

The Edinburgh Reporter Advent Calendar – Getting out this Christmas – The Sheep Heid Inn

✘ The Sheep Heid Inn, Duddingston is Scotland's Oldest Pub but Edinburgh's Newest Restoration, and somewhere you can get out to this festive period. ✘

Enjoy a hearty meal, accompanied by the refreshment of your choice, served in a cosy, warm, familiar environment.

Down in Duddingston, where monarchs and poets rub shoulders with history, there's been a quiet revolution. Well, it's not really been quiet, and it's not been a revolution either. For a month, day and night, a dedicated team laboured away at the old building that houses the venerable Sheep Heid Inn. Rewiring this, replumbing that, cleaning up the other. Regulars looked on with anticipation, and maybe a little trepidation. Imagine the surprise then, when the doors reopened in November. The most often posed question has been, "Well, what have you actually changed?"

The answer, without fear of contradiction, is, "Almost nothing". This has been a restoration project, bringing the Sheep Heid Inn back to the prominence and style to which the village has deserved, and visitors have welcomed, these past centuries.

Established in 1360, the Sheep Heid Inn is considered the 'oldest pub in Scotland'. That's not the sort of tradition with which you meddle lightly. The pub has been restored to its former glory, with many of the inn's historic features once again to the fore. There's a selection of rams' heads, on the wall, not the menu, echoing the ram's head snuff box – a

gift from King James VI of Scotland – from which the Sheep Heid likely takes its name.

New to the manager's desk is David Jardine, as often in front of the bar as he is behind it. "The Sheep Heid is a pub with so much history that we have had to be very sensitive with the restoration to ensure that we maintain the charm and character that can be found in every nook and cranny." What has been done to those intimate hideaway spaces, is make them more comfortable, and more inviting than ever before. Without altering the fabric of the building, more space has been found to make dining a delight and a visit to the bar every bit as sociable as it ever was.

✘ It's not just around the bar that the sociable Sheep ✘
Heid Inn has its reputation. The restoration has made the Skittle Alley even more popular. It's the last traditional pub skittle alley in Scotland, and it was always going to be part of the restored building. Now it's better lit, and better maintained than ever. Clubs, like the venerable Trotters, who've been striking the alley for years, have already welcomed the old-look, newly upholstered and freshly decorated lanes. In the summer, skittle parties are a clattering backdrop to the barbeques in the beer garden, a sheltered spot, that makes the most of the season, and is close enough to see your pint being pulled at the bar.

"As well as making changes to the interior to make it an inviting place to enjoy a drink", said David, "we've also launched a brand new menu featuring a wide range of traditional, fresh cooked dishes – along with a few modern surprises. Guests can look forward to our four-hour slow-roasted shoulder of lamb, our braised beef rib, mushroom and Guinness pie and our black olive and onion tart topped with cumin roasted vegetables – to name just a few.

We have also developed some outstanding puddings including the delicious treacle and ginger tart with clotted cream and a

raspberry crème brûlée". Produce could hardly be fresher. The Inn is part of the community and, the Duddingston Community Field Project is ready to step in with fresh vegetables, and even free-range eggs, whenever hungry patrons render the cupboard bare. Apart from getting more involved in the community, David would love to welcome even more of you to the Duddingston hostelry. "We're confident that once people have been to visit us we will quickly develop a reputation for not only being one of the best pubs in Edinburgh, but also one of the best dining destinations."

To join the following, and be part of the [Sheep Heid Inn](#) crowd, just visit their [website](#).

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New manager David Jardine (centre) celebrates the recent restoration of Duddingston's historic Sheep Heid Inn, along with delighted regulars