

The Lamb at Hindon

There's snow on the high ground, logs glowing in a huge open fireplace, game and spicy oriental dishes on the menu... and room at the inn. Did winter ever have a warmer welcome?

Our drive to The Lamb at Hindon saw snow on the high ground for the first time this year, and the skeletal etchings of trees against the white, the startling Christmas card colours of cock pheasants by the side of the road and the anticipation of an icy blast on leaving the car made us long for a fireside corner and heaped platefuls of tasty, warming food.

First impressions were good. A warm welcome from the staff, an even warmer and obviously much-used and loved fireplace with a pile of glowing logs, and a pleasing sense of the building's age – the oldest part dates back to the 17th century – all helped to make us feel at ease.

The bar was packed with red-checked young men in plus fours and stocking feet, and we learned that the inn gets a good deal of business from shooting parties. This made sense. The more-or-less hunting pink of the dining room walls, the framed pictures of gamebirds, the stuffed fox's head eyeing diners from a high beam and, later, the note of warm approval in our waiter's voice when I asked for the game of the day – pheasant – all added up to an establishment which embraces that particular country scene.

Interestingly, the building has, through the centuries, always been involved with life in the raw. For instance, Assizes were held in a building known as The Lamb on the site of the current inn as long ago as the middle of the 15th century, and Petty Sessions continued here until the early 19th century. The Lamb also supplied post horses for coaches going to and from London and the west country and was renowned for its home-brewed beer until the middle of the 19th century. But it is Silas White, a notorious smuggler, who is the most intriguing character linked with the inn. Said to be the leader of the Wiltshire Moonrakers and ancestor of a



Beautifully presented, warming fare in an historic setting

Hindon family, he made The Lamb the centre of his activities. The cellars, no doubt, proved an excellent hiding place for contraband, and there were passages beneath the inn, discovered in 1954, which ran parallel to the street.

It would have been disappointing if the menu had not been as full-bodied as the setting. But it was. Gorgeous, winter-warming starters included citrus and beetroot cured salmon with saffron and grain mustard potato salad (£5.95) and my choice, homemade carrot and coriander soup (£4.50). This was thick, creamy and a fabulous shade of orange. Perfect.

My partner noticed that some of the dishes had an oriental influence, and chose to start with Thai spring roll with sweet

chilli and sesame sauce (£4.50). The huge rolls – the lightest, crispest of pastry wrapped around fresh, tasty vegetables – were the ultimate examples of their kind, and the sauce pleasantly warming for a winter's day.

Main courses include a similarly exotic Asian risotto with chilli, lemongrass, ginger, garlic and coriander (£8.70) – one of many innovative vegetarian dishes – along with marvellously traditional offerings such as 28-day matured Scottish rump steak (£13.95) and calves liver and bacon (£11.50). My partner, sticking with the unusual, chose Moroccan marinated free range chicken with spiced couscous and spinach (£10.75) and was delighted; the couscous was a particularly tasty triumph, the absolute antithesis of the bland version I have been known to serve at home. My pheasant (£12.95), meanwhile, was wonderfully tasty, though the bed of mash and vegetables it was served on a little small.

The desserts (£4.25), written on a chalk board by the bar, were mostly of the warming, comfort food variety, perfect for days such as these – bread and butter pudding with custard, apple pie with custard or cream – but I chose a more modest affair, raspberry brûlée, which was wonderfully fruity, a nice twist on the standard crème brûlée.

We do as a nation tend to shy away from wintry weather and any sense of enjoyment of it, but with haunts as good as this to retreat to, all I can say is bring it on, bring it on. ☑

**The Lamb Inn
Hindon
tel: 01747 820573**

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