



Taste Buds

Gastronomic friends Ruth, Lana, Paul and Ben visit the Angel Inn, Hetton in The Yorkshire Dales.

Even before the starters arrived, I couldn't help feeling irritated. I was sure I knew the three ladies who sat in the corner of our little nook, but I couldn't quite put my finger on where from. Ah well, maybe it would come to me. It was lunchtime, only half of the six tables were occupied and on further inspection of the numerous other crannies, this set the tone for the rest of the oak beamed 500 year-old inn. Which made it a little quiet, but it was midday on Monday, the weather was appalling and the food was definitely our main concern in any case.

The starters arrived promptly. So quick in fact, that I hadn't yet finished my pint of Copper Dragon - a glorious local brew which had more than a hint of chocolate. And this is where I make my first confession: I just couldn't resist trying a little of everyone else's starters - after all, isn't that what friends are for? Ruth's Wild Mushroom Risotto, though small in stature was big on taste with each grain of rice fluffed to perfection. Paul knew what he was having even before we arrived and his never-fail Fish Soup duly delivered. He still managed to complain however that, with separate croutons and three sauces, this particular dish was still served minus instructions. My theory is that where food is concerned, it's your right to enjoy it however you like. And Ben seemed to be getting on famously with his Terrine of Seared Chicken Livers. One taste and I could see why. The cold savoury meat in contrast to the slightly tart salad refreshed my palette and I feared he may have won in the best starters stakes.

However, my Little Moneybags just edged first spot. And here's my second confession: Confused by the plural of the dish, I was surprised to see just the one bag before me. Thankfully, it was a huge fine crispy bag, full to almost bursting with chunks of seafood in a lobster sauce that could more than punch its weight in any top city centre restaurant.

My Roast Topside of Venison came as perfectly medium-rare as I like it. The roughly cut red chunks were



complemented superbly with a slightly overcooked rosti potato and a tangy oriental sauce. It wasn't melt-in-the-mouth stuff, but if I'm having meat I like it to be meaty, so compliments to the chef for addressing my own personal tastes.

Only two of us managed dessert - there's no such thing as a light lunch at The Angel. Ruth's Hetton Mess was anything but. A beautifully sculpted column of golden biscuit filled with meringue, yogurt and fresh strawberries appeared. And it didn't stay on the scene very long at all. Just as swift was my Brandy Snap Basket filled with ice cream. It was the crunchiest I'd ever had and reminded me of my sticky-fingered childhood. Do they still sell brandy snap, or am I shopping in the wrong sweet shops these days?



And talking of reminders, here's my third and final confession: On the way back from a thoroughly fulfilling lunch in Hetton, I noticed signs for Rylstone - home of the famous Women's Institute who raise thousands for Leukaemia Research with their naked calendars. Ah yes, that's it - I knew those dear ladies were familiar. But obviously, I didn't recognise them with their clothes on.

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