

The Bear and Ragged Staff, Cumnor
under new ownership

The Bear and Ragged Staff has had a makeover and while there will be those who don't like change, who still consider new pence to be too new-fangled and shudder at new-look, maroon passports, the rest of us are getting on with it and loving this transformation, especially the loss of five microwaves and two freezers from the kitchen and the emphasis on fresh, local produce.

The bar is now more fluid, airy and open plan, with colours more Farrow and Ball than 1980s brothel (no, I haven't) and yet broken up into seating groups so that you know you'd be comfortable there with a group of friends. There's also a feeling of space in the dining room but with plenty of chatter at other tables, so that it doesn't feel as if anyone's listening in.

The most striking part of the meal was the ludicrously good value charcuterie sharing platter, which ranges from £8 to £15. We shared the middle-sized £12 platter between three, as a starter, but even with appetites on the healthy side of piggish, it was a challenge. Duck rilletes, giant caper berries, parma ham, pastrami, chicken liver paté and enough bread to feed a small army, were all delicious. There's also a Greek Meze to share, which sounds fabulous and we'll be having a go at that next time.

Mains were comfortingly predictable, astonishingly generous and well turned out. My char-grilled swordfish steak was beautifully cooked and served on a massive pile of well-reduced and very tasty ratatouille. The salmon and dill fishcakes, served with extra buttery spinach could have done with the potato mashing a little more, but it was a tiny niggle and they were beautifully crunchy and also massive. Both were a very reasonable £10, with other lunch mains ranging from £8 for moules marinière to £13 for char-grilled sirloin steak, hand cut chips, salad and sauce Diane. Evening mains are a little more expensive, nudging up against £16, but look absolutely delicious.

With this enormity of helping, it's a wonder how they sell any puddings at all. We shared some profiteroles, which were light, crunchy, the size of three small apples and without the merest hint of claggy sogginess that choux can often succumb to.

If you don't fancy sitting in the restaurant for a proper meal, there are bar snacks - ginger, coriander and duck noodle broth, or perhaps smoked haddock goujons - at £4. Alternatively, you can have a barbecue, in the summer, or can take a picnic basket out into the garden. Sounds perfect for ramblers or cyclists.

Changes are still being made to the structure of parts of the pub and some of the old regulars have tutted at these and gone elsewhere, but with such generous helpings of reasonably priced food, I imagine that the place will soon be absolutely heaving.

MEL JONES, wine and food writer, broadcaster and sherry enthusiast - www.quaffersoffers.co.uk

WELL PROJECT TO HELP THE POOR IN INDIA

A former Baptist church minister living in Marcham has dedicated part of his time to helping provide fresh water for the poorest of people in rural India. Keith Mersh of Orchard Way has set up a project called Samaritan's Well, to help the Dalit community in the North of India.

The Dalits, also referred to as 'The Untouchables,' are the lowest in the Indian caste system and often find themselves severely discriminated against, even to the point of being prevented from accessing the hand pumps to draw water from the wells. Due to their faith, this discrimination is sometimes also experienced by Christians, often prevented from using the hand pumps.



Apart from setting up the project in India, since moving into Marcham at the end of 2008, Keith has also set up his business, Abingdon Blinds & Curtains, drawing on nearly twenty years experience in the soft furnishings business, gained before spending several years in church ministry. Keith visits people in their own homes to measure for and install blinds and curtains and has committed a minimum of 10% of the business profits to the India project.

Working in partnership with an Indian church network, the aim of Samaritan's Well is to bring fresh water to those in rural India, regardless of their caste or faith. Keith has already raised sufficient funds to purchase the necessary tooling, as well as sufficient to pay for the installation of wells in three Indian villages.

Give Keith a call and he will visit you in your own home, measure and discuss your requirements and then usually within a fortnight will return to install your blinds or curtains. Call Keith when you next need blinds or curtains and by doing so, you will also be helping the poorest in rural India.

For more info on the business and the well project see www.abingdonblinds.co.uk or call Keith 01865 391881



Abingdon Bowling Club in the beautiful surroundings of Albert Park are holding free taster sessions for anyone who thinks they might like to take up bowls. The dates for these sessions are **Friday 22nd May 5.00-7.30pm. and Sunday 24th May in the morning 10.00-12.30pm.** No special equipment is necessary and several Marcham and Frilford residents are already members, so why not come along and have a go. If you have any flat-soled shoes it would be helpful. **Geoff Bailey, Recruitment Officer for ABC**

Abingdon European Society
Early Flemish Painting

Alice Foster

Saturday 18 April 7.15 for 7.30 p.m
Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Abingdon
AES Members & Students £5 Visitors £6.

Includes refreshments.

Contact: AES Secretary 01235-534561

If you would like to suggest a restaurant or pub to be reviewed, give me a call on 01865 391725. Ed

The Bear and Ragged Staff, Cumnor

- Under new ownership since December 2008
- A stunning 15th century Inn located in a beautiful old English village
- Contemporary English style country cooking with a few guest dishes from the continent, using local produce cooked on the premises
- Summer season commences at Easter with weekend all day opening, BBQs, traditional Teddy Bear's Picnics, salad and summer wines on the terrace

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