

The View review

Dia Newland enjoys a trip to historic Salisbury but isn't put off by a severed hand



**The Haunch of Venison • 1 Minster Street • Salisbury • SPI ITB
01722 411313 • www.haunchofvenison.uk.com**

After such abysmal weather it's a pleasure to set out for Salisbury under a bright blue sky, albeit sharply cold, with spring in our hearts. Salisbury has so much to offer the city explorer that it's almost unnecessary to plan ahead; practically every street has an ancient building to admire or an artefact with plaque to read and digest. Nevertheless, as we approach, with the cathedral spire standing attentively on the horizon, I enjoy anticipating the bustling atmosphere of Wiltshire's popular county seat.

There are many public houses and restaurants to choose from but today we are having lunch at the Haunch of Venison. Just off the market square, the circa 1320 building is almost opposite the Poultry Cross, which was built at about the same time and was originally one of four market crosses in the city.

The restaurant is reached through a tiny bar, busy with locals enjoying a pint, then up incredibly old, dark, oak stairs. As we take our seats at the rear of the restaurant, the 13th-century St Thomas Becket church fills the window. It holds the famous medieval painting of *The Last Judgment*, and was mentioned by Thomas Hardy in *Jude the Obscure*. It is impossible not to be impressed by this gothic building. As I gaze at it I remember reading that a tunnel was built between the two buildings for the convenience of the clerics when they visited the then house of ill repute in which I sit. It seems we are all subject to human frailty.

It is not long before our starters appear. My partner has chosen caramelised red onion and homemade goats' cheese tartlet with

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dressed salad. The sweetness of the onion is a perfect foil to the dry tang of the cheese, and the pastry good and crumbly. My duck pâté is accompanied by red onion marmalade and grilled bread: the marmalade and bread (warm and buttery) are a good slant on the ordinary.

The menu is changed seasonally. We are told by Christina, our friendly waitress, that Robin Adams, their young, local chef, is in the process of revamping the current dishes



Caramelised red onion and homemade goats' cheese tartlet and duck pâté with red onion marmalade

on offer. There is also a specials board to choose from which offers good lunchtime fare. We choose to have a glass of the house white with our meal, but there is a wine list for hardier souls to peruse.

The wait between courses is just right and the roast sweet chilli chicken with spring ribbon vegetables served with cheesy polenta cake arrives as an artistic tower. Don't let the word chilli put you off; the flavour is mild and the taste of the vegetables easily discernible. Salmon en croûte with new potatoes, asparagus spears and salad garnish is my partner's main course. A good appetite is required to manage this plate and though the pastry is too much for him, he reports the salmon to be tasty and the vegetables well cooked. All dishes are generous in size so anyone planning a busy afternoon after lunch at the Haunch of Venison might be wise to stick to two courses.

Even so, we go for all three, and at Christina's recommendation plump for the chef's homemade sticky toffee pudding to end our meal: one serving, two spoons. Topped with ice cream and sitting in warm sticky sauce, the softness of the pudding is exactly right. And there's nothing like a traditional English pud to set you on the road for further sightseeing in the cold.

We make our way back downstairs and cannot resist checking out the mummified severed hand in the House of Lords bar (named because of its use by the hierarchy of the earlier mentioned clergy), which was discovered in the 19th century and belonged to a player who cheated at whist. **♥**

Our meal, without drinks, came to £33.60