



# The Review

## The Crown

Worthing Road, Dial Post



Warren Buffett, an extremely wealthy investment banker, famously said that it takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.

At The Crown Inn, Dial Post, an ambitious young couple are a little ahead of schedule.

In a few month's time, James and Penny Middleton-Burn will celebrate only their fifth anniversary at The Crown, but in that relatively short space of time they have built up one of the most respected and popular gastropubs in the district.

It has no right to be a success. Dial Post has no shops, less than 100 residents, and the only passing traffic are the few residents of Shipley Road. James himself admits that he'd never heard of it before he took it on.

The same cannot be said of his wife, Penny, who can usually be found pulling a pint of Harvey's bitter or another guest ale while head chef James leads his team in the kitchen.

Penny is the very definition of a country girl. Penny grew up in Dial Post, her grandparents owned the same pub some 40 years ago, and her sister Jo and partner Spike rear the pigs and lambs in Clayfield Farm in Barns Green that eventually end up in James' kitchen.

While most pubs and restaurants claim to keep it local, The Crown goes one better - they keep it in the family! Wonderfully, Penny's grandmother in Dial Post provides a Zucchini relish, but refuses to disclose her secret recipe. Instead, it has been left for Penny in her grandmother's will!

With all this talk of farming and family traditions, you

might think that The Crown wasn't really a place for an outsider. That anyone who didn't arrive on a John Deere tractor and bang the mud off his welly boots in the porch before ordering a pint of IPA wasn't welcome.

But you'd be wide of the mark. Either by luck or delicate planning, or a bit of both, The Crown has maintained popularity with drinkers in the village, and become a very welcoming place for visitors.

Pleasant but visually fairly unremarkable on the exterior, inside the pub has a warm feel that you can only get from a family run pub and a big dog called Chops! The exposed oak beams and supports give the pub its character, without the need for much in the way of paintings and decoration, but there is a touch of the modern too with leather sofas near the bar and candles glowing.

Most of what we've spoken about so far can be attributed to Penny, but when it comes to the food, it is James' skills that come to the fore.

Enormously passionate about his food (he even felt "uncomfortable" about selecting his recommendations over the page, as he insisted the entire menu was worth exploration), his enthusiasm and energy seems to spur on and inspire his team. Looking around the restaurant (it was fairly busy even on a Thursday night) it was clear that each dish is prepared with care, not just those placed in front of a food critic.

Persuaded by James monologuing on its virtues, for starters we opted for the sesame coated fishcake (£8)

James Middleton-Burn has been running The Crown with wife Penny for five years



All images by Toby Phillips

and also the chef's chicken liver pate, with homemade chutney and crispbread (£6). The fishcake was superb, full of flavour with a crisp, crusted coating well complemented by the spicy tomato and caper sauce, if not the pint of Harvey's Armada Ale I was drinking. The pate too, again made with high quality local meat, was to a high standard.

For the main course, I went for chicken breast, goats cheese and wild mushroom risotto (£14), while Toby (AAH photographer) chose the home ground 8oz steak burger (£11), one of the biggest sellers at the pub. It requires a little explanation for an eatery of such reputation to have a burger as its biggest seller, but all the answers come when it is delivered. The meat is 100% locally sourced sirloin and fillet, served with hand-made coleslaw and hand-cut chunky chips.

In addition, you can pay a little extra to add bacon or cheese. And this isn't any cheese (in M&S advert voice), this is the award winning, creamy mature

cheddar Sussex Charmer made using the milk from cows at Pallinghurst Farm in Rudgwick.

As a tip, you might want to avoid a starter if you're going to opt for the burger - it's big.

The risotto was also excellent, with a variety of wild mushrooms and some generous, tender cuts of free range chicken.

And what's also worth noticing is the lack of pretension. There's no overblown adjectives or, our favourite, French translation (do potatoes taste different when they're pomme de terre?). The chicken pie is listed as just that with 'fresh veg, mash and real gravy'.

Then of course there's the desserts. So often a disappointment, here they go all out to finish with a flourish. We'll be blunt - they're not cheap. At £6 a piece they ought to be good, but they are. If you go as a couple we recommend that, rather than buying two single puddings, spend an extra 50p and go for the Assiette of puddings (I know, what was I saying about French trans-

lations!) which includes the sticky toffee pudding with vanilla ice cream, chocolate cake, creme brulee, cheese-cake mousse, and home-made sorbet (£12.50).

It's one of those where you mutter 'Oh, I shouldn't!' or 'Oh, how naughty' with every guilty but glorious mouthful.

Sadly, we had to steer clear of the wines as we're not one of the 50-100 residents of the hamlet of Dial Post and had to drive home, but you won't be too surprised to hear again that they are provided by a local supplier, Amphora, which operates out of Slinfold.

Amphora specialises in finding interesting wines from Languedoc, Roussillon and Provence, and there's a good range on offer at The Crown to complement all the dishes.

All in all, we'd have no hesitation in going back, and The Crown is even a worthy consideration for a special occasion as one of the few places that can combine good food with a relaxed and welcoming environment.

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## On the Menu

James Middleton-Burn, head chef at The Crown, makes some personal recommendations



### Starters

At the moment I've been foraging for wild garlic, and the wild garlic bread complements the spaghetti bolognese. You can't lose by having soup as they're always freshly made. We make fresh fish cakes too, which are really meaty. We also make our own pate using chicken livers and pork. Some people might think that pate is boring, but have our pate, you'll enjoy it! I normally avoid it when I eat out, but with ours you can taste the layers of flavours.



### Main Course

We want to have those classic pub dishes that people want, but for each one to be as good as it can be. Take the ham, egg and chips. We home cook local ham which we honey glaze and hand carve, with free range eggs from Clayfield Farm and hand cut, twice cooked chips to give them a proper flavour. If you come to The Crown you've got to try our burgers. We make our own mince, and probably sell 50-70 a week. There's a lot of meat there - half a pound - I can't eat a whole one!



### Dessert

All our desserts are home made - our sorbets, our ice creams, everything. Treacle tart is very popular. We were running it as a special but I've put it on the menu. I can't take the sticky toffee pudding off either as there would be an uproar!



### Drinks

We have three Harvey's on at the moment but it's not normally like that. We mix it up quite a lot. Dark Star features a lot here, we'll have a run of that for a while, and we've got the WJ King Spring Ale coming on soon. Our partner is a wine importer, and we buy from them. They specialise in new world style wines from France. They're rich and naturally fruity, complex and interesting, and mostly from the Languedoc region. They're really good value.

# wabi

Cocktails from  
**£6.50**

## Happy Hour

Tuesdays -Thursdays 5-7pm  
All cocktails only  
**£4.00**

Enjoy Chef Scott Hallsworths selected  
dinner, including wine from  
**£29.00**



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