

Be a *glutton* at Sutton

When is a pub not a pub? Our reviewer ponders that point over a plate of food in a Macclesfield 'pub' that may deserve a grander label

REVIEW BY RAY KING

It seems somewhat churlish to call Sutton Hall a pub, given its stately history and the quarter-mile avenue of trees leading up to the door, but that's what it resolutely calls itself. In fact Brunning and Price, the Chester-based pub company whose portfolio includes some of the most iconic hostelrys in Cheshire and North Wales go further. Sutton Hall, they say, 'is a proper pub' with an atmosphere that's friendly and unpretentious.

For sure it has a snug and lively bar purveying a wide choice of real ales. But the 480-year-old manor house, once home to the Earls of Lucan (of Charge of the Light Brigade and 1974 Belgravia murder mystery notoriety) also has a library, no less than seven different dining areas - some boasting magnificent open fires - and delightful terraces and gardens featuring the remains of a Bronze Age barrow.

Back in the 16th Century the scholar Ralph Holinshead was born here, whose historical chronicles formed the basis of 14 of William Shakespeare's plays, give or take the odd bit of dramatic licence (and a fair old slice of Tudor



PHOTOGRAPH BY KIRSTY THOMPSON



Sutton Hall, Bullocks Lane, Sutton, Macclesfield SK11 0HE.
Tel: 01260 253211;
www.sutton.hall@brunningandprice.co.uk

propaganda). So Sutton Hall's not just any old boozery then - and what's really good about it is that today's hospitality lives up to the provenance.

We arrived there, up in the foothills of the 'Cheshire Alps' a couple of miles beyond Macclesfield, early on a Friday evening just as the Big Thaw was following the Big Freeze. We'd had the strong recommendation of trusted foodie friends who'd brought us a copy of Sutton Hall's attractive and ambitious menu. The bill of fare, featuring hearty, rustic dishes like pork and leek sausages and mash, roast free range chicken suet pudding, braised shoulder of lamb with redcurrant gravy and confit duck leg with

duck faggot and cherry gravy, changes regularly but is updated daily on the website, another big plus for satisfying those whetted taste buds.

We found our unclad table in a large atmospheric room filled with eclectic furnishings and lined with scores of prints and pictures next to the stone flagged bar at which one orders food and drinks. Just beyond, in another substantial room, a fire was ablaze in the grate and as the night progressed, tables filled until the whole place was pretty much full.

I started with potted rabbit and belly pork with pumpkin pickle (£5.75) - a range of robustly seasoned pressed, flavoursome meats rather than a rerrine - which came with a thick doorstep of warm toast. The chunky, rustic pickle provided an ideal foil to a farmhouse treat: a splendid use for the contents of that Hallowe'en lantern. Can't wait until next November. Mrs K, slightly taken aback by discovering that her citrus marinated king scallops came cold while the accompanying confit tomatoes were just warm, was soon singing the praises of a dish that cleverly combined the

sweetness of the tomatoes with the piquancy of the citrus dressing and the contrasting texture and saltiness of a scattering of unbilled pancetta on the sliced shellfish. An excellent starter for £6.95.

Apologies if you've heard this before, but I find winter, Cheshire and venison to be an absolutely irresistible combination of time, place and ingredient from which Sutton Hall permed a winning main course. A generous pan-fried venison rump, served pink and juicy with a fine, subtle gamey flavour, came alongside its classic partner, braised spiced red cabbage, a chunky dice of roasted celeriac and delicious red wine and beetroot gravy (£16.50). Opposite, tandoori monkfish, firm yet beautifully moist (£13.95), boasted well-judged spicing and a tip-top pairing with bhaji-style onion fritters, spiced potato and terrific mango and crème fraiche salad.

Puddings were no less enjoyed: light-as-air rum baba with a just-so boozy flavour and a dollop of delicious mascarpone (£4.95) for me and a skillfully crafted wedge of white chocolate tart

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Scallops with confit tomatoes



Venison with roast celeriac



White chocolate tart, honey roast figs

alongside honey roasted figs (£5.25) for her. A comprehensive wine list, arranged by style rather than origin, yielded a bottle of 'clean but rounded' Casa La Joya Unoaked Chardonnay from Chile (£15.90) and a glass of 'smooth and earthy' Vina Carrada Rioja Tempranillo (£3.10) to complement that memorable venison. ■

Cheshire Life restaurant reviews are conducted independently by reviewers who book incognito and pay the bill in full.

Meal *in a minute*

Digest this mini-review in 60 seconds

Panacea Restaurant and Bar
London Road, Alderley Edge
SK9 7QD
01625 599200
www.panacearestaurants.co.uk



Style of venue Style is the word. Stylish décor, stylish customers, stylish staff, stylish food.

On the menu Happily, it's not a case of style over substance. There's a wide range of excellent modern British food on offer. To start, I suggest smoked haddock fishcakes with wilted spinach and poached free range egg (£6.50); follow with roast seabass with steamed asparagus and lemon olive oil (£17.50) with side order of handcut chips (£2.95) and any one of a number of delicious sweets. But my dining companion would recommend classic moules marinieres (£6.95) followed by slow cooked lamb shank with colcannon, braised red cabbage and rosemary gravy (£16.50).

Décor Stylish.

Ambience For such a chi-chi venue that attracts the larger than life locals (ie footballers and soap stars as well as the long-standing Alderley Edge residents) it's a friendly, relaxed place. Don't be intimidated by the gorgeous and er, stylish, staff because they welcome everyone, even ordinary mortals like me and you.

Service Pleasant and efficient.

Cost Varies. Dinner for two with a bottle of wine around the £20 mark plus coffees, would come in around £90. But there are deals so check their website.

Suitability for entertainment Oh, just find an excuse and go. You deserve to step out in style now and again.

Louise Allen-Taylor



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