

The Plough Inn is making a splash beside the river in Kelmscott



Food fit for manor folk

Annette Nix enjoys a comforting lunch at the newly revamped Plough Inn at Kelmscott

Running a picture perfect 17th century inn near a popular tourist attraction sounds like a good business proposition in anyone's book.

Which is probably what husband and wife team Sebastian and Lana Snow must have thought when they bought The Plough Inn, a stone's throw from Kelmscott Manor, a few months ago.

The chef/proprietors, who also run The Five Alls at nearby Filkins, have been overseeing the Grade II listed Plough's refurbishment since they purchased the freehold in March.

Sebastian, former chef/proprietor of Snows on the Green, London, and head chef at the multi award-winning Swan at Southrop, said: "We are so excited about The Plough. The chance to restore it to its rightful place as the centre of the community once again was too good to miss."

Open for just a few weeks when we visited, they were still in the process of finishing four stylish en suite guest rooms, to make a total of eight.

The Snows have refurbished the inn in true country style, with the expert help of interior designer Miranda Snow.

The repointed random stone interior walls are offset with pastel painted beams and quirky vintage and antique finds, contemporary prints and soft furnishings giving a homely ambience.

All the inn's original rustic features – beams, flagstones and oak flooring – have been retained. A ground-source heat pump supplies the underfloor heating and a woodburner takes pride of place in the traditional bar area.

The inn was packed to the rafters with diners with barely a seat to spare when we visited on a Wednesday lunchtime. Families were happily scoffing in the pretty garden, where there is also a separate little Hideaway bar, seating up to eight.

Head chef Matt Read comes with a top pedigree, having previously worked with Sebastian at his London restaurant, Snows on the Green. Matt has also worked at The Ivy and Langan's Brasserie, London.

We sat in the restaurant area and were immediately taken with the menu's lovely "comfort food" vibe. Sharing a basket of warm, malty bread and butter we chose a starter of quails' eggs with celery salt from a tempting selection including treacle-cured Loch Duart salmon, prawn cocktail, smoked eel salad and sweetcorn and coriander soup.

For mains I selected The Plough fish pie with minted peas and my guest the devilled lambs' kidneys with rosti potato and spinach.

The fish pie was just like mother used to make – served in an old-fashioned enamel pie dish with chunks of salmon and boiled egg with a mashed potato topping – although I would have liked a little more white sauce. I ordered a side dish of salty samphire, which

complemented the dish well.

The beautifully cooked and generous portion of lambs' kidneys with crispy rosti was soon devoured with a contented sigh.

Other mains on the a la carte menu were mixed grill with stuffed mushrooms, onion rings, anchovy and caper butter; lamb hot pot with red cabbage; lobster mayonnaise with new potatoes and salad and gilt-head bream chargrilled on the bone.

For pudding we had burned custard with rhubarb and ginger and the cooling blackcurrant gin and tonic sorbet with ginger snap – both delicious.

The apricot pond pudding with butterscotch sauce and almond ice cream looked tasty, too. The cheese board had a selection of three unpasteurised cheeses with chutney and oat biscuits.

The wine list is well composed and we enjoyed a bottle of the house red merlot/grenache. You can also have wine by the glass or carafe, or splash out on a range of magnums for a special occasion.

If you are nibble-ish and want to be less formal, there is also an all-day bar menu with snacks such as Kelmscott piglets in blankets, devils on horseback, sandwiches, toasties and boards, and specials including Fowey mussels in cider with chips or Kelmscott sausages and mash with caramelised onion and sage gravy.

To help walk off all this hearty fare, the village sits conveniently alongside the Thames Path. The Plough also has its own mooring on the river and future plans already include buying a barge for bankside and river dining.

The inn is just a two-minute walk from beautiful Grade I listed Kelmscott Manor, the former summer home of renowned Arts and Crafts designer, poet, novelist and social activist William Morris. Owned and managed by the Society of Antiquaries, it is open every Wednesday and Saturday from April 1 to the end of October, with entry by timed ticket from 11am to 5pm.

I am sure those who come especially to visit the manor will be equally happy to discover the delights on offer at the revamped Plough Inn.

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