

Walking through the streets of time

IT IS always a pleasure to walk down the High Street in Cowbridge — fine buildings, historical interest, good shops. The street itself might go back to Roman times, and the facades, some as early as the 16th century, front even older buildings.

The Great House is 16th century, and was the town house of the Carne family of Nash manor. Woodstock was the 18th century town house of the Wyndhams of Dunraven Castle; while the desirable, early 19th century Caecady House was that of the 'Squires of Caecady'.

By JOHN I HOWELLS

The original Guildhall and market house was in the centre of the walled town, at the junction of High Street and Church Street — and in the centre of the street.

It was demolished in 1830 and replaced by the present Ruritanian one near the eastern wall. Part of the wall possibly still exists as the boundary of the large garden of Old Hall, a garden which you can walk into, and which comes as a surprise after stepping from High Street.

These have been taken over for community use, including the 16th century house, which was the home of the Edmondson family at one time.



● Customers drink their coffee (seated) as staff members (left to right) look on: Luisa Bayon, Jan Simmonite, Ann Hayward, Chef Martyn Peters and Jayne George.

A relaxing way to wine and dine

NEAR CAECADY are the 18th century (or quite likely much earlier) premises of Farthings Wine Bar, its front stripped to the bare stone.

Inside, its length is another surprise, as it seems to go on and on — I believe this was two premises originally.

The wine bar ethos sets the character, with round wooden and marble tables, beamed ceilings, stone walls. Drinks are ordered from one bar, food from another, though there is a printed menu, and once ordered the food is brought to your table.

This was all a little confusing at first — but after finding a comfortable corner away from the music and next to one of the two real fires, the evening settled into a most relaxed and enjoyable one. Others enjoy it too presumably, as it was full on a Wednesday — no looking, by the way.

Quite a wide range of starters included smoked salmon served

with capers, chopped onion and granary bread (a rather overpowering combination I would think).

I tried the 'Farthings Moneybags' (£2.65), filo pastry providing the bags, filled with a tasty mixture of smoked chicken, fresh mango and apple, accompanied by cranberry jelly. This was good; but even better was my partner's deep fried Brie with redcurrant jelly (£2.50), the Brie meltingly soft inside nicely browned breadcrumbs — and a crisp salad to go with it.

Besides the wide choice on the menu, there were a few extra dishes of the day on a blackboard, such as the savoury seafood pancake; mussels; and my partner's choice of main course, the fish of the day, which was coq rouge. Coq rouge?

We were not the only ones to think this must be a fancy name for chicken in red wine — though if we had looked more closely in the dim light, we would have seen it was

filled with almonds, prawns and apricots, and grilled (£6.50).

I never did find out what fish this was, as no one behind the counter knew, I did not see the chef — and the nearest my reference books came was coque rouge, the prickly cockle. One thing I do know, it was not a cockle, prickly or otherwise. It was full of flavour though, but perhaps would have been improved by some piquant sauce on the side.

My own choice of main course was the noisettes of lamb with a port and mushroom sauce (£5.95). I enjoyed this, even though the meat was not as pink as I like, and I had reservations about the sauce. Good potatoes in their skins (or chips) come in the price of the main course. There are no other vegetables, though several different salads. Further main courses included lasagne; chicken a la King; fresh salmon; veal; steaks; and sliced beef with mustard and wine sauce.

The desserts, at the bar, looked good and tasted good. The two we tried (both £1.75) were a nicely sharp lemon meringue pie; and a deep, not cloying cheesecake decorated with kiwi fruit and strawberries. Besides these there were apple strudel; a Pavlova; a strawberry shortcake surrounded by a feathered coulis; and interestingly, plum pudding served hot with brandy butter.

With two sheries, half a bottle of house claret, one glass of dessert wine (Muscat de Lunel), and two good coffees, the bill for two was (£28.90).

Relaxing by the fire over our coffee, it brought to mind how much things have improved in 16 years on the food front. Mrs Ann Hayward can be congratulated or being part of that improvement and providing good food and friendly service at Farthings.

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