providing a perfect one, which this very nearly was, is much harder.

By Malcolm Warne

The Café  
153-155 High Street, Northallerton  
Telephone: 01609 760400  
[www.the-cafe-northallerton.co.uk](http://www.the-cafe-northallerton.co.uk)  
Open: For breakfast 9am-11.30

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓✓



# A village pub transformed

**T**wo years ago the Weeks brothers took over the closed Otter and Fish at Hurworth, near Darlington, and embarked on a transformation of the rather down-at-heel and unloved pub into a restaurant and bar.

After six months' work, the Otter and Fish reopened and, almost at a stroke, set a new standard for pub dining in the Darlington area.

The modernisation, which included an extension, resulted in a look and feel no other village pub in the area could match. No expense was spared in the décor and furnishings, and the resulting contemporary, almost chic-looking, restaurant is a place where diners can feel at home having a simple bar snack with a well-kept pint of real ale, or pushing the boat out with a full-blown three-course meal and wine from a short but well-chosen list.

Although food is the primary attraction at the Otter and Fish, locals are still welcome to come in for a drink at the far end of the pub in a small but cosy lounge area.

After developing a fine reputation almost overnight, the Weeks brothers have maintained their early form and standards remain high, judged by a recent return visit.

Prices have risen on the back of that burgeoning reputation but then prices have risen almost everywhere and restaurateurs are paying much more for their meat, fish and vegetables, especially if they wish to continue to produce good quality cuisine.

It has also encouraged chefs to look at more unusual cuts of meat and types of fish. Hence skate wing is one of the Otter and Fish's new specials and very good it was too on the night we dined there. If you are put off skate by its unfamiliarity, can I urge you to try it. It is a very underrated and once you have fathomed out how to remove the tender slivers of pure white flesh from the wing, it is has a glorious flavour. At £16.50 it is good value for a fish dish cooked to this standard.

Sylvia thought her fried halibut with chorizo, new potatoes & parsley pesto (£18.95) was also beautifully done and absolutely fresh.

Meat dishes which caught our eye included Cannon of spring lamb on pomme puree with asparagus and mint hollandaise (£17.95) and roasted loin of Yorkshire suckling pig served on a bed of bubble and squeak with a red onion confit and scrumpy jus (also £17.95).

Our starters had been pretty good too. Sylvia found her confit of duck (£7.25) falling away from the bone and nicely sticky sweet. My terrine of gammon, wrapped in Durham ham with pease pudding (£16.95) was unspectacular but very sound. Crucially, it was not at all salty.

For dessert, we shared a peach cheesecake (£5.95) that was just as good as the one we had at the Otter and Fish when it first opened. At the time that strawberry cheesecake restored our faith in the concept, cheesecake being a much mucked-about-with concoction.



The bill, excluding drinks, was just over £50. If you think that's pricey, there are bar meals between £10-12 (sausage and mash, lamb steak, pasta, steak and ale pie) and an excellent "early-bird" offer up to 6.45pm Monday-Friday when any bar meal is £8.45.

Service was not lightening fast but that was clearly because everything is cooked to order. If you require a quick, formulaic, pub meal go elsewhere.

Booking is a good idea particularly at weekends. Disabled access is easy.

By Malcolm Warne

Otter & Fish  
Strait Lane, Hurworth, Darlington  
Tel: 01325 720019

Open: Food served: noon-9.30pm

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓✓

# A most pleasurable act of atonement

**A**pril has turned out to be a month of atonement for me but it's got nothing to do with blockbuster movies.

On the Saturday before last, we had one of the best meals we've had for ages.

So why the guilt? To whom is the reparation due?

Almost exactly two years earlier, I'd made the journey to the little village of Oldstead, tucked away not far from Kilburn and Coxwold on the edge of the North York Moors. It was a truly awful experience.

The timing of the visit could not have been worse for, not too long after, the D&S was contacted by the Black Swan's new owners. Anne Banks took the pub over to run as a family business along with husband Tom and sons James (front of house) and chef Tom.

Would we care to pay a return visit, she asked?

The invitation has lain at the back of my mind since then. The reason I feel so guilty is that it took so long.

The first big contrast with my first visit was a full car park - I may have been slow in getting around to a visit, but it's clear many others have not.

The welcome was warm and friendly, the beer good (cask Black Sheep and Skipton's Copper Dragon), and the fire roaring.

The menu is clearly laid out and informative. In a climate where local-sourcing has, happily, become almost mainstream, the Banks spell it out in black and white: all the meat is emphatically British (just how much cruelly produced foreign flesh, particularly that of fowl, lingers hidden behind restaurant menus?) and in the main comes from as far away as, well, Sproxtton and Gilling - down the road.

Virtually everything is home-made, from stocks to sausages, black pudding to bread and chocolates.

Upstairs in the dining room, which has been extended to offer 50 covers with the opening up of a former bedroom, there is a quality feel: interesting antique oak furniture, attractive prints and tasteful colours and textiles.

Our starters were smoked haddock and spring onion risotto with a poached egg, watercress and parmesan (£5.50); pan-fried gnocchi with home-roasted tomatoes, rocket salad and balsamic dressing (£5.25); carpaccio of tuna (raw, thin slices) with crispy Oriental vegetable spring rolls (£5.95) and, from the specials board, crispy brie with apple and pomegranate jam, pea shoots and hazelnut vinaigrette (£4.95).

All were excellent: the presentation was stylish but not too fussy, the proportions modest but not measly - the emphasis was definitely on flavour.

My one small niggle was that the rocket salad with my gnocchi was a little over-dressed for my liking; the tomatoes, on the other hand, were fantastic.

Next up, with efficient service from pleasant staff who were clearly under pressure on the busiest night of the week, came confit shoulder of lamb with sweet potato puree, roasted root veg and crushed Jersey royals (£13.95); pan-fried seabass with a warm sweet potato and lemon salad, confit vine cherry tomatoes and tomato and herb dressing (£15.95), and from a section of the menu titled "new twists on old favourites", braised shin of beef and Black Sheep ale pie with mash, pickled red cabbage and oxtail jus (£9.95) and eight-week hung rib-eye steak with a rocket and parmesan salad, chips and bearnaise sauce (£15.95).

Silence fell. For some time.



Again, I tried to solicit any criticisms from my companions, to no avail.

For my part, I wasn't too taken with the crushed new potatoes: they were too much like lumpy mash, and I'd rather have savoured the Jerseys whole. On the other hand, the lamb was melt-in-the-mouth tender and the roasted vegetables a perfect accompaniment.

A good cheese board (£6.75), dark chocolate and almond torte with ice-cream, vanilla panna cotta with Yorkshire rhubarb and treacle tart with orange custard and lemon curd ice cream (all £4.95) more than sealed the job. These were first-class, delicious puds, not afterthoughts.

Pre-dinner drinks, a good bottle of Argentinean cabernet sauvignon (£19.75) and a couple of coffees brought the bill for four very satisfied customers to £133.90 - perhaps putting it in the realms of a special treat meal out for most people, but worth every penny.

By Gareth Dant

The Black Swan  
Oldstead, near Thirsk  
Tel: 01347 868387 / [www.blackswanoldstead.co.uk](http://www.blackswanoldstead.co.uk)  
Open: Tues-Sat noon-2pm, 6-9pm;  
Sun noon-2.30, 6-9pm. Closed Mondays  
Disabled access possible but limited

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓✓✓** Value **✓✓✓✓**

# Local ingredients take centre stage

**T**here is nothing like sinking into a comfortable sofa beside a log fire after a superb meal and being served with coffee and chocolates.

The warm homely atmosphere of Stone House Hotel near Hawes, created by its local and helpful staff, is one of its big attractions. I and my friends are grateful that it does open its restaurant to non-residents.

It is best to book a table in advance. The menu changes every evening but there is always sufficient choice for each diner to fine tune the meal to their own requirements thanks to a team of three local chefs led by Patrick Alderson who has been at Stone House for 18 years.

The chefs are willing to prepare meals to accommodate any allergy or food intolerance. "They are very versatile. There's nothing they can't do," said Peter Westwood who runs the hotel with Chris Taplin.

We took friends with us on our latest visit. While Jim and I enjoyed the tangy sweet strawberry salsa with melon as a

starter, Sue and Helen chose the garlic and ginger prawns with a sweet chilli dipping sauce. They were perfect, enthused Helen.

David was just as pleased with his tomato and Yorkshire Fine Fettle cheese salad. Afterward he commented that the cheese from Shepherd's Purse in Thirsk was better than many "proper fetas" he had tasted.

He was very pleased that there was a separate vegetarian menu even if it relied on mushrooms and cheese for the protein content. "I do wish they would offer a nut roast sometime," he commented but added that his Spanish fritata with roast vegetable was very good.

The rest of us passed over the Yorkshire lamb hot pot, the grilled tuna loin steak with tomato and basil sauce and the pan fried breaded fillet of plaice, for the honey roast loin of ham with a delicious Cumberland sauce. The ham melted in the mouth.

Along with these came an ample selection of al dente vegetables and roast potatoes. Most of us chose sorbets,



icecreams or fresh fruit salad for desserts as we wanted to be able to enjoy the local cheeses on offer afterward. But the profiteroles with chocolate sauce and the raspberry and apple crumble did look so good.

In the cosy lounge where we enjoyed freshly brewed Sumatra coffee and chocolates some of the residents told us how they loved the atmosphere and good value for money at Stone House, while others just kicked off their shoes and relaxed.

By Pip Land

Stone House Hotel  
Sedbusk, near Hawes  
Telephone: 01969 667571 / [www.stonehousehotel.com](http://www.stonehousehotel.com)  
Open: Evenings Sun-Sat, 6pm until late

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Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓✓

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# Pushing the boat out in grand style

**O**n a late spring evening, the shadows lengthen across the immaculately kept lawns, the willows weep over a stream and pheasants strut their way through the sylvan scene.

As the darkness grows, the trees are subtly lit to create an aboriginal sculpture and rabbits emerge from the undergrowth to trim off any stray blades of grass. It's idyllic.

Where are we? At Judges Hotel, Kirklevington, near Yarm and we seem to have been given the best table for two in the place, in the conservatory with the aforementioned view of the manicured grounds through double doors.

Before our meal we had perused the menu in one of the hall's sitting areas, the quiet hush only disturbed by muted voices in a far corner of what was originally Kirklevington Hall. If it wasn't for the bar at the far end of the room, it would be easy to imagine that this was still a private residence, if only for the circuit judges on duty at Middlesbrough's courts, dealing with the criminal classes of Teesside. It must have been a trial to merit such home comforts. Hence today's name.

This is grand country house dining and it isn't cheap. Three courses a la carte (lunch and dinner), is £44.00 including coffee, also a "Table d'hote" menu at lunch (two course £14.95, three courses £17.50 and coffee & petits fours at £4.00 per person) is available. With a modest bottle of wine you'll be hard pressed to get away with a bill of less than £100 a couple. But it is a good example of the idiom: You get what you pay for. Apart from the truly spectacular surroundings, there are some little extras which make for a special occasion. Such as a canapés served with pre-dinner drinks and a fragrant amuse bouche of cauliflower and leek soup served before our starters.

Chef John Lyons has created a menu that features good quality ingredients simply prepared. If there's a particular characteristic, it is use of exotic fruits in unexpected dishes, such as my soft shell crab, a salad featuring creme fraiche, beurre noisette, pancetta and banana. This was less way out than it sounded with the crab being beautifully moist.

Sylvia's ballontine of ham hock and foie gras with pineapple, mache salad, sultana and cider caramel was a superb combination. On paper it looked to have the potential of a culinary car crash. In the mouth it was anything but.

Other starters included a boudin of pheasant with lentils du puy, lemon and Sauternes and croustade of goat's cheese with red onion chutney and pickled grapes.

England's crustiest judges would have been happy with the main courses too. My grilled calves liver with pancetta, pomme puree and shallot jus was meltingly tender to the extent that I couldn't help but think of the cute little doe-eyed animal that had given up its life to provide this plateful of heaven. Did I feel a twinge of guilt? Not a bit, I'm afraid.

The local lamb "Senteurs de Provence" with peas a la Francaise more than passed muster with Sylvia too. Correctly cooked medium, these plump slices of rump were as tender as lamb can be. The only gripe was that the peas could be counted on the fingers of two hands - what might be described as a garnish. Sylvia skipped dessert so I was left to manfully tackle something called Vanilla, a Judges speciality of individual creme brulee, panacotta, sponge, ice cream and doughnut. It was very vanilla-ish and very more-ish.

We skipped coffee and petit fours (£4 extra), settle the bill (£97) and reluctantly vacated our table with the



sublime view to scrunch our way up the gravel drive and homewards.

An expensive evening out, certainly, but the service, surroundings and quality of the cooking go quite a long way to mitigate the cost. For a (very) special occasion you will find it hard to beat.

By Malcolm Warne

Judges Hotel  
Kirklevington Hall, Kirklevington, Yarm  
Telephone: (01642) 789000

Opening Hours: 12.30-2pm, 7.30-10pm, 7 days

Ratings (out of four): Food quality ✓✓✓✓ Service ✓✓✓✓ Surroundings ✓✓✓✓ Value ✓✓✓

# A real winner in the eating out stakes

**S**olberge Hall, a magnificent Georgian mansion set in nine acres of parkland, is probably best known as a posh wedding venue.

Owners Paul and Lucie Smith - whose company, Thoroughbred Hotels, also has Swynford Paddocks Hotel at Newmarket which also has a Silks Brasserie (you can see a theme developing here) - are obviously seeking to attract a different punter, hence the development of the former coach house and stable block into a stylish and less formal restaurant.

It is undeniably a beautiful setting - the elegant buildings make the perfect backdrop to some seriously stylish touches, like the glass-walled terrace which will be wonderful for summer dining, and the swish glass doors (which were, unfortunately, letting in a vicious draught).

And the racing theme, which runs to a few sets of jockeys' silks hanging on the walls and some predictably-named cocktails, is, thankfully, not overplayed.

Seating 50 in one big open space, the Brasserie did have a rather cavernous feel - with about ten other diners the night we visited there did seem rather a lot of empty tables, and we weren't the only ones to complain of the rather chilly feel (which wasn't helped by the forest of whirring ceiling fans, enough to power a hovercraft, remarked Peter, who I thought at one point would have to be surgically separated from his topcoat).

However, what the heating lacked was certainly made up for by the warmth of the young staff, who were more than willing to move us to a table near a radiator and to turn off some of the offending fans.

But it was Peter's first course which did most to raise his temperature. The Thai fishcakes with oriental salad in a sweet chilli syrup (£5.95) certainly had a kick in the tail. My sample bite was enough to convince me they were too hot for my taste, but they certainly put some colour in his cheeks.

My lime and chilli goat's cheese bake en croute (£5.25) was simply delicious - the cheese meltingly soft and creamy, the pastry cracklingly crunchy and the basil dressing wonderfully aromatic.

Other starters (all about £5-£6) were mussels cooked in Guinness and roasted shallots; salmon and her ballontine with black caviar; and Toulouse sausage with potato and sun blush salad.

Peter's main course of confit of lamb shank on champ mash potato (£13.95) was a really robust dish of big, big flavours. And the mango and mint salsa was just inspirational. Full marks from him - and me.

I had the sophisticated "array" of fresh fish, on creamy potatoes with a white wine cream sauce (£12.95). Delicate and delightful, this scored for me - a simple dish done really well.



Other mains were halibut fillet, with aubergine caviar, beetroot, shallot and mint salad (£12.95); oven roasted suckling pork belly stuffed with caramelised apples (£12.95); chargrilled tenderloin of beef on garlic mash (£18.95); and from the "light meals" menu a selection of pastas around a tenner, a Cajun chicken Caesar salad and fajita wraps.

Puddings, all around £5, included baked white chocolate and mascarpone cheesecake, almond and lemon polenta cake and chilled winter berries with glazed champagne sabayon and, although tempted, we settled for a couple of cappuccinos (£2.85) which rounded off the meal perfectly.

With a bottle of very good Chilean white, our dinner came to just over £60 and I think it was worth every penny. Silks may be getting off to a slow start, but I'll bet on its success.

By Peta King

Silks Brasserie  
Solberge Hall Hotel, Newby Wiske, Northallerton  
Telephone: (01609) 779191 [www.solbergehall.co.uk](http://www.solbergehall.co.uk)  
Opening Hours: 10am until 10pm

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓✓** Value **✓✓✓**

# Local produce takes centre stage at L&C

The local produce band-wagon is one we are happy to roll along with. Indeed we will be so bold as to claim a tiny bit of credit in these parts for kick-starting it back in 2002 with the Darlington & Stockton Times Great North Country Fare campaigns, an initiative which champions our may local food producers.

Many restaurants now make a point of serving locally-sourced food and many retailers sell it. However, one local grocer has done more than most to stock the wares of regional food producers and that is the incomparable Lewis and Cooper of Northallerton. But it has taken them a while to do the obvious thing and feature in the store's upstairs tea room the local produce they stock downstairs.

We have sampled both the lunchtime menu and the breakfast fare and enjoyed both. The philosophy is very less is more. The food is served simply, even to the point of plainness. The quality of the food is allowed to speak for itself.

So Jurgen Bleiker's salmon, smoked near Skipton is served with home-made freshly griddled outcakes made from an adapted West Yorkshire recipe dating from 1858. At £6.95 for a modest amount of salmon it's not exactly a bargain but there's no questioning the quality of the fish.

Sylvia tried the Lewis and Cooper version of Yorkshire "Rabbit" (£4.95) or rarebit (a mis-spelling apparently). This is made with cheese from Fountains Dairy, oatmeal stout from Sam Smith's Tadcaster brewery and Henderson's Relish, made in Sheffield. Served on a toasted muffin with a salad garnish and more relish on the side, it was predominantly spice. Sylvia thought it certainly different but couldn't admit to being an instant convert. It may be an acquired taste.

Other dishes on the lunch menu include Yorkshire ham and eggs (£5.95 or £3.95 for a half portion).

Since this review was written there is a newly launched breakfast menu. They do the full english and also offer a scrambled egg and smoked salmon on toast for £6.25. A bowl of Yorkshire muesli is £1.75.

My scrambled eggs were fine if a tad overcooked for my preference. Sylvia thought her dry cured bacon muffin (£3.95) was excellent. The tea (Yorkshire Gold - £1.45 per person) was perfect.

By Malcolm Warne

Lewis & Cooper  
High Street, Northallerton  
Telephone: 01609 766712  
Open: 9am-5pm

Lewis & Cooper was one of the highest rating menus in the readers poll section of the D&S Times.



# Saultz Bistro



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# This little gem above the shop should not be missed

**Y**ou could easily miss Ciara's. Its front door squeezed in beside the better-known Santoro in Yarm's High Street and opening onto a rickety staircase that looks as if it's leading to a second hand clothes shop, the bistro has a less than uplifting first impression.

But, keep an open mind because, although out of Yarm's way, this establishment is not playing second fiddle to anyone. And it certainly ticks all the right boxes for the town that's become the destination of choice for the aspiring eating out classes of Darlington and Teesside.

Upstairs, in a Tardis-like revelation, is a restaurant on two floors with a prestige position which allows favoured diners, like us, to enjoy the bonus of watching the entertainment in the High Street below.

The smart, bistro style decor is pared down to just the right blend of minimalist chic and classic comfort and there are a couple of squashy leather sofas at the bar to relax in and study the menus.

The fairly brief main menu is nicely varied, thankfully concise in details - and irritatingly littered with greengrocers' apostrophes.

From the fresh fish board - which managed to chalk up full points for grammar - Oliver chose moules mariniere (£6.95) to start. These weren't monsters, but what they lacked in size they made up for in quality. Well scrubbed up and coal black bright, the mini mountain of shell's looked even more attractive than usual, the broth slightly more substantial and the decent bread more appreciated to mop it up.

Peter's starter, from the Pasta's and Risotto's (sic) was a good-sized portion of perfectly cooked penne pasta (£5.75) with spicy sausages which had (I am informed) a

good bite, and chic (sic) peas, which were obviously there to add a touch of sophistication.

I chose dry fried chicken liver in Jamaican jerk seasoning (partly because the name always makes me smile) with asparagus spears and mango syrup (£6.95) which was truly delicious and surprisingly delicate.

Other starters with Scottish smoked salmon with fennel-slaw; salmon and watercress fishcakes with zucchini marmalade; and aubergine and bell pepper stack with buffalo mozzarella and pumpkin seed oil.

Peter's main course - again from the fish board - was a very posh sounding sea bass fillet wrapped in pancetta on a truffle oil mash (£15.50) which looked superb - it was guarded by a langoustine rampant which, like a Landseer lion, glared across the table at the identical one on my plate - and tasted "wonderful". Oliver's pan fried chicken breast with gratin potatoes, asparagus tips and red wine reduction (£13.95) was equally well received, the chicken meltingly tender.

But for sheer style, my shellfish tagliatelle in a plum tomato sauce (a very reasonable £8.95) must take the prize. And when it said shellfish, it meant it - the mussels and scallops in their shells giving a really robust flavour and providing great fun hunting them down in the pasta.

My only caveat, apart from the apostrophes and the bad spelling, is that vegetables come under the heading of Extra's and are charged accordingly, which does bump the price up quite a bit. Although I couldn't complain too much about the value of Oliver's Extra of salad (very good) and chunky chips (very tasty) at £2, it did seem a little naughty to charge us another £2 for a tiny bowl containing a spoonful of red cabbage and some very overcooked courgettes.



Other mains were rack of lamb with a salsa verdi crust; Chinese five spiced pork on a green tea and star anise broth; roast butternut squash and sage risotto and a selection of steaks and sauces.

Peter was the only one to manage a pudding - a very tempting mocha coffee creme brulee with a generous slab of chewy caramel brownie, which he said was lovely although the glaze failed his "can you skate on it" test.

The puddings, at £4.95, also included profiteroles with creme patisserie and white chocolate sauce; steamed chocolate and stem ginger pudding; and apple and almond frangipane torte.

With a bottle of Argentinian white at £12.95 the bill for three came to just under £80 - certainly not the cheaper end of the market, but for a thoroughly enjoyable evening with a meal imaginatively presented and served by very efficient and well trained staff, I wouldn't quibble at the price. And with food of this quality, I could even forgive a little bad grammar.

By Peta King

Ciara's  
High Street, Yarm  
Telephone: (01642) 788944 [www.ciaras.co.uk](http://www.ciaras.co.uk)

Opening Hours: Noon-2.30 Mon-Sat;  
5.30-9.30 Mon-Thurs; 5.30-10pm Fri and Sat;  
Teatime specials 5.30-7pm Mon-Sat

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓✓✓** Value **✓✓✓✓**



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## Chambers Restaurant at The Honest Lawyer



### It's all change at Chambers.

For years, the restaurant at The Honest Lawyer in Croxdale, only a short hop from Durham, has borne the name chambers but no one other than the eagle eyed menu browser will have noticed. Time for chambers to move front and centre, and this is more than just a rose by any other name.

Along with the more prominently placed title comes a new management team, a new head chef, and, most crucially for the curious diner, a new menu bursting to the brim with more inventive offerings than before.

Richard Jones, who is leading the charge at the venue, is, fittingly, honest about the reasons why. The former Toby Bridge Hotel - relaunched after being hit by flooding five years ago - didn't quite find its mark with a quick and cheerful food style and Chambers will be aiming instead for those who love their food

fresh, locally sourced and made with devotion.

That will hold true whether you settle in the restaurant or aim for a bar meal - meaning the casual visitor or those looking for a more elegant evening will be equally at home here.

The popular Sunday carvery continues, of course, while those looking for bigger celebration can be catered for in a private function room that can host up to 50 people.

Further to the appointment of a new head chef, the menu is now taking shape - with such offerings as the mouthwatering seared venison with truffle oil mash, baby carrots and a chocolate and redcurrant sauce, pictured.

It's a big change for Chambers - but for those who appreciate quality food, one that will be more than welcome.

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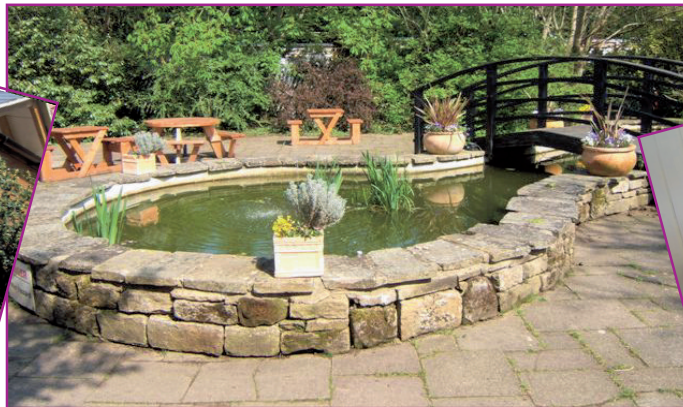


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# A temperamental Aga adds to the fun

**O**ne of this year's rare summer evenings saw us venture to Middleton in Teesdale, where we ate al fresco at the delightful Cafe 1618 wine bar and restaurant.

Intrigued by the renaming of the former Cornforth and Cornforth, we thought new owners Jon Dunn and partner Bev Major must have been influenced by The Da Vinci Code. But it turned out to be nothing more sinister than the street numbers of the cafe and their adjoining holiday cottage. They also do bed and breakfast.

"It's really named because Bev looks 16 and I look 18 stone," joked Mr Dunn - the former true, the latter not.

Ms Major is front of house and Mr Dunn is the chef, and both fill their roles like square pegs in square holes, with excellent help from local staff. Hard to believe he spent 20 years in local government, she a similar high-flier.

However, with Mr Dunn's interest in cooking increasing over the years they finally bit the bullet in January, finding "the perfect location" in Teesdale after five years in Middlesbrough.

"Middleton is stunning," said Mr Dunn, and how could we disagree as we abandoned the intimacy of the bistro for the rare luxury of eating outside in England in the evening.

The garden, which is reached by the alley to the right of the cafe, is a real surprise, seating up to 40. The furniture is as good and solid as that indoors - sturdy wooden tables, easily seating six, with padded chairs and benches.

With only 25 covers in the cafe, the menu is limited. However, it changes weekly, with Mr Dunn often making things up as he goes along as he coaxes his temperamental Aga into turning out tempting dishes.

The night we dined there were three starters, four mains and four desserts, although when we reached that course the profiteroles had gone.

Peter began with blueberry and goat's cheese tartlets with redcurrant jelly at £4.50.

I went for seared scallops on a bed of lemon dressed herb leaves at £5.50. It is so easy to overcook scallops; a few seconds too long and you're chewing rubber, but this trio was perfect. Lemon and fish always marry well, but it could have done with a lighter hand pouring the dressing, as I finished with a little puddle on my plate.

For mains I chose slow-cooked lamb shank with a garlic, herb and red wine gravy at £12.75. The Aga, doing its thing since early afternoon, had come up trumps. As my knife touched the meat it fell off the bone, every morsel barely needing chewing. Mr Dunn tries to use as much local produce as possible, the lamb having made the short trip from McFarlane's across the road.

Peter was initially disappointed by the choice of only four mains, but his poached chicken on herb mash at £11.95 soon changed his mind. It was to have come with asparagus cream, but as he only likes asparagus when served whole, he opted for a white sauce offered by Mr Dunn.

Vegetables for both dishes included perfectly cooked broccoli; again not as easy as it sounds, cauliflower cheese, and gorgeously crisp roast parsnips and potatoes. Other options included steamed lemon sole or spaghetti lunghi.

My pudding consisted of blueberry and raspberry pavlova, the meringue base having dried out in the Aga overnight. The initial crispness melted into a light chewiness on the tongue, a perfect complement to the tartness of the fruit. Not cheap at £4.25, but definitely moreish.

Peter went for whisky and white chocolate bread and butter pudding with a light custard sauce, at £3.95 not too heavy on pocket or stomach. The whisky was discernable but not overpowering, the bread light and fluffy.



We washed it all down with a bottle of El Emperador Chilean Merlot, a fabulous peppery number at £12.95.

The menu says "Honest Food Honestly Cooked", and who are we to disagree?

At £51 including a filter and espresso coffee, we would add Honestly Priced.

By Sheila Dixon

Cafe 1618  
Middleton in Teesdale, DL12 0GQ  
Telephone: 01833 640300

Open: Tuesday-Sunday, 9am-6pm.  
Late opening Thurs-Sat, last orders about 9pm,  
although flexible in summer

Ratings (out of four): Food quality **✓✓✓** Service **✓✓✓** Surroundings **✓✓** Value **✓✓✓**

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