

Restaurant Review

Featuring a local place to eat every month

The Shurlock Inn: seriously good food at reasonable prices

Traditional village pubs are a rare breed nowadays. Some have survived as sports bars, others restaurants. Either change runs the risk of alienating faithful locals popping in for a pint. The best have met the needs of both local drinkers and visiting foodies, and in this the Shurlock Inn has excelled.

The last tenant landlords of the former White Hart in Shurlock Row enjoyed valuable support from a few villagers, especially neighbour Gordon Hulme. A Canadian entrepreneur, he made it his mission to save the village pub when was threatened with closure a year ago.

With the backing of other villagers and outside investors, a company was formed which bought the building and secured the pub's future. There followed an extensive refurbishment programme over several months before the Shurlock Inn opened last summer to great acclaim.

The key players alongside Gordon are partner Alison Stump and head chef Mark Speirs. Events consultant Alison and the

other front of house staff members give a warm welcome to all customers, whether regulars or new visitors. Mark, who trained with Gordon Ramsay, brought his wealth of experience and passion for quality to the new kitchen layout and menus. He now leads a team of excellent chefs.



Gordon and Alison were on duty the Tuesday evening we visited. Both are by nature warm and friendly, and they knew quite a few customers by name – even a Jack Russell!

Separating the cosy villagers' bar from the dining area is a brick half wall featuring a two-sided log fire. We rounded the corner to find several groups of diners in the surprisingly light and airy restaurant. It seemed the Shurlock Inn was no longer a well-kept secret...

The old black beams have been stripped back to their natural wood colour and the décor has been softened. The comfortable leather chairs, blond wood tables and fresh flowers add a clean, contemporary touch to the olde worlde charm of the building.

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The menu is a delight: not too huge a choice, and sensibly planned to offer an interesting selection at fair prices. We opted for starters of sautéed squid with chorizo and new potatoes and a crayfish and avocado tian with squid. The presentation was first class and the taste buds were not disappointed. The sautéed squid, with a deliciously light and crispy tempura-type batter, was perfectly complemented by the gutsy chorizo and some peppery rocket. The tian was a generous portion of avocado and seafood salad, held together in a neat stack by a little Marie Rose sauce.

Next came calves liver – melt-in-the-mouth perfection with braised Baby Gem, mashed potatoes and a sage and lemon jus – and sea bass fillet with the crispiest skin and most succulent flesh possible, served with roasted Mediterranean vegetables and pesto dressing (plus a bowl of crunchy sautéed potatoes on the side).

We were about to decline dessert when Alison reminded us it was Shrove Tuesday. The chef had pancakes, served simply with lemon and sugar. Impossible to resist.

The wine list has a good mix of new and old world and grape varieties at fair prices, with several of each colour available by the glass. As for the beer, we saw several visitors come in to sample the resident or guest ales and collect a sticker in a booklet. This turned out to be the local CAMRA Real Ale Trail 2010, which runs until early May. The Shurlock Inn is one of 28 pubs in the Reading area taking part.

We eventually rolled home happy and with full bellies, vowing to show more restraint during Lent... and to return to the Shurlock Inn straight after Easter!



Bookings now being taken for:

Mother's Day

Sunday 14 March

Easter Weekend

Friday 2 – Monday 5 April

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