

The View review

Annie Bullen feels quite at home at The Manor



Comfort is a priority in the drawing room

The Manor • Shrewton • Wiltshire • SP3 4HF • 01980 620216 • www.rollestonmanor.com

When friends and neighbours were invited to The Manor last year to celebrate the old house's new lease of life as a country hotel, one man spotted a former girl friend – on the dining room wall. Old photographs, showing life in and around Shrewton, where the centuries-old manor stands, mark the past, and there she was, joining farm workers taking a break from gathering in the harvest.

The old brick-and-flint house has been owned by the Smith family for more than 60 years but its history goes back centuries, encompassing such famous figures as Lord Cardigan and Lady Jane Seymour, the third wife of Henry VIII. Present owner George Smith enlisted the help of his cousin Suzanne Kilmister to turn his old family home into a comfortable restaurant with rooms and, just six months ago, they opened with seven stylish bedrooms, each with a bathroom and furnished with a lovely mix of modern fabrics and colours, and antique furniture which filled the family home.

But what about the food? I went to The Manor to test the skills of chef/manager Mark

Barnett who presents an incredibly reasonable dinner menu, which works out at less than £20 a head for three courses. A gin and tonic, taken by the fireside in the drawing room, slipped down nicely as we chose and, while we dithered, a plate with a delicious cheesy smoked trout mixture on crispy pieces of toast arrived.

I enjoyed the mix of comfort and informality at The Manor; there's not an enormous entrance hall and the dining and drawing rooms are situated either side of the front door, so it was just a step to our table where we were soon enjoying brie and cranberry tartlet (me) and a smooth pâté with a nicely balanced tomato relish. I wanted to steal the prettily engraved jug (another family heirloom) filled with iced water but contented myself with enjoying the tart with its crisp pastry and mopping up juices with chunks of warm baguette.

The other starter that evening (the menu changes depending on supply) was leek and potato soup. Mark told us that the lamb – my choice – had been braising all afternoon in its red wine and tarragon sauce. He buys much of his meat from local farmers. It was a chunky neck fillet, which gave way obligingly to my fork and tasted wonderful. Both the lamb and Roy's tender Gressingham duck came with a tower of gratin dauphinoise potato, crisped in the oven and melting inside. The duck, garnished with some finely shredded and deep-fried spring cabbage, sat on a red berry sauce. Vegetables were imaginative too. Lightly cooked carrots with butter and parsley and a dish of thinly sliced courgettes sprinkled with very finely chopped peppers for flavour and colour.


We could have eaten wild mushroom ravioli, pork medallions with apple and blue vinny cheese, or salmon pillows with scallops and a basil cream. A glass each of Australian Stonefish (Shiraz) hit the spot. The wine list isn't huge but is well chosen with a balance of old-world classics and new-world adventures.



The cosy dining room

There is still work to be done in the garden, but the old orchard thrives, so I chose apple crumble and very good it was, too, subtly spiced and with finely chopped walnuts in the topping. Roy went for local cheeses, which arrived with an interesting selection of biscuits.

We relaxed over coffee and peppermint tea in the drawing room, where we chatted with Mark, by that time finished in the kitchen, and a regular, who likes the Manor so much he stays during the week while he's working locally.

We liked it too – in fact we enjoyed it so much, we stayed the night. 

Our meal, without drinks but including a £1.50 supplement for the duck, came to £37.50

Oh...

Colonel George Smith bought the Manor and its farm more than 60 years ago and became involved in the small community. When he spotted a church organ for a reasonable £300 in London, he decided to buy it for Shrewton's Methodist church. But when it was dismantled for transportation the carrier received a nasty shock. Inside was a skeleton – possibly that of the man responsible for working the bellows.



Chef/manager Mark Barnett at the door to The Manor