

# The View review

**Rosemary Staal finds a riverside pub-restaurant teeming with life**



The George • 14 Bridge Street • Fordingbridge • Hampshire • SP6 1AH • 01425 652040 • [www.georgeatfordingbridge.co.uk](http://www.georgeatfordingbridge.co.uk)

I don't know what time you'd need to get to The George to be sure of a space in their car park, but we see we've definitely missed the boat by the time we arrive. So have others, so there's a good old hoo-ha going on with various drivers showing off their macho reversing skills as they extricate themselves from the overstuffed courtyard. We get out too, with a bit of silky-smooth manoeuvring on D's part, and take refuge in the main car park in the town a few minutes' walk away.

My assumption that the George's courtyard has been filled with cars driven by the staff is proved quite wrong when we walk in and find the majority of the tables taken by scores of happy customers who are giving the place a good buzz.

We express our surprise that a Tuesday night should be so busy – especially as it's one of those disappointing July nights that thinks it's in March – but co-proprietor Nicky tells us it was even busier the night before. A Monday night? This place must have a magic formula.

We look forward to discovering what it is, but first we wander out to enjoy the glorious riverside location and its very English views, with Fordingbridge's ancient and very lovely seven-arched bridge almost within touching distance to our left. Sadly it's too chilly to eat outside, although some determined smokers show they're prepared to shiver for their cause.

A large area of decking on the riverside terrace gives a loftier view of the Avon's passing trout, but we scuttle inside to get comfortable in a conservatory-like room where there's a selection of rather charmingly homespun, mismatched, tables and chairs. No fine white drapery for uniformity here: this is a paper-napkin and no mats or tablecloths set-up, and cutlery sits in a jug on our table so we can lay our own places. That seems a good idea because the jeans-clad and white-polo-shirted waiting staff and Nicky are dashing about at quite a lick, rushed off their feet.

It isn't just the car park spaces that have been snaffled by the earlier arrivals, I discover. They've made such inroads on the menu that three of the dishes (including roast vegetable

lasagne, which I might have chosen) are 'off'. That is off the menu, as opposed to off colour.

Nevertheless, there is quite enough to choose from and D and I consult both the standard menu and the one on the chalkboard before opting for what we think will keep the wolf from our respective doors. D goes for cream of carrot and orange soup followed by cod in a Speckled Hen-laced batter and chunky chips. The latter seem to be a signature of the George as they accompany many of the dishes.

I have spied some of my favourite ingredients in one of the starter dishes, so have no hesitation in asking for aubergine and mozzarella rolls with salad leaves, tomato purée and parmesan shavings. For my main course I choose sea bass stuffed with orange segments on a bed of sliced summery veg with lemon grass.

Lisa, our waitress, is anxious to know if we are getting on OK. Yes thank you, we assure her. It is the head chef's night off so we grab a chance to chat when he appears from the cellar. Craig Harden tells us that he and Nicky, partners in life as well as in business, are living a dream come true. They used to be childhood sweethearts in Portsmouth but drifted apart when Craig moved to work in London.

Fate brought them back together 20 years later and now here they are, running this former coaching inn together and loving it. They took it over a year ago, since when business has quadrupled.

From the look of all those contented faces around us, we can see why. ♡

**Our two-course meal for two, excluding drinks: £34.35**

