

Another helping from Martin Dawes

Reviews, reflections and recipes in Sheffield

A burger in Bradfield

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The Schoolrooms burger is a tasty bite

A while back I wrote that ordering the soup is a good way of testing a chef. So let's see how it goes with the leek, potato and Stilton at the Schoolrooms cafe, Low Bradfield. Nice. The kitchen certainly hasn't stinted on the cheese – or the seasoning.

As I finish I notice the little black grains at the bottom of the bowl which gave the soup (£4) added pep and zip, a toned-down version of the buzz you get from chilli. I once had a fascinating mini-tutorial from a Keralan chef on the importance of coarsely cracked black pepper in his region's cooking so it can pay to go heavy on this spice we take for granted and don't always use properly.

We've been invited to sample lunch at The Schoolrooms, just a year after owner Rachel Hague, from a local farming family, reopened it. She and partner John Woodhouse had converted the former school in 2011 into a farm shop, deli and butchery with a café upstairs.

After a while Rachel leased out the business but things didn't quite turn out how she'd planned. The place closed for a time but re-opened last June. As Bradfield is in one of the most glorious stretches around Sheffield we didn't need to be asked twice so we took the pretty way, out along the A57 before turning off towards Strines and then snaking round the hillsides until the Agden reservoir appeared below.

Low Bradfield, with its cricket pitch, bowling green and post office, is quintessentially English and makes for a great place to stroll around, grab a bite to eat and perhaps do a bit of food shopping at The Schoolrooms.

My last visit was four years ago but there was a familiar face in the kitchen, head chef James Gray. He'd been sous to the talented Thomas Samworth but is now in charge with Laney Smith his number two.



Laney and James in the kitchen

He's back after two years cheffing in Canada. So what, I asked, was the most notable thing he had learned? "It was in Whistler, British Columbia, at a ski resort, where there was a very high turnover. I learned organisation – and how to cook a steak better, about the only thing they eat out there!"

The café doesn't do steaks but it does do a pretty good burger (£8), made by the butcher downstairs from local beef. It's about an inch thick, moist and juicy with plenty of taste and, need I say,

well-seasoned. It is served in a brioche-style bun made, like all the breads here, by the Bakewell Pudding Company.

The café likes to present it platter-style on a wooden board so this won't please the WeWant Plates lobby! It comes with excellent skin-on, chunky chips, salad and a rattlingly good tomato and caramelised onion chutney. That chutney was so good I'd hoped they had made it themselves and could pinch the recipe but it seems they don't.

You probably won't be surprised to hear that burgers and fish and chips, sold on Fridays for a giveaway £6, are the two best sellers in the café.

It's a hot day and most diners are outside – the Schoolrooms does plenty of sandwiches and salads, and is licensed – but we stay inside where it's cooler. The place looks much the same from our last visit, still with animal pictures by artist Lynne Williamson brightening up the walls.

My wife has a rustic looking ham, Stilton and asparagus quiche (£6) from Toppings, the Doncaster pie company. Appropriately it's pie-like in design with a tasty pastry and good, soft custardy filling.

We finish with cake and excellent coffee, dispensed by Anna from Poland.

*This blog ate as a guest of the Schoolrooms.

The Schoolrooms, Mill Lee Road, Low Bradfield, Sheffield, S6 6LB, is open Wednesday to Sunday. Children's menu. Car park. Tel: 0114 285 1920. Web: <http://www.theschoolrooms.co.uk> (<http://www.theschoolrooms.co.uk>)

