



The Market Place

“Simply fine food,” says The Market Place’s website.
 “We’d have to agree,” replies **Laura Rowe**

There are few things more satisfying in life than a plan that comes together, whether it’s finding the five perfect cheeses for the ultimate Welsh cheeseboard; hitting a particularly tough target for the month; or something as simple as arriving on time for a lunch reservation.

We’d been rushing around in the city centre all morning, and as we tried to find a space in Cowbridge’s free car park in the centre of the town, the sun came out. The change of pace from downtown Caerdydd was almost palpable

as we ambled towards the The Market Place, at the end of the High Street. We knew that the current owners had taken over the restaurant a little over six months ago, and had been gaining plaudits from locals and media alike, and we wanted to know why.

The Market Place is just a short walk from the Physic Garden, which is looking spectacular at the moment – we weren’t the only ones snapping away at the convolvulus with our digitals.

The interior of the restaurant its everything you’d expect from a historic

Cowbridge eatery (it was once the Mason’s Arms, a mediaeval inn built into the old town walls). It’s cosy and comforting, furnished with solid antique furniture; imitation candles flicker in the background, and nook-and-crannie corridors lead through into dining room after dining room.

We were shown to the back dining room by one of the friendly waiting staff and given two menus to choose from. Unlike some set menus, the Market Place prix-fixe takes several dishes straight from the à la carte, making it an easy decision for us. The food is unashamedly

“Filling, but well worth the pop of a button or two on the trousers”



simple – great British and Mediterranean classics. Beer-battered cod and home-made tartare was scribbled on the specials blackboard, along with calf's liver and bacon, and char-grilled lamb with spring greens and cannellini beans on the à la carte.

Tempted not only by the price (three courses for £13.95) we went for the set menu. Not wanting to start an unseemly battle, we both decided to go for the goats' cheese. A soft, palate-coating round of cheese, sat in a filo nest, had been lightly caramelised under the grill, creating a pleasant sweetness against the moreish gentle tang from the goat's milk. Accompanying the above, a peppery rocket salad and sweet beetroot made a classic combination, but one that was executed exceedingly well.

For a main course, I had the salmon and cod fishcakes. I was met with two hunking great golden balls of tender fish with just the right ratio of creamy mash – extremely filling, but well worth the pop or two of a button on the trousers. Along with some seriously chunky and amazingly flavourful chips (they must have been cooked in the fat of some marvellous beast) was a sublime aioli. Overhearing the waiter describe the dip to another diner we realised this was no Hellman's with a bit of crushed garlic – this was proper sweet roasted garlic bulbs made into a sticky garlicky paste mixed with a rich homemade mayo.

Luckily for Deri her choice was equally as appetising. Again, nothing overcomplicated, a simple 'Market Place burger' – but what



a burger. Sandwiched at the centre of a soft floury bun was a dense beef patty, pink at its centre and prettily dotted with fresh herbs, topped with a melting slither of Gruyère cheese, grilled bacon and a sweet, sticky onion relish.

“The best burger I have probably ever tasted,” she graciously declared. A major claim indeed, but it was easy to see why. The burger was perfectly cooked with the perfect accompaniments, and again those crisp chunky chips.

Not normally defeated so easily, we were both fit to burst. Folks clearly like their portions big in Cowbridge.

Our waiter, however, would not hear of us leaving without trying the Baileys and brown bread parfait, which sounded immensely

stodgy but turned out to be anything but. The parfait was just softening, light and creamy with only a subtle sweetness from the Baileys and a comforting nutty flavour from the brown bread. Sandwiching the two generous portions were sweet, crunchy almond wafers, and at the side, to help cut through any richness, was a sharply-sweet summer berry compôte. We battled on to the very last morsel.

While the service may be rather too relaxed for suit those on a limited lunchtime, there is little to fault at this eatery. New head chef and owner Tim Marriott (who incidentally, likes to walk, genial-host-like among his customers to see that all is well) has struck the perfect note. Don't you just love it when a plan comes together? ☺

Unlike many publications *Cardiff 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: Tues-Thurs 12-3pm and 6-9pm, Fri-Sat 12-3pm and 6-9pm, Sun 12-3pm

We visited: Tuesday lunchtime

Prices: Set lunch menu two courses £10.95, three £13.95; à la carte starters around £5, mains around £12

Do they welcome children? Yes

Vegetarian choice: One or two per course

Disabled access: Yes

Wine list: A good mix

Service and atmosphere: Very relaxed and friendly

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