

FOOD & DRINK

Well worth splashing out on

Joseph Connolly enjoys a poolside lunch at Lido, Bristol

I got off the train from Paddington at Bristol Temple Meads - Temple Meads, as I think we are all aware, being that fictional detective who was utterly riveting on the wireless throughout the Fifties. And now just look at him! He is a Bristol railway station, just as John Lennon has become a Liverpool airport: what strange times we live in, yes indeed.

The journey itself had been utterly predictable: I had booked a forward-facing window seat at a table, so resignedly crushed myself into the duly reserved back-facing aisle job, with no table in sight. The nearest lavatory was out of order, and so was the next. The one after that had an "automatic" tap that automatically dispensed no water - and although a nasal youth on the intercom announced the existence of a "café" about eight carriages and half a mile away (the last place on God's earth still to proffer "beverages"), there was an absence of trolley service due to the rail company's new policy that may accurately be summarised as "Sod the public".

Fortunately I did not require a radioactive bacon bap, or a little packet of Cheeslets - because I was in Bristol for lunch. I often

hare about the country on just such a mission, for I am the pig that flies. Lido is in the Clifton area of the city, which is just as well because the taxi journey there took me through endless vast and hideous cliff-faces of architectural insult. Clifton, however, is the nice bit, where all the splendid Georgian terraces and squares are quietly glorious.

Nowadays we are used to restaurants being called the first wacky word that enters the proprietor's head, but Lido is called Lido because all the best tables overlook a small but stylish open-air swimming pool. But is this a good idea? Let us see.

The décor, I suppose, is coastal chalet - pitch pine cladding and tables not really marrying too well with chromium chairs that maybe were salvaged from a skip when the local Jobcentre Plus had a clear-out. There are pictures of fresh and colourful market produce, which is suitably artisanal, and a daily printed menu. Set lunch comes in at £12, £16 and £20 for one, two or three courses, while on the carte we have eight starters and half a dozen mains. From those my guest was kicking off with octopus "gallaga", which turned out to be very gorgeous indeed: slow-cooked chunks of octopus with a hint of smoke atop a silky potato purée. The whole of the menu tips its hat to Spain, while there is also a whiff of the Middle



Oakfield Place, Bristol BS8 2BJ
017 332 3970; lidobristol.com
Three courses à la carte with wine, about £40 per head

ought to be hurling fish. I wonder if they all still come here when it's pouring...? Swimmin' in the rain.

I wouldn't have minded a bottle of 1985 Château Musar - that Lebanese miracle that can outgun first-growth bordeaux - but it was £220, so I settled for a cheapskate £21 Nero d'Avola (Sicilian, and always a good deal). (Out of the 50 wines, only two are French: Italy dominates, then Spain.)

To follow, wood roast poussin with cauliflower slow cooked in tomato, olives, chilli and oregano; and for me, seared pigeon breasts, sweetcorn purée and mushroom migas (breadcrumbs deep fried in pork fat): I asked for the bird to be slightly more than seared because seared can sometimes mean raw, and raw pigeon is never a good thing. It was earthy, meaty and satisfying, the sweet purée cutting it perfectly. The poussin was even better - nicely plump atop gooey cauliflower florets: deeply flavoured, with the faintest curry dusting. A bowl of properly potatoe potatoes tempted us into eating far too many... but not so many as to render us too full for pud. Here, though, the quality dipped: poached peach, orange blossom custard and ginger crumb was underpowered: no great fruit, and the "custard" was more of an egg-white mousse. My chocolate and stout ice cream bore no trace of stout, and not much chocolate either.

But Lido is a friendly and easy restaurant: the food has brio, from a chef who knows what he's up to. That such a place exists in such a locale, as unpromising gastronomically as it is delightful architecturally (all I saw nearby was a Côte, a seafood place and not much else), is a mystery worthy of the talents of that local and legendary gumshoe, the great Temple Meads.

Joseph Connolly's A-Z of Eating Out (Thames & Hudson) is available from Telegraph Books

THREE OF A KIND WATERSIDE

Dock Kitchen
Artlessly expert, faintly fusiony food from Stevie Parle.
Portobello Dock, 342/344 Ladbroke Grove, London W10 5BU; dockkitchen.co.uk

Mallams
Old-school seafood place on the quay.
5 Trinity Rd, Weymouth DT4 8TJ; mallamsrestaurant.co.uk

The River Café
Peerless modern Italian: flawless food in an elegantly austere setting. And the people-spotting opportunities are plentiful.
Thames Wharf, Rainville Rd, London W6 9HA; rivercafe.co.uk

East, should your nostrils be so attuned.

I had wood roast scallops, sweet herb and garlic butter - three mighty, lusty and juicy examples with coral in the shell, and extremely well served by the not-too-garlicky butter (way this side of what you might expect with, say, escargots). While wolfing my scallops, I was distracted by a determined woman in a yellow two-piece and a snorkel: I think she might have been diving for more. From our elevated vantage point, the pink and palely loitering bodies floundering around in just over a metre of water resembled freshly skinned frogs, nervily awaiting an impromptu dissection. The pool is Mediterranean blue (due to tiling, not the Bristol sky) and all around are vast and lovely red and purple hanging baskets and changing cubicles with jaunty striped curtains. To those idly doing the backstroke, one felt one

OUR RATING
8/10

To those idly doing the backstroke, one felt one ought to be hurling fish



Pint to pint

Our guide to the best British pubs. This week: *The Brewery Tap*, Peterborough

It's not every day that you find yourself savouring Thai food with English draught beer in a former labour exchange.

From the outside the building is austere Thirties in solid red-brick. No nonsense. Apart, that is, from a huge and lurid banner advertising Green Devil IPA (6% ABV), draped around a hop silo towering over the roof.

Welcome to The Brewery Tap, Peterborough. Which is a bit baffling, as the brewery in question is Oakham. Relocation from Rutland to Cambridgeshire came about in 1998, by which time it had outgrown its origins in the biggest town in England's smallest county.

(One of the partners, meanwhile, had married a Thai restaurateur from London and more chefs were lured from her homeland. Hence the preponderance of spicy food in what might be called Oakham's Thai-ed houses.)

Growing demand for its beers is hardly surprising if their showing here is anything to go by. JHB, or Jeffrey Hudson Bitter (3.8%), is light in colour yet full of flavour with a dry and citrusy finish.

Not quite as citrusy as the slightly stronger Citra (4.2%), but then the clue's in the name. Camra's Champion (gold) Beer of Britain, 2014, more than holds its own against the spices of the crispy duck salad, cooling lip and tongue in the process.

My determination to go easy on the food to leave room for the beer has been somewhat undermined by an amiable couple from Spalding who've been ploughing through a veritable Thai banquet. "Have our potato wedges,"

says he. "We couldn't eat another thing," says she, handing over the remains of the chilli dip as well.

Ah, well. Glad to help. There's just room for a half of Bishop's Farewell, a judiciously balanced and full-bodied 4.6%, and just time for a browse around.

The internal décor is as different from the building's exterior as the current clientele from the flat-capped and muffled jobseekers of the Thirties. A floor of light wood and polished stone is bordered by startling black and white tiles and topped here and there by comfortable leather sofas.

There are settles around the outside walls and the function room is separated from the main bar by two handsome carved doors worthy of the nearby cathedral. Bought on eBay,



apparently, as indeed was the even more ornate wooden panel hiding the gas and electricity metres.

But the pièce de résistance is the glass wall separating the bar from a micro-brewing plant. You may just catch them producing a short run of seasonal ales in there. Or, like me, you can simply speculate how much elbow grease went into keeping those sizeable, silvery vats so shiny before regrettably bending my own elbow to see off the last of the Bishop's Farewell.

Chris Arnot

The Brewery Tap, 80 Westgate, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, PE1 2AA (01733 358500)

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