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“ REVIEW

William Sitwell reviews The Double Red Duke, Bampton: ‘It was an emotional experience’

★★★★☆ 4/5

Our critic is wowed by a new taste sensation at this refurbished Cotswolds inn

By William Sitwell
8 July 2021 • 11:30am

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The stylish and comfy interiors

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In brief | The Double Red Duke



Address: The Double Red Duke, Bourton Road, Bampton

Oxfordshire OX18 2RB

Contact: 01367 810222

Price: Dinner for two excluding drinks and service: £140

Website: countrycreatures.com/double-red-duke



Looking back at my childhood in the Cotswolds, in a thatched cottage in a small hamlet called Chilson in Oxfordshire, the past isn't just a foreign country, it's a different universe.

Happiness for me was sitting alone at the bottom of the garden on the wall of the compost heap chucking twigs and stones into the stream. The M40 motorway stopped several miles short of Oxford. There was no suggestion of a 'set' associated with Chipping Norton, just some useful shops and a tiny theatre with uncomfortable seats seemingly reclaimed from old London buses.

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Today, the area is weighed down by moneyed magnates who don't care that the M40 was extended because they use a helicopter to travel to their sandblasted, electric-gated houses and barn conversions. And if they think their local pub is a bit iffy, they buy it and chuck the proceeds of some minor dividend at it.

Which, specifically, in the case of The Double Red Duke at Clanfield, means a rumoured £6.5 million refurb.

Not that I wish to be sniffy about this. I'm just saying that back in the 1970s, you'd be hard pushed to find someone who had spent six and a half grand on a pub in those parts. But with my past having been and gone, in the here and now, the prospect of dinner at The Double Red Duke sounds pretty damn fabulous if all I have to do is go there and eat.

So off I went to pick holes in the place. And rather unsuccessful I was at that. For the DRD is pretty exceptional. It's stylish, very comfortable (I would struggle to afford a single cushion), cleverly proportioned (there are snug areas, more communal parts from bar to dining rooms and a breathtaking long dining bar in part of the kitchen) and all beautifully lit. The service is slick and professional and, after trading for just a couple of weeks, was flowing well and with confidence.

We started dinner in the garden of this ancient building clad in greying Cotswold stone. And I had something so seemingly simple and so utterly gorgeous I can't believe I'd never had it. Yes, I was a grilled-oyster-and-bone-marrow virgin. It was like arriving in Venice for the first time; far greater than any imaginings, far superior than any description, an unforgettable, emotional experience. Yup. They're that good. A fat, sweet oyster covered in bone marrow, bread crumbs and herbs and grilled. We had some raw ones too while we were at it and a delicious broad bean hummus, or whipped mash as they called it, with crispbreads.

Sipping, while all this was going on, a Bethnal Green chardonnay (yes, really; they didn't serve that in the pubs in Charlbury in the 1970s), blended and bottled by the Renegade Urban Winery – it was very good!

Next we larged it on lobster and prime rib of beef and fries. 'Medium rare,' suggested our waiter. 'Yes please,' we chorused. It wasn't, so we sent it back and (25 minutes later, for which I applaud them... properly grilled and rested), we got our medium rare. And it was almost as epic as that grilled oyster. Charred edges, pink flesh, melting skin, just perfection. We shared some salted caramel petits fours and scarpered.

Money doesn't buy you everything, but £6.5 million can get you a pretty special pub.

Read more: William Sitwell reviews Wild Tavern: 'Their charred softly pink rib-eye is utterly marvellous'