



After taking over the Red Lion over two years ago, Tom Gee has turned the sleepy village pub into a gastronomic delight with an impressive range of real ales to match. *Fork* finds out more...

I can't imagine a better way of spending a cold January evening than sitting in front of a roaring log fire in a classic village pub in the heart of the Cotswolds. You'll find the Red Lion in the high street of the bustling saxon village (or town, as some may argue) of Cricklade in Wiltshire. Just a few minutes from the Thames path and a stone's throw from the North meadow nature reserve it caters for walkers as well as locals.

On the first Friday after Christmas the place is heaving with regulars taking advantage of the nine real ales on tap and the vast selection of bottled beers.

A delight to behold though they are, we're not actually here for the beer, but to try some of the much talked about cuisine of Head Chef, Daniel Ingram.

Ingram cut his teeth at Heston's pub for over three years before joining *Fork* favourite Dominic Chapman at the Royal Oak in Berkshire. His key aim at the Red Lion is to use as much locally sourced

ingredients in his menu as possible.

Owner Tom Gee explains that the pub runs a loyalty scheme which encourages local residents to bring in their excess locally grown fruit and veg, and in return they'll get vouchers to spend in the pub. The scheme has been running for just over a year now and has proved so popular that they've had to turn people away.

This fits in with the whole ethos of the

The facts...

Chef
Daniel Ingram

Price range
Starters from £5-£6.50
Mains from £10.50-£20.95
Desserts from £1.50-£6

Where is it?
The Red Lion Inn,
74 High Street, Cricklade,
Wiltshire SN6 6DD

Website
www.theredlioncricklade.co.uk





On the menu

Starters

Tomato and thyme soup, served with homemade crusty bread, £4.50

Red Lion tea smoked organic salmon, with pickled cucumber and brown bread, £6.50

Main courses

Pot roast pheasant with root vegetables and crusty bread, £9.50

Pan fried whole sea bream with new potatoes and parsley butter, £11.50

Desserts

Treacle tart with Jersey clotted cream, £5

Bramley apple crumble, £5

Red Lion to encourage community-based projects, and to help out within the local area as much as possible.

As we're shown into the dining room we have to step over the dogs curled up in front of the open fire. This really is your quintessential village pub, where the staff take as much care over our four-legged friends as they do their regular customers.

One thing that really strikes me is the difference in decor between the pub and the restaurant. The restaurant has a much more formal, sophisticated decor, but still generates the same welcoming and relaxed atmosphere that you get in the bar.

Gee talks us through the menu with great passion and knowledge of everything listed, including the carefully crafted beer matching option for each dish.

A refreshingly simple menu that uses locally sourced produce was making it hard to make a decision but, after much deliberation, I opted for the pan seared Cotswold wood pigeon, braised puy lentils and pickled quince. Mrs S decided on the baked free range duck egg with wild mushrooms spinach and homemade toast. As we waited for our starters we made light work of the fresh home made



bread with a choice of three butters.

My medium-rare pigeon was perfectly cooked with the rich, succulent taste complementing the unique texture and flavours of the braised puy lentils and quince. The dish was beautifully matched with a bottle of 6% Isolation Ale by the Odell Brewing Company.

After polishing off the starters we moved on to mains of pan roast line-caught cod with champ potatoes, clams, brown shrimps and spiced butter sauce. And I opted for the char grilled rare breed sirloin steak, beer battered onion rings and triple cooked chips. The beef, which was reared only a few minutes down the road at Butts Farm, was everything you would expect from a well sourced supplier – it was tender and full of flavour. With the triple cooked crunchy and fluffy chips and a slightly more potent 12% beer this time, it made for a truly great main course.

I usually give puddings a miss preferring to sit there with another drink while my partner tucks into hers and tells me how much I'm missing out. On this occasion, being a bit of a sucker for anything chocolate and sweet, I opted for the millionaire shortbread and rich creamy sauce. The shortbread arrived on a wooden board in three perfect cubes with a small cup of warm sauce.

Once more, the dessert was

complemented with another perfectly matched beer in the shape of 10% Brooklyn Black Chocolate Stout. Divine!

Moving back into the bar to join the locals and sample some of the many beers on tap we sit back by the open fire and soak up the atmosphere.

With plans to revamp the five already very comfortable en-suite bedrooms, and a micro brewery in one of the outbuildings, this place has a bright future ahead. 

