



Review

The Dinton Hermit

A voyage into history at the Hermit

A blast from the past provides an evening to remember for food and drink editor Richard Cawthorne

RESTAURANTS live or die by the quality of their food. Fair comment, you might think.

Except once in a while you come across one sufficiently different that, within reason, the meal is almost a secondary consideration. Thus the Dinton Hermit Inn in the tiny village of Ford outside Aylesbury exerts its charm even before you walk in.

What was a traditional turnpike pub dating from the 16th century – the road outside once formed the main route between Aylesbury and Thame –

Further food developments, including special fine-dining evenings, are on the cards

is now part of a carefully-refurbished set of ancient buildings that, once discovered, just beg you to explore.

Inside is even better, with nooks and crannies all over the place, stone floors and walls, old beams, and more. It is still essentially a pub – the owner is insistent the Hermit should maintain its place as the traditional village tavern – but there are now cosy dining areas and bedrooms as well, making the property ideal for a working-week stopover or, better yet, a romantic weekend.

Associations with the English Civil

War add to the atmosphere. Cromwell stayed at nearby Dinton Hall, home of Simon Mayne, a signatory to Charles I's death warrant, while the hermit for whom the inn is named is rumoured to have been the king's executioner.

As we absorb this, the menu arrives with almost exactly the ingredients one would expect in these surroundings. Starters feature soup, haddock fishcake and ham hock terrine, with a goat's cheese crostini and crayfish with tomato and mango salad on the more adventurous side.

Mains feature wild mushroom risotto, chicken Caesar salad, salmon fillet, braised shoulder of lamb, pan-fried ribeye steak and the 'Dinton Hermit burger'.

My visit coincides with the arrival of a new head chef, Simon Pitney-Baxter, with a CV that includes Amaryllis, L'Ortolan and L'Enclume, the Carnarvon Arms in Newbury and No 11 London.

Our choices are the soup (leek and potato) at £4.50 and the crostini (£5.25), both of which hit the spot, followed by the lamb (£13.95) – tender, flavourful and properly served – and the burger (£12.50), the taste of which shows careful preparation in even so simple a dish.

Imaginative touches in the wine list include an unoaked chardonnay from Argentina and a pinot grigio from Hungary among the whites, while the reds feature two Argentinian malbecs plus an example from the Vale de Clara vineyard in Portugal. My 2007 Dom Fontenelles merlot from France is good value at £15.

USEFUL TO KNOW

Dinner for two at the Dinton Hermit cost £57.20 including a bottle of wine and tip.



BOOK A TABLE

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www.dintonhermit.co.uk

This is an independent review featuring a restaurant selected and experienced by our food and drink editor. The restaurant was not told it was being reviewed.