



RESIDENT RECOMMENDS

THE CROWN, STOWUPLAND

WORDS SUE DANDO PHOTOS PHIL MORLEY

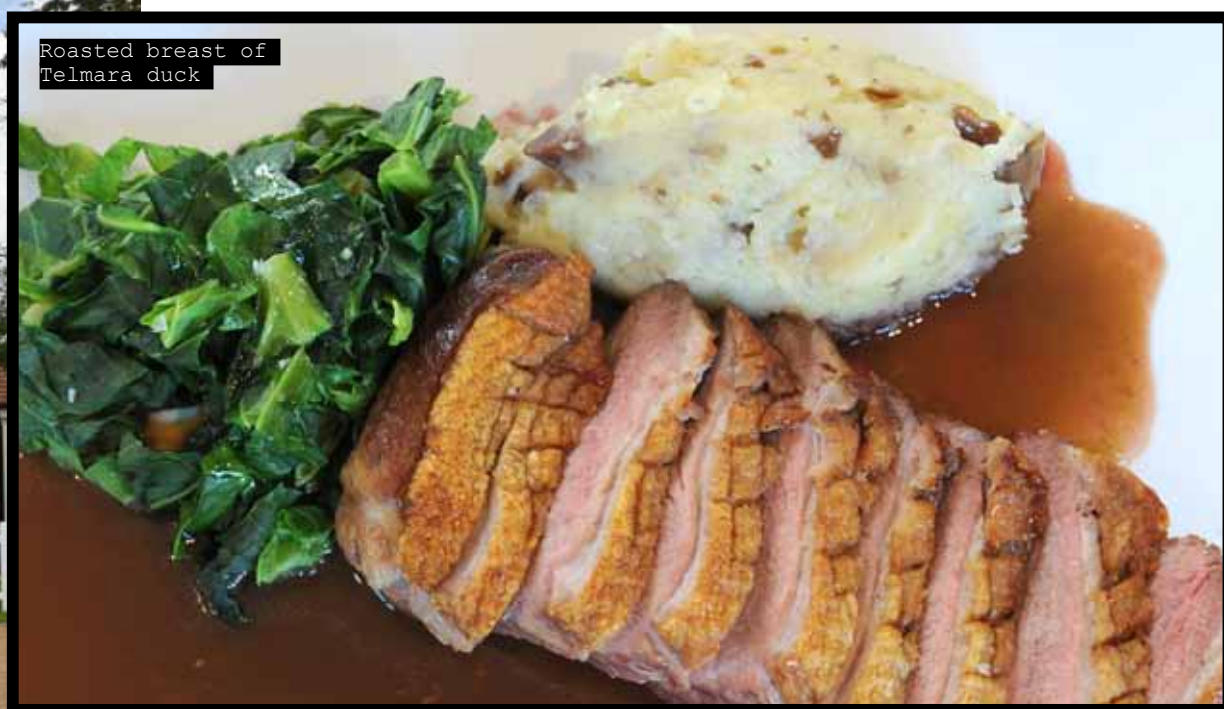
We are blessed with so many splendid places to eat in Suffolk that I don't tend to frequent the same establishment more than once (twice at a push). I like to spread myself thinly, you see. So it can only be a reflection of the good food on offer that I have eaten at The Crown, Stowupland an embarrassingly high number of times since it opened last August. Okay, so it does help that it is on my doorstep, and I therefore drive past it almost every day (the car park is invariably packed, always a clue as to how good business is). But there are plenty of pubs and restaurants local to me and yet not many that I would go back to. No, the

reason that I return time and again is because The Crown serves bloody good food. Simple as that.

When locals Emily and Rob Shelley bought the dilapidated building just over a year ago, they set about creating a "proper pub" and they are at pains to stress that this is what The Crown is. And yes, it *is* a country pub, and proudly so, with amiable dogs at the bar and board games and pints of Green King and Adnams aplenty. However, the big difference here is the food, because unlike many (too many) pubs, The Crown serves proper home made nosh that is far superior to food served at the vast majority of pubs I've ever been in. Chef Chris Bruce has been doing this sort



The Neapolitan stonebake pizza oven



Roasted breast of
Telmara duck

of food forever. Remember The Bull at Blackmore End? Tot Hill House? The Shepherd and Dog up the road in Forward Green? He's been around the block a few times and his food is all the better for it. The Crown is lucky to have him.

Don't get me wrong, this is not a high end/gastro pub experience. You won't find linen napkins or obsequious waiters hovering expectantly at your table. Nothing on the menu needs a linguist to translate. What you will get is really good pub grub: sausage and mash, scampi (homemade and apparently one of the most popular choices), fish and chips, plus the added bonus of a proper Neapolitan stonebake pizza oven which I am told throws out wonderfully authentic pizzas. Alternatively, you can go off piste a bit and gorge yourself with fancier fare like, for example, a plate of pork tenderloin with prosciutto and Parmesan, wilted spinach, tomato, shallot and marsala wine sauce. Sounds delicious? It is.

The Parma ham and Comice pear starter that I tuck into on this particular occasion is terrific, the ham smoky, the sharpness of the chive and creme fraiche offset by the diced sweet pear and potato, and there's a

nice nutty crunch from the walnut dressing that helps combine it nicely.

The seasonal specials - or 'Winter season at The Crown' as they are known - offer something a bit less pub grub, a bit more posh nosh and it is from here that I opt for the roast duck breast, winter greens and chestnut and potato mash. The duck breast is quite the biggest thing I have ever seen on a plate. The skin is crispy, as it should be, the meat melt in the mouth tender and full of flavour, and the earthy chestnut mash, so creamy and unctuous that it's gobbled up much quicker than is decent. The dish is served with a lovely elegant, glossy, Madeira sauce. I am drooling like a Dingo as I re-live the memory.

The dessert menu is way beyond what you would expect from a pub and should appeal to the most demanding of tastes. But by now I am stuffed - only the thought of disappointing other pudding lovers out there stops me from declining the final course (she said!) So I plough on gamely, for review purposes only you understand (obviously). Something light is in order, and for that reason the white chocolate and lemon mousse calls to me. And trust me



Parma ham and
Comice pear

White chocolate and
lemon mousse

when I say this: it is so light...and yet, just when you think it is nothing but air, it hits you with a burst of lemon zing. Sharp, creamy, sweet, smooth, it is sublime and divine in equal measure.

So yes, I agree with the owners that The Crown is a proper pub. But trust me, it is so much more than that.

My tips: grab one of the many board games for some traditional pub fun, ask to sit in the bar area if possible. Fill your boots with top notch grub. Enjoy.

The Crown, Church Road, Stowupland, Suffolk IP14 4BQ. Tel: 01449 490490. thecrownstowupland.co.uk