



The Fat Fowl

Restaurant and jazz bar by night, café in the morning, many other things in between; **Deri Robins** visits Bradford on Avon's most versatile eatery

While you could probably exhaust the whole of Bradford on Avon's shopping delights and still be back in Bath in time for lunch, there are persuasive reasons to linger.

One of them is the Fat Fowl. Its tireless owners bill it as a restaurant, tapas bar and jazz café, with a cuisine that is probably best judged by its interesting-sounding evening menu; indeed, when we saw the choices on offer – oyster tempura, blue cheese and walnut tart, a whole roast duck to share – we almost

postponed this review and came back for dinner. One day, perhaps.

However, if the midday option is lighter and more informal than the evening one, the keyword of both is provenance: those twin virtues, seasonal and local, are strenuously celebrated, and the menu changes so frequently that it was still being chalked up on the blackboard as we took our seats.

Here's how local the Fat Fowl is. Walter Rose and Church Farm supply the meat and game; a delivery of fresh fish is brought in daily from Brixham. Local West Country cheese from The

Fine Cheese Company in Bath is served with home made apple chutneys and fresh breads. Eades of Bath supply home grown vegetables daily; Bath Ales Gem is on the beer menu.

There are many nice things about eating in a restaurant that doubles as a café. One of them is the lack of pretension. The Fat Fowl is laid-back and relaxed; there were mums with kids, colleagues chewing over a business plan, a sprinkling of lone latte drinkers, and us. The owners have resisted the temptation to squeeze in as many covers in as possible, so you don't feel remotely crowded out.

“The great thing about café-come-restaurants is the versatility”



Local art on the wall

The other great thing about café-come-restaurants is their versatility. I am not a lunchtime drinker, and find water boring; what I wanted was some green tea, and this is exactly what I got, nicely served in a little pot.

A full tapas menu is available in the evening along with the à-la-carte; it looks enormously impressive, with an awesome thirty choices altogether. At lunchtime you can sample a smaller selection of these dishes, each £4 each; you can also mix and match these with a choice of starters and mains, that included celeriac and leek soup, mussels steamed in cider, ham hock terrine, risotto, smoked haddock and a steak sandwich.

Reassuringly (proving that everything is cooked freshly to order) we were told that our tahini wings would take longer than our other tapas choices; did we want them as and when they were ready – ie, tapas-style? We did. The thick hummus was superb – very distinctive in flavour, thanks to a generous addition of cumin. The chicken piri piri, too, was very pleasant, the tender chunks of meat in a just-hot-and-interesting-enough sauce, while the anchovies were sharp and vinegary.

The tahini wings made an appearance just as we running out of things to mop up with the excellent bread; we loved the flavour the sesame paste leant the chicken skins. Definitely one to try at home.



Fresh and colourful mains

Veggies will do well here, and even I'd chosen a non-meat second course in the form of a tartlet of Cerney goat's cheese (£8.50). The cheese was soft and mildly tangy, and the dollop of beetroot pesto as fresh-tasting as it was colourful and pretty, but the onion chutney that the success of the whole venture hung on was a little bland; I would have welcomed a bit more sweetness and a bit more piquancy.

His smoked salmon and crayfish tail bruschetta (£7.50) was generously piled with fresh-tasting seafood, but again, a squeeze of lemon would have been a bonus.

Unable to fit in a pudding, yet unwilling to leave without one, we requested a couple of brownies to go. I'm sampling these as I type, and I'm delighted to say that this was

an excellent call. Dense, rich and soft, I've had less chocolatey chocolate truffles – really magnificent.

So, coffee and cakes, lunch, dinner, tapas. Anything I've left out? Oh yes – the jazz evenings. Excellent, by all accounts. Oh, and the cooking classes; from another blackboard we learned that February's courses include a vegetarian workshop (£25) and one with fish (£35) – no point trying to book up for the retro classics course, though, as it's already sold out.

Diversification's said to be the name of the game in these challenging and competitive times, though it can be tricky to get the ideal balance between versatility and not overstretching yourself. On the basis of our visit, the Fowl appears to have it just right. 🐔

Unlike many publications *Bath Life* does not solicit complimentary meals or advertising in return for favourable reviews. Our team dines incognito in order to give readers a genuinely independent assessment

Visiting details

Opening hours: Mon-Sun 9:30am-11 pm

Cuisine: Locally sourced and seasonal ingredients; European/modern British/brasserie and tapas

We visited: Wednesday lunchtime

Prices: Lunch as in review above; dinner sample menu starters £6-, mains £12-16

Do they welcome children? Very much so

Vegetarian choice: Good

Disabled access: Good

Service and atmosphere: Friendly and laid-back

The Fat Fowl

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A reduced version of the tapas menu is available at lunchtime