

The View review

Weekends are for treats, says Cassi Kingshott, as she takes a break from retail therapy



Photographs by Ian Wilcox

**Mill Arms • Barley Hill • Dunbridge • Romsey • Hampshire • SO51 0LF
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After a Saturday morning shopping there's nothing better than relaxing over a pub lunch. It's the perfect time to catch up with friends or family on the week's events, talk politics, films, books, children or whatever your personal passion, without worrying about appointments or meetings.

The Mill Arms is an 18th-century inn situated in the Test Valley not far from Romsey. It has many old features remaining inside, including the original flagstone floor and oak beams. After a hectic morning one weekend we dropped in for lunch. As a treat – worrying about diets at the weekend is off limits – I chose beer-battered haddock with chips and mushy peas. I was expecting a good old-fashioned, traditional British dish and was surprised when waitress, Kate, brought our food. I had five – exactly five – of the most enormous chips I have ever seen. The size of potato wedges, these were, nonetheless, perfectly rectangle in shape, peeled and deep-fried potato chips. They were accompanied by two generous pieces of battered haddock and a portion of mushy peas that tasted like crushed fresh summer peas. The tartare sauce alongside was freshly made, too.

When we first arrived we were the only people dining in the conservatory but by the



Raspberry and chocolate brownie trifle

time our main courses arrived the room was filling up with couples obviously also out for a leisurely weekend treat with friends. The conservatory seemed a popular place to eat and I suspect many of these diners were regulars as everyone was very relaxed and 'at home'.

My lunch companion had chosen an equally British dish called John's sausages. We never did find out who John was exactly (he may have been the chef but sadly we didn't get to meet him on the day of our visit) but his sausages were fat and spicy. Good old John. Swimming in a rich onion gravy, they went down very well with a pile of soft mashed potatoes.

Apart from the 'Pub Favourites' there is also an à la carte menu at the Mill Arms featuring, for instance, a risotto with halloumi cheese. It sounded delicious and is something I would certainly choose from a menu. Although we were in the mood for solid, comforting food, the chef had really made the effort to present this in an original way and it was appreciated.

For pudding, I continued the theme with trifle, which turned out to be a little too much to finish. This was partly my fault for choosing a raspberry and chocolate brownie trifle to follow fish and chips. Nevertheless, I couldn't help but feel it would have slipped down more easily if it had been made with a fresh chocolate custard rather than the mousse-like confection used, which I found very sweet. A case, perhaps, of eyes larger than tummy.

My companion made an excellent choice and had a totally delicious Bakewell tart with black cherry compote. The almond sponge of this traditional English classic was moist and marzipan-like and the sharp taste of the raspberry jam came through well, setting the tastebuds tingling.

Coffee was perfect, served black and slightly frothy on top. There were homemade hazelnut macaroons on the dessert menu which I would have liked to try but simply couldn't manage another morsel. Perhaps another time. All in all, a perfect pub lunch and a little oasis. We left, recovered and ready to continue our shopping expedition. **V**

Our two-course meal, without drinks, came to around £31



Bakewell tart with black cherry compote



Haddock, chips and mushy peas