

The Big Eat Out



THE MURDERERS

Mist creeps its cloying tendrils slowly up the heights of Timber Hill. A shrill scream in the darkness is cut short. Heavy footsteps in the fog behind me seem to get closer with every stride. A malign presence stalks the streets of Norwich, a once fine city now turned... less fine. Ok, so that would have been an excellent backdrop for this month's visit to The Murderers but sadly reality (as always) has a way of ruining my fun. The weather was pretty decent, the staff were friendly and it was a sunny Sunday afternoon. Bugger.

THE ATMOSPHERE

Like Jekyll and Hyde, today's venue has a split personality; two names, two faces and two identities. Originally named the Gardener's Arms and still with the sign outside, this ancient looking tavern is a ramshackle creation of dark wooden panels, tile floors, steps, crevices, crannies, nooks and beams. Plenty of shaded corners to hide your face from unwanted attention, it is perhaps held up by the buildings either side. The overall effect on first glance is like an episode of Wolf Hall with Nobby's Nuts, a fine addition Hilary Mantell herself would be proud of. The second name is that of The Murderers and lends itself to the café bar addition, still a very old construction but somehow (conversely) more light and airy. Call me Mr Todd because I opted for the stylish macabre of the bar area and sat beneath a portrait of famous grave robbers Burke and Hare. This typifies the

overall tone of the place, it revels in the name and the notoriety of the deed that lent it its second identity. A blue plaque on the wall is there to fill me in; the name comes from the murder of the landlord's daughter in 1895 by her estranged husband. He was given the death penalty, later changed to life imprisonment as he was provoked (?). This meal better be good because he's set a precedent.

Added to the undeniable charm of this building from the 1600's is an enormous collection of paraphernalia related to crime and death. Ronnie Kray hungrily watches me eat from behind the prison of his glass glaze (he was framed! Ha!... oh leave me alone) and crossed swords hang above the bar (I'd bet they'd be good for doing a murder).

THE MAIN EVENT

A penny dreadful passion for the macabre, the grisly and the gruesome is fun but when it's time for food even a picture of an electric chair isn't going to sate my hunger. The menu is a fairly standard pub food offering served daily until 5 except on Sundays when they finish earlier. The mains are, as expected, things like curry, chilli, lasagne and battered fish. There are a decent selection of burgers, baguettes, salads and light bites for a lesser meal. So, when visiting a place known for death and murder I felt the only safe bet would be to order a meat pie and hope Mrs Lovett had been given the day off. This week's pie was a peppered steak with rich gravy and mushrooms. It was topped with an enormous cloud that turned out to be the puff pastry lid. The peppered pie filling was hot and spicy and excellently simple and tasty. We also went for their ultimate bangers and mash with veggie sausages. A mountain of mash came served in a huge Yorkshire pudding and drowning in gravy... I hope the chef has an alibi. These two dishes seem to fairly represent the food overall; they were simple, tasty and filling. Decent pub fare at a decent price but, unlike many places, served in excellent surroundings. Hearty food to be enjoyed with a beer and a roaring fire.

OVERALL

Norwich is full of places to eat across a huge spectrum of styles and prices. To stand a chance you really do need something a bit different and the beautiful building with its ugly past certainly sets this apart. I really like the pub as a pub with an excellent selection of real ales and plenty of corners to ensconce yourself. Nothing in the way of food could overshadow this style, and the menu perhaps won't be enough to draw you here on its own, but if you find yourself enjoying a pint with Fred West any time soon definitely get yourself some grub; it'll be a very decent bite. **James MacDonald**

VENUE	●●●●●●●●●●
FODDER	●●●●●●●●●●
VALUE	●●●●●●●●●●
OVERALL	●●●●●●●●●●