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This 'something old' was special

SOME people live to eat, others eat to live, so the saying goes. It might not be the best admission for someone writing a restaurant review, but I belong firmly in the latter category. It takes something very special to make me want to linger over a meal – good company is a prerequisite, of course, but the atmosphere must be informal and relaxed and the food has to be very special to make me not want to just eat and go. So the fact that I and three friends spent a good four hours enjoying dinner at The Old Quarter should give a good idea of the impact of this cosy and welcoming venue. Once gathered and welcomed by Dana, we faced one of the best menus I'd seen in a long time. After a bit of negotiation, each of us managed to come up with what I think was a good cross-section of what was on offer, and while waiting and enjoying a glass of the house merlot, there was a chance to appreciate the decor and atmosphere of this compact venue.

I was struck that despite its relatively small size, the tables were not crammed together. Some might have been tempted to pack in a few more, but allowing space gave the room a nice open feeling. The painted stone walls bore several classic photos and prints of Town's Old Quarter as it once was and the exposed beams added to this old-world ambience. Having bread while you wait is nothing new, but I had never been offered what amounted to a mini-starter before – in



Pan-fried tiger prawns and baby calamari with chilli and garlic, finished with a lemon and Guernsey butter sauce. (Pictures by Mark Windsor, 19004936)

this case a sampling of smooth and very tasty chicken liver pate accompanied the selection of white and soda bread and Guernsey butter which we were able to enjoy ahead of the first course. This duly arrived and we managed to resist the temptation to dive in just long enough for the evening's photographer to get a few pictures. It may have delayed our getting down to the serious business of eating, but it also gave us the opportunity to

appreciate the presentation. I loved the way my slices of smoked salmon were arranged on top of a small mound of rocket salad, while Dave's calamari was presented in tight scored curls and Robin's mackerel pate arrived as two large Brazil-nut-shaped mounds accompanied by a small pot of horseradish. Mark's rocket salad with chilli and ginger fried beef fillet strips boasted an impressive Parmesan cheese crisp, rising out of the plate like a sail. It may all have looked lovely,

but there was no holding us back, and we discovered that in this case appearances definitely weren't deceptive. 'Beautifully tender' was Dave's verdict on his calamari, along with praise for its flavour, which was not spicy but piquant, he said. Sweet cherry tomatoes, salty capers and crispy lettuce augmented my smoked salmon, while Mark said that chilli and ginger added a subtle flavour to his salad and the beef was wonderfully tender.



Medallions of beef fillet, topped with melted Cashel Blue cheese, on a bed of champ potatoes and red wine sauce. (19004981)



Orange creme brulee presented with an orange sorbet. (19005033)



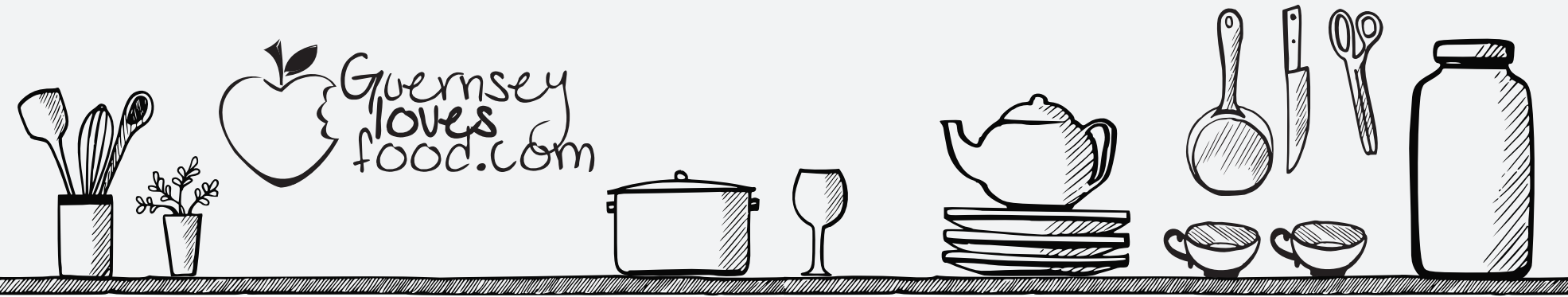
Chocolate brownie served with vanilla ice cream. (19005036)

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Chicken breast stuffed with soft cheese and chives, served on roasted new potatoes and vegetables, coated in sweet pepper cream sauce. (19004972)



Smoked mackerel pate with horseradish cream and toasted home-made soda bread. (19004941)

Robin's mackerel pate was smooth and tasty and the lightly-toasted soda bread was a good accompaniment.

My wife follows a low carb/ healthy fat lifestyle and I've cut down too, so chicken breast stuffed with cream cheese practically leapt off the menu the moment I saw it, and it proved to be just as deliciously creamy and rich as I had anticipated. Mark had vegetarian risotto, which was every bit as tasty as it looked, with a properly creamy texture. It came with salad and a separate portion of grated Parmesan. The Old Quarter says it offers 'good, no nonsense food with an Irish slant'. The 'slant', in Dave's case, was the champ potatoes on which sat his



Baked cod fillet with a white wine and tiger tail prawn sauce, served with potatoes and spinach. (19004959)



Rocket salad with chilli and ginger fried beef fillet strips topped with a Parmesan crisp. (19004944)



Sticky toffee pudding with home-made brown bread ice cream. (19005029)

medallions of beef. Although he'd been given a steak knife, he said that the meat – medium rare, as requested – was so tender he didn't really need it. The fact that he cleared his plate also served as testament. 'I loved it,' was Robin's verdict on his baked cod fillet, which was in a white wine and tiger prawn sauce and served with potatoes and spinach (not to be confused with champ, which uses spring onions). He was particularly taken with the huge prawns atop a wonderfully large portion of cod.

We sat back after four first-rate main courses and pondered the age-old conundrum of how one could possibly face dessert.



An open feeling in the restaurant adds to the enjoyment of the food. (19004946)



Baileys cheesecake. (19005027)

The mouthwatering selection on offer was enough to swing it. My go-to puddings are Eton mess or creme brulee, so the offer of an orange version of the latter with a portion of matching sorbet was intriguing. It turned out to be a wonderful combination of tangy sorbet and smooth, creamy, orange creme brulee with a crunchy layer of caramel. Mark's Baileys cheesecake (another touch of Ireland there) boasted a healthy amount of the liqueur. 'That was the nicest cheesecake I've had,' he announced after polishing it off. Dave's sticky toffee pudding had a bit of a twist in that it came with home-made brown bread ice-cream. This was 'a

revelation' he said, while the gooey pud boasted plenty of toffee. As for Robin, he plumped for chocolate brownie and vanilla ice cream and said that the sauce was 'outstanding'. To top off a top-class meal, the coffee came with a lovely shortbread biscuit rather than mints – these, in the form of mint humbugs, arrived not long afterwards. We were all so full that the thought of having to walk seemed like a bad idea, so an order from the bar was placed to allow a wonderful meal to wind down with a drink and good conversation.



Vegetable risotto with balsamic roasted Mediterranean vegetables, with a light dressed salad. (19004954)

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