

Good Report:

Dining out **Guide**

First class food at second choice pub

At a glance

The Crown Inn

Where: Helmdon Road, Weston
NN12 8PX

Call: 01295 760310

SUNDAY lunch in a pub was always on the cards the minute the builder rang in to say he'd done his back in. That was on the Thursday morning at which point our kitchen resembled a dustbowl, entry to the fridge was blocked by a steel roof support and the oven was similarly off-limits for all bar a contortionist.

By Sunday, we'd booked into a highly recommended pub in the greater Towcester area (discretion forbids us from saying which one) where a table was ours for 1pm.

We were ushered into a tiny corner of a tiny pub where we pulled up two tiny tables with bedside-



style lamps on and looked out to our neighbouring seats: A pink armchair and settee of the style popular in British households circa 1955. In fact we felt we were in 1955 before it then emerged that they didn't do traditional Sunday lunch. So we made our excuses and left.

Luckily, the AA Pub Guide pointed us in the direction of one of its Pick of the Pubs for Northamptonshire, The Crown Inn at Weston, near Helmdon.

Dating back to at least the days of Queen Elizabeth I, its most famous claim of all is much more modern, namely that Lord Lucan was allegedly spotted having a sharpener there on the night his children's nanny was murdered in 1974.

The Crown is an impressive building which was buzzing with activity when we arrived, somewhat flustered, at around 1.30pm. After ordering drinks – a pint of IPA from a decent list including Hook Norton, a J2O and an orange and lemonade – we headed straight for the main event. The starters

looked mouth-watering and included carrot and coriander soup, goats cheese and Serrano ham rolls, scallops and tiger prawns in a garlic and lime cream with rocket and Cornish crab. All of these were reasonably priced in the £4.50 to £5.50 bracket.

Main courses included haddock and chips, gammon with free range egg and chips, salmon en croute and duck confit with veggies taken care of with a mushroom, spinach and mozzarella lasagne with garlic bread and salad.

In the end we went traditional, as planned. Step forward roast chicken with all the trimmings, and it was as good as I've ever tasted.

Not only was the chicken plump, tasty and tender, it was accompanied by a delicious homemade stuffing, a blinding bread sauce and beautifully cooked seasonal vegetables. The vegetables – including sweet potato, broccoli leek and swede – were exceptionally good and it's some admission

for a carnivore to admit they may even have been the stars of this particular show.

Value-wise, this was stunning. Just £8.95 for a very full plate of delicious food and £5.95 for a similarly generous portion for three-year-old Jack, who I was more than glad to help out when things got a bit too much.

Kate found space for an apple crumble with ice cream. There was a beautiful crispy crumble covering a mountain of tasty hot fruit below and she eventually had to wave the white flag about halfway down the apple. Jack happily scoffed his portion of delicious vanilla ice cream while I worked my way through a cafetiere of magnificently strong coffee.

The pub is extremely child-friendly, indeed the games room area was packed with youngsters as we left. The toilets were clean and well-appointed although there were a

couple of steps to get over to reach them. Since the building is several hundred years old it is littered with steps and not particularly wheelchair friendly. The total bill for the above was a credit crunchingly good £39.50. We'd love to go back and sample the rest of the menu some time soon. And when we do, this time around it will definitely be because it's our first choice.

Richard Edmondson

Our view

Food	****
Service	****
Parking	*****
Value	*****

Our food writers pay in full for all meals and do not identify themselves when dining. The maximum star grading is five.