

Review Spotted Cow

Words Tony Benjamin



Some gastropubs are, truth to tell, wannabe restaurants that feel fairly uncomfortable places to pop in to for a pint. Other places are cheerfully unpromising pubs that provide amazing food. The Spotted Cow clearly aims to have its raspberry and blueberry cheesecake and eat it too by offering a really good pub experience as well as a separate dining area and an ambitious menu alongside the pub grub staples of bangers and/or pies and mash (and, anyway, we're talking Murray's bangers and pies by Tom's and Pieminister here, so it's all quality stuff). The Clipboard Queen is always impeccably organised – it's a skill that she's used to ensure the success of countless musical events over the years – so the confusion about our dinner date must be my fault. Whatever, I find myself sitting comfortably in the bar sipping well-kept ale and finding all sorts of friendly and interesting people to chat to, with the result that I'm slightly surprised to find Her Majesty in attendance and myself being steered, menu in hand, towards the eating area.

The menu makes for interesting reading, not least because the Cow have extended their 'local, sustainable, ethical' food-sourcing policy to include 'grown on the premises', with a roof garden providing many of the vegetables and herbs used in the kitchen. I'm tempted by a resulting beetroot dish – braised gold and red specimens sliced and segued with beetroot jelly

and whipped goats' cheese with crushed walnuts. It's meant to be a main course but they let us have a starter version (I told you they were friendly) alongside a charcuterie plate and some artisan produce from nearby Mark's Bread. It's a fine way to start eating and catch up with the Queen's more wide-ranging clipboard-toting activities, the crisp freshness of the beetroot being especially delightful while the individual cured meats are excellent specimens. My companion continued with the charcuterie theme, being intrigued by the 'caramelised minted peaches' that came in a rocket salad with serrano ham and dolcelatte cheese. Implausible as it sounds, the well-balanced flavour combination was memorable and deserves to be a classic. I'd tucked into a dark and moist duck leg confit which came with an intense red wine and (homegrown) summer berry sauce that warranted very close attention indeed. I'd ordered a side dish of seasonal vegetables – chard, baby leeks and carrots – but shamefully couldn't finish them and we had to do a bit of rallying before contemplating dessert. In the end we shared a bitter chocolate torte with chantilly cream – another concentrated taste poised exactly on the edge of sweetness. With drinks (though the wine list was tempting, we'd chosen beer and cider), it all rolled in at £50 and we were impressed by the quantity and quality of the food as well as the skilled imagination that had gone into the meal.

THE SPOTTED COW 139 NORTH ST, BRISTOL, BS3 1EZ. TEL: 0117 963 4433, WEB: WWW.THESPOTTEDCOWBRISTOL.COM

VENUE VERDICT ★★★★★★ YOU CAN TRUST THIS GASTROPUB - THEY KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING (AND THEY DO IT SO WELL).

DIARY

Kilfer: Roots Replanted Fri 10-Sun 12 Sept, Hampton Row Allotments, Bathwick, Bath, BA2 6QS, 2.30/6.30pm, £9/£7 conc. Ffi: 01225 386777 • Big hit site-specific drama about food security from last year's Fringe comes to an allotment near you.

Bath Farmers' Market Sat 11 Sept, Green Park Station, Bath, BA1, from 8.30am

Weston-super-Mare Farmers' Market Sat 11 Sept, Winter Gardens, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1AJ, 9am-12.30pm

Bristol Organic Food Fair Sat 11/Sun 12 Sept, Lloyds Amphitheatre, Canons Way, Anchor Rd, Bristol, BS1 5DB, Sat 10am-6pm/Sun 10am-5pm, £5/free Soil Association members & under-16s. Ffi: www.organicfoodfestival.co.uk • One of the biggest gatherings of organic food (and non-food) producers in Europe, with cookery demonstrations from a range of top local and national chefs, a kids' activity area, live music and (of course) loads of exhibitors and tasty samples to persuade you to shop organically.

Tobacco Factory Market Sun 12 Sept, Raleigh Rd, Southville, Bristol, BS3 1TF, 10.30am-2.30pm • Eclectic array of items.

Soup and Stock Tue 14 Sept, Bordeaux Quay, V-Shed, Canons Way, Harbourside, Bristol, BS1 5UH, 6-9.30pm, £75. Ffi: 0117 904 6679 or www.bordeaux-quay.co.uk • Learn to make great stock and use it to make broths and soups with garnishes

Bristol Farmers' Market Wed 15 Sept, Corn St, Bristol, BS1 1HT, 9.30am-2.30pm, free • Local producers from within a 40-mile radius sell a massive range of food.

Do We Really Want Supermarkets To Feed Us? Wed 15 Sept, Elim City Church, Jamaica St, Bristol, 7-9.30pm, free. Ffi: www.transitionmontpelier.org.uk • Discussion about the implications of dependence on supermarkets for food security, farmers in poorer countries and the local independent economy, including discussions about viable alternatives for the future.

Bread Thur 16 Sept, Bordeaux Quay, V-Shed, Canons Way, Harbourside, Bristol, BS1 5UH, 6-9pm, £75. Ffi: 0117 904 6679 or www.bordeaux-quay.co.uk • BQ's artisan bakery gives up the secrets of bread doughs.

Kilfer: Roots Replanted Thur 16-Sun 19 Sept, Peasedown St John Community Farm, Dunkerton Hill, BA2 8PJ, 2.30/6.30pm, £9/£7 conc. Ffi: 01225 386777 • See Fri 10.

Hotel Du Vin Farmers' Market Fri 17 Sept, Hotel Du Vin, The Sugar House, Narrow Lewins Mead, Bristol, BS1 2NU, 11am-2.30pm, free. Ffi: 0117 925 5577 • New gathering of food producers, with cheese, fruit, veg, meat and bread suppliers represented.

Lunch Date Fri 17 Sept, Bordeaux Quay, V-Shed, Canons Way, Harbourside, Bristol, BS1 5UH, 12.45-2pm, £25. Ffi: 0117 904 6679 or www.bordeaux-quay.co.uk • Seasonal two-course lunch demonstration followed by lunch.

Dinner Date Fri 17 Sept, Bordeaux Quay,

V-Shed, Canons Way, Harbourside, Bristol, BS1 5UH, 6.30-8.30pm, £40. Ffi: 0117 904 6679 or www.bordeaux-quay.co.uk • Seasonal three-course meal demonstration followed by dinner.

Bath Farmers' Market Sat 18 Sept, Green Park Station, Bath, BA1, from 8.30am.

Whiteladies Road Farmers' & Fairtrade Market Sat 18 Sept, corner of Whiteladies/Apsley Rd, Bristol, BS8 2SW, 8.30am-2pm. Ffi: www.sustainableland.org.uk • Fresh food from South Gloucestershire farms, live music, market café and family-friendly activities.

Montpelier Bean Feast Sat 18 Sept, St Andrews Rd/Montpelier Park, Bristol, 2-9pm, free. Ffi: 07866 748193 • Revival of an 18th-century annual festival of high jinks held in Montpelier when it was outside the Bristol boundary. All kinds of games and such, plus you can bring your own homegrown produce to exchange for 'beanie' tokens in a food exchange market.

A Very Private Public Breakfast Sat 18 Sept, Kinwarton, 3 Upper Camden Place, Camden Rd, Bath, BA1 5HX, 9am, £12. Ffi: 01225 463362 or www.janeausten.co.uk • The Jane Austen Festival offers the chance to experience a Regency breakfast in an appropriate environment.

From China to Chintz - Tea With Jane Austen Sat 18 Sept, Kinwarton, 3 Upper Camden Place, Camden Rd, Bath, BA1 5HX, 3pm, £12. Ffi: 01225 463362 or www.janeausten.co.uk • Enjoy cucumber sandwiches and china tea as part of the Jane Austen Festival.

Jane Austen Festival 10th Annual Gala Dinner Sat 18 Sept, The Banqueting Room, The Guildhall, High St, Bath, BA1 5AW, 7.30pm, £59.95. Ffi: Jackie@janeausten.co.uk • Highlight for those participating in the Jane Austen Festival, offering the chance to: "Partake of a simply delicious dinner whilst between the courses you will be entertained with music, readings and, of course, a theatrical. This is a wonderful opportunity to wear costume."

Tobacco Factory Market Sun 19 Sept, Raleigh Rd, Southville, Bristol, BS3 1TF, 10.30am-2.30pm • See Sun 12.

Antinori Wine Dinner Sun 19 Sept, Hotel du Vin, The Sugar House, Narrow Lewins Mead, Bristol, BS1 2NU, 7pm, £65 (inc three-course dinner & wine). Ffi: 0117 925 5577 • One of Tuscany's most eminent wine producers gives you the chance to explore their range as part of a three-course meal at Hotel du Vin. Tickets must be bought in advance.

Your Sushi Workshop Sun 19 Sept, Mercure Brigstowe Hotel, Welsh Back, Bristol, BS1 4SP, 2pm, £65. Ffi: www.yoursushi.co.uk • Chance to learn the basic skills, make a range of sushi pieces and go home with a full bento box.

A Very Private Public Breakfast Sun 19 Sept, Kinwarton, 3 Upper Camden Place, Camden Rd, Bath, BA1 5HX, 10am, £12. Ffi: 01225 463362 or www.janeausten.co.uk • See Sat 18.

From China to Chintz - Tea With Jane Austen Sun 19 Sept, Kinwarton, 3 Upper Camden Place, Camden Rd, Bath, BA1 5HX, 4pm, £12. Ffi: 01225 463362 or www.janeausten.co.uk • See Sat 18.