

Simple classics in the old school house

Weekend Eating Out

by Malcolm Warne

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FORMER SCHOOL: The Corner Cupboard

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

The Corner Cupboard

Birdforth, near Thirsk
Tel: 01845 501495

Open: Tues to Sat, 9.30-5pm

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 crème 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.



LIGHT AND AIRY: The conservatory – Pictures: Richard Doughty/D&S

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