

# The View review

Annie Bullen *refuses to sing for her supper*



Weather permitting, you can eat in the courtyard

**The Mercure White Hart Hotel • 1 St John Street • Salisbury • SPI 2SD  
01722 327476 • www.mercure-uk.com**

I don't want to bring politics into this review of a very pleasant evening spent at the old White Hart Hotel in the heart of Salisbury, but when the next general election comes around, the elected member had better be in good voice.

The balcony atop the portico of the elegant 17th-century building stands ready for the MP to face constituents and sing out, in good Wiltshire dialect, the old song *The Vly be on the Turmut*. I am not kidding. Salisbury's present MP, Robert Key, evidently a good sport, has followed the tradition with relish.

Anyway, there were no turnips (nor, I am pleased to say, flies) on the menu when we visited the White Hart for dinner. Now owned by Mercure, a French company, the hotel, with its spacious and comfortable public rooms, has undergone refurbishment and has a new young team in the kitchen, headed by chef Graham McKell. They've established a dinner menu with a good choice and at a reasonable price, which explains why the large dining room was well occupied by a mix of guests at the hotel and outside diners on a mid-week evening. There's a pretty paved garden outside where you can choose to dine on warm evenings.

Scallops on a tomato confit with a curly slice of crisp Parma ham and an artistic trail of

balsamic syrup was my choice of starter, while my companion went for the comfort of a bowl of leek and potato soup. A selection of very good breads had arrived, arranged on a rather nice old tile. The theme continued with the scallops – tastefully scattered on a much larger tile, which was manoeuvred into place in front of me with practised skill. I liked the combination of scallops and slowly reduced fresh tomatoes, soft and sweet. The flavour of the leeks came through nicely in the soup, homemade and creamy.

Assistant food and beverages manager Ernst Gruenfeld brought us glasses of a good New Zealand pinot noir to go with the main courses. Earlier manager Olivia O'Sullivan had explained that the hotel actively promoted fine wines by keeping the prices as low as possible. Shame we were driving. It was certainly robust enough to go with the lovely flavours of my baby aubergines stuffed with ratatouille, with roast sweet potatoes and a beautiful Parmesan crisp.

Calves liver is sometimes very badly cooked, but not here – I cut a slice from my partner's plate. Crisp on the outside and meltingly soft in the middle with a good flavour. I didn't get the chance to try his mashed potato or baby carrots but the red onion gravy was delicious.



**Chef Graham McKell**

A good selection of English cheeses for him, a creamy cappuccino crème brûlée for me, coffee and peppermint tea, completed our hugely enjoyable meal.

I'm just glad I didn't have to climb on the balcony and sing. 

**Our meal, without drinks, came to £56**

**The dinner menu** changes frequently. On the evening we visited other starters included mushroom and foie-gras terrine with salad leaves and toasted walnut bread, asparagus topped with a poached duck egg and a pink grapefruit dressing, tea-smoked lamb rump with a cucumber salsa and Parmesan, crab salad with pickled fennel, capers and dill oil.

Main dishes included chicken breast with savoy cabbage and bacon with creamed potatoes and thyme jus, grilled sea bream with crushed new potatoes, leeks and fennel and a chive velouté, roast rack of lamb with baby courgettes and a rosemary jus, sirloin steak with mushrooms, tomatoes and chips.

Puds included warm dark chocolate parfait, caramelised lemon tart, apple and cider torte and meringue with summer berries.

**The old** dialect song *The Vly be on the Turmut*, extols the dubious pleasure of turnip-hoeing in rural Wiltshire and is the marching song of the Wiltshire regiment. The chorus, sung heartily in a heavy Wiltshire accent goes thus:

*The vly, the vly  
The vly be on the turmut –  
'Tis all me eye  
Fer I to try  
To keep vly off the turmut.*



**Scallops on the tiles**