

The View review

David Eidlestein enjoys a 'traditional' festive curry



**The Shah Jahan • 111-113 South Western Road • Salisbury • SP2 7RR
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You can't beat the good old traditions when it comes to the festive season – so what better way to celebrate than with a good curry? It's as much part of the fabric of British life at Christmas as karaoke, Cristiano Ronaldo and Terry Wogan.

So, imbued with the spirit of goodwill, I took my appetite, my elasticated trousers and my hungry wife along to The Shah Jahan, just down the road from the railway station at Salisbury.

It has been a high spot on the city's restaurant landscape since it opened back in 1990, and since its facelift of a couple of years ago, it has the ambience and décor to match the quality of its food.

England is good at Indian restaurants and Salisbury particularly so. Curry has brushed aside fish and chips as our national staple diet and now no Christmas gathering would be complete without the spice. Kings of the 21st century would come bearing gifts of myrrh, frankincense and a nice sag aloo.

Tohur Ali has been involved in the family business from the start, initially as an eager fresh-from-school waiter and nowadays as

manager. Some of his staff have also earned their long-service stripes, a rare example of continuity that has surely contributed to the restaurant's longevity and its large, loyal clientele.

The décor is a subtle lemon and light blue, the waiters are smart, numerous, polite and attentive, and the crockery and cutlery are as funky and pleasing as you'd expect from today's more upmarket Indian restaurant. Nowadays the layout of the place helps create a good buzz, but the pre-Christmas groups and parties added crackers, paper hats and hoots of laughter to the atmosphere.

The food at The Shah Jahan has always been good but we were delighted to note that it has moved up a notch or two of late, adding more sophisticated South Indian and other speciality dishes from the sub-continent to augment the usual curry-house fare, which it still produces as well as ever.

Rather than watch us dither over the menu, Ali wisely suggested that we sample a cross-section of dishes. It proved an excellent decision, even if we did feel that we would need to summon a small crane to lift us out

of our seats by the end.

I started with a tasty mixed kebab, comprising chicken and lamb tikka plus an onion bhaji; Rosie, brought along (a) because she's a vegetarian and can try different things, and (b) because she grumbles for days if she's left at home, much enjoyed her vegetable paneer rolls. She's what you might politely call a fussy eater so they must have been good.

Then the headline act: seven very different dishes – two chicken, two lamb and three vegetable, accompanied by two sorts of rice and a nan. We were supposed to dip and pick and sample; instead we hogged and slurped and bloated.

The meat was tender and delicious, the spices imaginative and the vegetarian dishes, judging by the grunts of delight emanating from my enthusiastic fellow diner, were outstanding.

When the sweet menu was offered, we would probably have opted for Indian fruit salad had we been able to reorganise our stomachs sufficiently to create space for anything. But we weren't, so we didn't. 

