Parkers Arms, Lancashire

27 Apr 2012 by Dr Andrew Stevenson

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The route from Clitheroe over Waddington Fell to the Trough of Bowland and on to Lancaster is a historically important route, still one of Lancashire County Council's priority gritting routes in winter, linking the Ribble Valley to Morecambe Bay and the two castles of Lancaster and Clitheroe. Four hundred years ago, the Lancashire Witches would probably have been taken through Newton-in-Bowland on their way from Pendle Hill to Lancaster Castle for trial.

The Parkers Arms, on the north bank of the River Hodder, remained somewhat unloved for many years until it was taken over by an interesting team who had previously run the oddly named Weezos in Clitheroe and before that had run a restaurant for many years in West Africa.

The Parkers Arms has been nicely renovated, though, as with virtually every other renovated pub, there's more than a touch of what is surely sold by Dulux as 'gastropub sage green.' In the bar there is a roaring open fire, while a woodburner keeps the snug nice and, well, snug. There is also a light and airy dining room, with fine views over the Hodder Valley to Waddington Fell, but sadly they only open that up when they're very busy. Unusually, the Parkers Arms still very much operates as the local pub, welcoming drinkers and their dogs as much as diners. At busy times this can cause problems, as the staff struggle to juggle the conflicting roles of playing the genial mine host at the bar and dealing with diners, and it can get a little raucous. But the food is worth bearing with their front-of-house idiosyncrasies.

These days, everywhere boasts about local sourcing. Here they don't simply mean it, but take it almost to an extreme, and even attempt to give a definition of terroir on the menu. There is a printed menu, with staples including very reliable pies and pasties, but it is in the specials and in particular their '2012 menu' that the terroir is really allowed to shine through. 2012 here has nothing to do with Olympics, but means that everything is sourced from within 20 miles and three courses will cost you £12. It is a daily-changing prix-fixe menu in the French tradition. If you found this on a byway in France, you'd come back saying things like 'only in France' and be telling friends about this perfect little place you stumbled across off the autoroute.

I started with a Dunsop egg - their take on the ubiquitous scotch egg, made with a delicate mousseline of smoked trout from Dunsop Bridge, the geographic centre of the Kingdom, just down the road. It had a light, crisp crumb, and the egg itself was just right with a nice runny yolk. I thought the trout worked well and made a much lighter dish than the usual pork-based scotch eggs. On the side was some soused fennel and a remarkably good home-made wild garlic mayonnaise. Apparently the chef had picked the wild garlic on her way into work that morning.

Main course was a rabbit pie. Apparently the rabbit had been shot the day before by a local gamekeeper. It came in a good light cream sauce with bacon and a touch of mustard. The puff-pastry lid was very neatly applied and glazed to give a much more professional appearance than is often found. There is none of that Delia Smith 'nice home-made look' here. On the side was a beautiful Robuchon-style buttery mash and properly cooked, nicely seasoned root veg.

Dessert was a bit of a surprise: a Portuguese custard tart, with some preserved damsons (scrumped from a tree in the village) and a quenelle of Chantilly cream to turn it into a dessert. Homemade with eggs from just down the road in Slaidburn. Good flavour custard, and they'd got that particular pastry absolutely spot on, and I thought this the equal of any *pasteis de nata* I've had in Oporto.

What impresses me about the food at The Parkers Arms is that the only shortcut is the distance the food has come. Everything is done well, done properly and in-house: there is an excellent understanding of technique, ranging from home-made caviar (using trout eggs from the local trout farm) to perfectly balanced Middle Eastern flavours in lamb koftas.

Local real ales from the Bowland and Lancaster Breweries are on hand pump at the bar, alongside the excellent temperance cordials from Mr Fitzpatrick's of Rawtenstall. Many readers of JancisRobinson.com will, of course, know of the excellent D Byrne & Co, wine merchants in nearby Clitheroe, and will be able to combine a mooch round the Byrne's

cellars with a trip to the Parkers Arms. I am told that the Byrne families now use the Parkers Arms for events. They are also responsible for the wine list. The wine list at the Parkers Arms is a good balance between accessible basics at around £16 up to finer bottles such as Ch Langoa Barton 1986 at £90.

Parkers Arms, Newton-in-Bowland, Lancashire BB7 3DY, tel +44 (0)1200 446 236, www.parkersarms.co.uk