

# *Dining at* **THE CHEF'S TABLE**



Bury St Edmunds has something of a reputation for restaurants but if you are looking for fine dining and something really special The Chef's Table at The Northgate is without a doubt the place to eat. **Anne Gould** investigates



Chefs have become something like superstars in recent years and the magic they work, as a result of years of toil and long unsocial hours learning and refining their craft, has finally been recognised. And so in a number of restaurants diners are invited into the kitchen to see these Gods at work and to soak in the creativity of their genius.

The Northgate in Bury St Edmunds is an exceptional, beautiful small hotel, a stone's throw from the Abbey Gardens, Angel Hill and St Edmundsbury Cathedral and offers just such a service. Seated at high tables and stools it affords a view over a canopied terrace but also allows you to watch all the action in the kitchen, which is run by head chef Greig Young.

Forget the loud crashing kitchen performances and shouting you might have witnessed on TV, The Northgate kitchen appears more like a synchronised dance that flows to a beautiful, quiet culinary harmony. But then Greig has an air of Zen about him which is maybe why he creates an eating experience that is like no other.

Diners can choose from the a la carte menu or experience the Chefs Table, described as the ultimate dining experience for food lovers. This special Chef's Choice menu can be anywhere between five and nine courses starting at £45 a head, but if you want to partake of course booking ahead is advised.

We came with the added complication that on doctor's orders I am currently both dairy and wheat free; a combination that can stifle creativity for everyday eating. But such is Greig's talent that at no point did I feel I was missing out because his food combinations are simply incredible.

We sampled the five-course menu and throughout the food was balanced perfectly with concentrations of herbs and unusual

flavourings. We started with spiced onion and potato with black garlic mayonnaise – a perfect and not too spicy mouthful to get the taste buds going. Served alongside it was wholemeal bread made from Pakenham Mill flour and butter, meanwhile, my gluten-free toast was accompanied by a truly inspired green dip made from rapeseed oil and dill.

Next was a most exquisitely beautiful starter; a combination of pastel perfection with delicately sliced kohlrabi, mooli and lemon garnished with parsley and dill. Tucked underneath in contrasting pink was delicately cured, chopped trout.

Then we moved on to a tomato salad – a mixture of many coloured skinless tomatoes; red, yellow and green with olives and served with burnt leek and honey dressing. Seriously this was a taste sensation. Greig has taken the much loved but humble tomato to a whole new level. I'd happily eat this again and again.

We'd had three courses already but they were so light and refreshing that it was a delight looking forward to what came next. And so the lamp rump arrived looking pink, juicy and tender accompanied by roast cauliflower and baby gem lettuce. It was magnificent. It was also the first time I have tried grilled lettuce and it won't be the last. As with all the ingredients Greig has chosen widely from fresh and locally available produce and the Colne Valley lamb (from just over the border in Essex) was of exceptional quality. I haven't tasted anything that good for many years.

Pudding was perfect for this time of year; a combination of strawberries and ice-cream but of course not the sort of combo you'd put together at home. There was strawberry sorbet, sorrel ice cream, strawberry ketchup and poached strawberries too. Was I missing the cream and dairy – absolutely not!

To finish with our coffee and mint tea was a wonderful touch that has become something of a signature for Greig, a red fruit and basil macaroon served on a bed of dried hibiscus flowers (check out the hotel website for a picture). It tastes as good as it looks.

For those who are staying overnight and those who don't have to drive The Northgate boasts a rather magnificent cocktail bar if you want to precede your meal with a relaxing aperitif on the large garden terrace – which is also perfect for al fresco dining, rare in the heart of Bury. There are carefully curated whisky and gin selections from near and far featuring gin made in Cambridge to elderflower additions that are grown in the hotel's back garden.

I sampled a non-alcoholic G&T which was surprisingly very much like the real thing albeit that it was a little sweet for my taste while my sister-in-law chose a Cucumber Highball which came in a ceramic Stein-like container and was delicious.

As with all things at The Northgate, there's a similarly carefully chosen wine list available by the glass or the bottle.



#### INFORMATION

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