

Roaring log fire at atmospheric Millbank Arms

The atmospheric Millbank Arms is tucked away in the Yorkshire Dales, in a charming, small village, around three miles on narrow roads from the hugely heavy traffic on the A66. You can chill here.

The building dates back to the 17th-century and it is packed with character. The stark stone frontage gives way to rustic wooden beams, a spacious bar area and, thank goodness, a roaring fire as it was sub-zero as we slithered through the snow from the parking place.

The historic pub in Barningham, County Durham, is Grade II-listed and is a retreat for locals. We chatted to several. Welcoming, so were the staff.

It also acts as a resting place for shooting parties and one started to congregate just after we arrived. It was not long before the bar was full and they were into refreshing pints.

Three ales were on offer, one a local brew, too hoppy for me that one, but the Theakston Best Bitter was refreshingly good and the Timothy Taylor Landlord was even better.

The historic pub had a change of management in October last year and the menu on offer the day we visited was not extensive, but it proved quality, British classics with an innovative twist, featuring locally-sourced and seasonal

ingredients.

Incidentally, the establishment offers boutique accommodation with restored rooms, but we were staying with friends.

The food? Three of us plumped for Gressingham duck breast. It is reported to be a unique breed created when wild Mallard was crossed with Pekin duck giving more breast meat with less fat and a rich, game flavour.

We were told that it was served pink, but that proved just right for our taste, with an exquisite carrot sauce and topped with shredded beetroot. The dish arrived with a rich port sauce and, sadly, this tended to drown the other ingredients instead of complementing them.

Another in our party had a butcher cut sirloin steak. Sides, extra cost, included chipolatas, triple-cooked chips and brussel sprouts and, once again, the sauce on the sprouts was too strong for my taste, tending to take the taste of the vegetable away.

Sweets were tempting and two of our party had dark chocolate torte. Yes, I had a bite and they were 100 per cent correct, it was exquisitely rich, but not overpowering.

The pub building may hark back to days gone by, but you order with staff using modern day technology, a tablet. Efficient, and your bill is itemised.

We thoroughly enjoyed our evening and the in-house experience helped us throw off the chill of the evening on the short drive back to the neighbouring village.

One hardy local even cycled the one mile, brave chap with the thermometer at minus 5c and in the pitch black on an unlit country road. His excuse? It was the only way he could quench his thirst with real ale and in good company. Can't argue with that.

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