

## EATING OUT DUKE ON THE GREEN

## Put your dukes up



**BY NELLIE NICHOLS**

**TRADITIONALLY pubs in England were places for drinking with little or no emphasis on food.**

I remember as a child sitting in pub gardens with my family on the odd warm summer's evening and being offered the ubiquitous choice of pork scratchings, peanuts, a packet of crisps (with the little blue paper twist of salt for sprinkling, the best part) or horror of horrors and my worst nightmare, a discoloured pickled egg.

All disgustingly salty and cleverly offered to increase beer sales.

The metamorphosis to the gastropub of today started in the 1950s via the statutory 'pie and a pint', before the advent in the 1970s of 'chicken in a basket'.

Quality then plummeted and variety soared as many of you will recall with the invention of the microwave oven and freezer food.

Below average fish and chips, lasagne and shepherd's pie to name but a few were suddenly available alongside the most dubious of curries and Sunday lunch options.

Slithers of overcooked beef, mass produced Yorkshire puddings and instant gravy sat cheek by jowl with fatty slices of pork and tinned apple sauce.

A wealth of options from freezer to plate via the magic of the microwave in a matter of minutes were all served with chips and a healthy salad garnish of sliced cucumber and tomato on the side.

Since the 1990s, serving food has become an integral part of a pub's trade and suddenly the very first 'gastropub' sprang from nowhere with the opening of The Eagle in Clerkenwell.

Now everyone's doing it, from Gordon Ramsay and Guy Ritchie to Marco Pierre White.

Gastropubs are springing up all over the place; exciting and fabulous food is on offer at nearly every drinking hole in the land.

Or is it? In Hammersmith and Fulham gastropubs are on every corner and I intend to visit several to find you some of the best and most delicious pub food I can.

I'm kicking off by having supper with a new friend at The Duke in Parsons Green.

Completely refurbished four years ago, the now duck egg blue in the restaurant and ox blood red in the bar interiors are well done with several

popular eating areas in both.

The brewery even had the good sense to preserve the remarkable original Victorian tiled wall, worth going in for a pint if you're passing just to see it.

The menu is very extensive – which always rings a bit of an alarm bell with me. Simple question: how can the fairly small kitchen possibly cope with a telephone book of variables on the menu and get the quality spot on every time?

All the usual suspects are there from soup of the day, salt and pepper squid to mussels with white wine, and so it goes on.

My new friend and I opt for the terrine of chicken liver and foie gras with spiced apple chutney and brioche and the 'English' asparagus wrapped in smoked salmon with some leaden hollandaise (for dipping?) both £6.95.

I am very excited about the opportunity of eating delicious English asparagus in October. Previously, I've only been able to eat it in season in the spring. Perhaps Youngs the brewery has also found time to reinvent the growing season for the vegetable?

Improbably, it's rather tasty. But each asparagus spear is sliced into three (to appear to be more generous than it actually is I fear) and the hollandaise lacks its expected warm velvety texture.

The terrine is very pink but nevertheless delicious and the chutney a perfect partner.

My friend moves on to a lamb burger which comes with a minted caper salsa and chips (£11.45). I'm going for the 24-day-aged Exmoor 8oz sirloin with hand cut chips and bearnaise (£16.95).

I love a good bearnaise but again it is more of a solid than it should be and I can't really get that tarragon flavour I have been promised.

My friend's burger is without doubt generous and delicious and the salsa a



**MISSING TOUCH:** Tamara Lyn at the Duke in Fulham PICTURE BY LEIGH QUINNELL

great touch. The chips are faultless and red hot like they should be.

That wonderful moment of biting into one knowing you are mad with impatience but can't stop yourself is one of those eating out moments I love with a passion.

My steak has been cooked perfectly

medium rare and has the tram line char grilled lines that could have been drawn with a ruler, but 24 days hanging in my book would have given a much more buttery texture.

We're finishing up with a lemon and vanilla brulee and a warm chocolate pudding with Jude's (who?)

very vanilla ice cream, each at £5.50. Both are good but I'm not beating a path to the door to have another one.

The list of grill options offers even the fussy eater a good choice of endless burgers, steaks and other mains.

Don't get me wrong, you would be very hard pushed to not be able to find something on this menu you could choose. But something isn't here. I'm not torn over my choice, which I love to be.



**Here you will be happy with your supper but in my book it's all too safe**

My mother always said try not to eat in a restaurant what you can have at home and that advice has done me proud over the years and always led to evenings of delicious decisions.

Here you will be happy enough with your supper but in my book it's all too safe – a sort of Durex of gastropubs. Predictable, careful, cautious and tame.

Many will be happy with this; me, I've always loved an evening of food which reveals a few surprises, but if ever I feel like a well executed burger I'll be back.

• *The Duke, 235 New Kings Road, Fulham. Call 020 7736 2777. Visit: [www.dukeonthegreen.co.uk](http://www.dukeonthegreen.co.uk)*

• *Nellie Nichols is a food consultant and has specialised in the industry for many years.*

*Visit: [www.nellienichols.com](http://www.nellienichols.com)*

## NELLIE'S PICK THE SALUTATION, W6

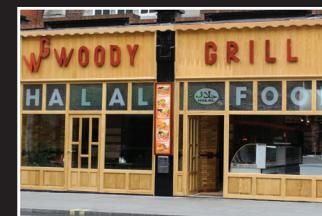


• **AFTER** a whirlwind £160,000 spruce-up, King Street's historic Salutation pub has re-opened. Fuller's Brewery have certainly been busy during the two-week project, building a new rear conservatory, opening up the fireplace and adding new eye-catching furnishings including a deer head mounted on the wall and church pew seating. There's also a new manager – Matt Ford, 25, (pictured) who used to be at the Turk's Head in Twickenham – and a surprisingly affordable new menu.

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