

THE BRICKLAYERS ARMS

HOGPITS BOTTOM ■ FLAUNDEN ■ HP3 0PH ■ 01442 833322

It would be disingenuous of me not to admit that I have held the Bricklayers Arms, Flaunden, in the utmost esteem ever since my first visit some years ago. I was therefore understandably a little nervous when my wife and I braved the elements to pay them another visit earlier this week. You know that 'you can have too much of good thing' experience? How many times have you been back to a much-loved restaurant with your expectations riding high only to find it an anti-climax? Would I fall foul of my inflated opinion of the place?

It's been over a year since my last visit, but I immediately reconnected with the charm and warmth of this delightful gastro pub. It hadn't changed a bit, rather like meeting an old friend. The welcome and atmosphere, particularly on a dark and dank night, was as lovely as ever. It's still the perfect place to while away a couple of hours.

The venue has already found its way into the prestigious Michelin Guide, and with the award-winning French chef Claude Paillet still firmly at the helm, the food here cannot fail to tantalise the taste buds.

I started with a selection of Smoked Fish (Salmon, Trout, Tuna) all of which are home smoked at the Bricklayers Arms. It's a simple, beautifully fresh dish, delicately smoked and served with a terrific home-made tomato chutney. My wife's choice of lightly battered King Scallops with a

skewer of pan-fried Tiger Prawns was a more elaborate affair, where artistic presentation and culinary expertise came into their own. Accompanied with an oriental stir fry served in a crispy filo basket, this was a confident fusion of tastes and textures.

For the main course the black spotted pork fillet, direct from a local farm in Sarratt, found its way into my affections and onto my plate! The flavour was superb with a well-judged cider and sage jus enhancing the taste. I loved the addition of the black pudding crumble – very unusual – and with a portion of creamed spinach and Dauphinoise potatoes, I had a meal fit for a king...

...And for my queen? – Game Pie: A trio of Partridge, Pheasant and Venison braised in a red wine and game stock, topped with a wild mushroom mash and served with fresh buttered vegetables. This was a real old fashioned and hearty affair, which wouldn't have gone amiss on any Elizabethan banquet table. With that rich gamey flavour simply flooding through, this dish was simply delicious.

The Pudding selection at the 'Brickies' is still as scrummy as ever. I just couldn't resist the Chestnut and Vanilla Ice-cream Eton Mess with chocolate sauce. Arriving in a tall glass, this was



a flamboyant head turner, which I polished off with remarkable ease. Equally stunning was my wife's Bourbon Vanilla Crème Brulee, with a beautifully smooth and creamy texture hiding beneath its golden crunchy topping. To really appreciate this splendid finale we sampled a couple of dessert wines - a sweet and juicy Black Muscat and an elegant tasting golden yellow French Sauternes.

Another impressive meal, at what continues to be one of the best eating establishments in the area. Worth remembering, and revisiting...

Reviewed by Alan Cox

PRICE GUIDE

 STARTERS: £5.95 TO £13.95 ■ MAIN COURSES: £14.95 TO £23.95 ■ DESSERTS: £4.75 TO £6.95 ■ HOUSE WINE: £14.95