

FEATURED RESTAURANT

THE BRICKLAYERS ARMS

Hogpits Bottom • Flaunden • HP3 0PH • 01442 833322

Reviewed by Alan Cox

RETURNING TO the 'Brickies' last week was like being reunited with a long lost friend. It may have been a couple of years since we last met, but my love affair with this place was instantly re-kindled and we hit it off again immediately.

Nothing had changed, thankfully, at this delightful gastro pub/countryside retreat. The welcome was as warm and genuine as you could hope for, and I can clearly appreciate why this award winning establishment is quite so loved – basically, because it's bloody good. The atmosphere was relaxed; the pace throughout leisurely and well-judged, and the waiters friendly, attentive and polite.

A generous bowl of particularly fine Italian olives and some warm fresh bread partnered our chosen aperitifs, as my wife and I carefully considered our culinary options.

If ever a gold medal was due, it was for my starter: Pan-fried foie gras with mis cuit shavings on rocket, served with a red onion jam and pear juliennes with toast. Beautifully presented, the warm livers were succulent and silky smooth and the contrasting textures of the full ensemble were sheer perfection together. Wow.

Just as outstanding were my wife's Cornish pan-fried King Scallops, with parsnip purée, dry smoked bacon and

breast and leg confit (marinated in salt and duck fat) with an orange jus, and Roast Breast of Guinea Fowl, pheasant sausage and a liver mousse feuilleté – were just a hair's breadth away from those sensational opening plates.

That said, though, both were still more than impressive. My wife loved the citrusy sauce, which complemented her duck perfectly. The breast, cooked pink, was beautifully tender whilst the leg emanated deeper earthier flavours drawn from its traditionally French preparation.

My guinea fowl had a great, gamey taste, and was a very generous offering, and came with the added bonus of that pheasant sausage, together with a light and delicate chilled mousse topped with a puff pastry lid. A trio of great flavours, harmoniously executed, and accompanied by shared side dishes of fresh buttered vegetables and the chef's signature Dauphinoise potatoes.

The puddings at the Bricklayers Arms have always been particularly scrummy – and again, they didn't disappoint. I just couldn't resist ordering the chocolate fondant. It's tricky to perfect (as I know from my *Masterchef* habit) and having witnessed many disastrous attempts on television, I can happily report that this was a triumph: light and



hazelnut oil drizzle. This trio of enormous and juicy shellfish were presented with great panache and precision, and the velvety purée and crispy bacon beautifully enhanced these treasures of the sea. Delightful and, quite simply, delicious.

With the stakes already this high, head chef Claude Paillet was going to have to go some to match his starters... and both the dishes we chose – Duo of Duck, pan fried

spongy where it needed to be and with a perfect hot gooey centre served with dollop of pistachio ice cream. My wife's sticky toffee pudding, although not quite so technically challenging, delivered all the flavour and texture sensations you'd expect from this decadent classic.

This was a great meal, with The Bricklayers Arms on top form. When all is said and done, really good friends will never let you down.

PRICE GUIDE: STARTERS: £5.95-£13.95 • MAINS: £15.95-£24.95 • DESSERTS: £4.75-£7.95 • HOUSE WINE £15.75