

It was a trip down memory lane for me when we drove out to Thame for a Sunday lunch at The Thatch. I used to live in a crazy shared house in Long Crendon – four humans, two cats and a dog called Brian.

That was long ago in another lifetime but my affection for Thame and the surrounding area still remains.

The Thatch is right on the high street and finding a parking space on a busy Sunday lunchtime took a little while – they have a small car park and the pub is popular, so be prepared to scout around a bit.

The building dates from 1555 and is easy to spot – as my companion Daniel pointed out smugly – because it is the one with the thatch...

Inside, log fires roared and the atmosphere was inviting and friendly.

We had a drink at the bar, busy with locals and 'day-outers', to start with. The building is characterful, with interesting nooks and crannies and many different places to sit including a modern restaurant area, a courtyard garden which would be splendid on a summer's day and the higgledy-piggledy Tudor part where we were seated.

I always carry a woollen shawl with me on outings to older buildings, having found that often the winter wind whistles through the ancient windows or under the creaky doors – but not here, I was snug as a bug in a rug.

I started with crab and guacamole cocktail (£7.50) and Daniel had devilled kidneys (£7.75). The generous crab dish was served in a large glass with a salty crisp nacho that was the perfect foil to the salad.

The devilled kidneys were just spicy enough and perfectly cooked, which got a big thumbs-up from Daniel, who requested them 'not too pink'. They came with crisp bacon and smooth cauliflower purée, a great mix of textures and flavours.

Our waitress Kate, who was knowledgeable about the food, friendly and efficient, looked after us beautifully. She brought us a fresh napkin after our starters, a small detail but in gastro-pub territory it is often the small things that make a difference.

Since it was Sunday lunchtime we ordered the Jimmy Butler leg of pork and the Aubrey Allen grass-fed rump of beef (both £13.50). I like to see the provenance of the meat I am eating and both these producers are top-notch.

We got terrific roast potatoes, super smooth carrot purée, fresh green cabbage and creamy cauliflower cheese.

Daniel was in raptures about the crackling, he is a bit of a devotee. It was wafer-thin strips of crispness, with no chewy, soggy fat in sight. Such was his rapture that a few minutes later, the lovely Kate appeared with a bowl of extra crackling – result! The portions are generous and the food is fresh, cooked with care and full of flavour. Truth be told we were full, but pudding is sort of obligatory, isn't it? You can always find room for something sweet.

I chose lemon tart with mango sorbet (£6), while my companion went for iced banoffee parfait with caramelised banana and toffee sauce (£5.75).

The lemon tart was both lemon and tart in the right measures. It came with a crisp caramelised surface and a generous scoop of soft, sweet mango sorbet. Chef had worked some magic with the banoffee parfait which had a really deep banana flavour, always



Alexis Thompson's lunchtime feast in Thame hits the spot

Crackling good time at The Thatch

difficult to achieve with frozen desserts. And if ever there was a fruit designed for caramelising, it is surely the humble banana.

Our coffees came with a little dish of Smarties (well, if you insist, I suppose I could manage one or two).

The Thatch serves great food and takes care to use local, high-quality produce. Prices remain reasonable. There are specials on both food and drink.

The pub is part of Peach, an independent collective of pubs all over central England

including other well-regarded Oxfordshire hostelries The Fleece, The Fishes and The James Figg.

As we drove home I remarked that if The Thatch had been around in my Thame days, it would certainly have become a regular haunt.

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