

All roads lead to the FOX & GOOSE

Eating out in Suffolk is sometimes a bit of an excursion, but when the destination is this wonderful old pub at Fressingfield, it's worth the trip

WORDS: Rose Paul PHOTOS: Charlotte Bond

If you've never had the pleasure of visiting the Fox & Goose at Fressingfield, I strongly urge you to go. This historic, timber-framed inn was originally built in 1509 as the local Guildhall, but became a hostelry in the 1700s and has for many years been a country pub with more than a small sprinkle of magic.

It is nestled right on the border between Suffolk and Norfolk, and has a peculiar feeling of being both in the middle of nowhere and on the way to everywhere. Either way, the impressive reputation of this pub and restaurant draws people from near and far.

We arrived on a dark and drizzly autumn evening, lights twinkling in the windows, the old building welcoming and homely. Although the building itself is large, particularly in length, inside it feels cosy and snug. There is a small bar in the middle, a generous, beamed eating area and two rooms upstairs that have been converted into restaurant areas, which offer private dining options as well as exquisite tasting menus. There are tables outside, too, for warm lunchtimes and summer evenings.

Walking into the Fox & Goose for supper feels like arriving home after a long day to find a range of expertly cooked, mouth-watering treats awaiting you – does it get much better than that? Professionally

trained Norfolk chef Paul Yaxley has been the talented, friendly and inspiring owner of the Fox & Goose since 2002 and has taken it from strength to strength. Even through lockdown, when many pubs struggled to stay afloat, the Fox & Goose started delivering cook-at-home meals. On New Year's Eve alone, they sold 300 dishes and saw a queue of people snaking down the lane.

Paul's mantra is to deliver good-quality food every time to his customers and this comes above all else. 'Consistency is key,' he says, and this really shines through in the well-oiled way the pub is run, as well as the quality of the food.

The history of the pub has always been somewhat sparkly, with a reputation for good food, a host to famous names and even the winner of a Michelin star back in the 1960s. It's a labour of love, but one that Paul has taken on with expertise, finesse and huge success, backed by a loyal team who appear as efficient as they are friendly and knowledgeable.

Settling into a comfortable alcove in the window, adorned with plump cushions and paintings by local artists, we salivated over the menu, spoilt for choice and torn between more than a couple of the delicious offerings. Warm bread with curls of butter appeared and drinks arrived as we made our choices.

The menu is two-sided, combining fine dining and pub classics done well. There are small portions for children, light bites and starters, providing something tasty for >

left: Beetroot foam with cashel blue cheese, apples, watercress and honeyed walnuts

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everyone, whether it's for lunch or supper. As many of the ingredients as possible are locally sourced.

To give you a flavour of the mouth-watering choices, Mr P went for a starter of grilled mackerel (not a bone in sight) with Indonesian spiced mussels, spinach, prawns and basil oil, and I, torn between several, went for beetroot foam with cashel blue cheese, apples, watercress and honeyed walnuts. It was light and colourful, a vibrant, deep pink with a mousse-like texture, which tasted earthy and warm next to the salty cheese, sweet apple and nuts. A true triumph.

For our main courses, Mr P had a delicious-sounding hake fillet with spiced cauliflower rice, sour cream pesto, spinach, roasted cauliflower and pomegranate dressing. Armed with the argument that I would be

right: Fressingfield Fox & Goose was once the village's guildhall

below left: Earl Grey panna cotta with orange sorbet, honey gel, orange carpaccio and tulle biscuit

below right: The cosy interior of Fressingfield Fox & Goose

right: Passion fruit cheesecake with banana sorbet, caramelised white chocolate and pistachio cake

far right: Fox & Goose exterior

that we went for a dish of poached pineapple with passion fruit marshmallow, rum and raisin ice cream, granola and passion fruit purée for Mr P (yes, wow!) and a ginger panna cotta with blackberries, apple purée, rosemary shortbread and blackberry sorbet

‘My own main course was a beautiful and tender local venison with *plum chutney*’

required to describe in detail the meals we ate, I managed to get a forkful to try and was really impressed by the lightness of the fish and balance of flavours. My own main course was a beautiful and tender local venison with plum chutney, salsify, beetroot purée, carrots, mille-feuille potato and hazelnut jus. It was even better than it sounded, and I was really struck by how clever the flavours were, traditional but with a modern twist.

Another joy about the meal was the portion sizes. We were neither stuffed to bursting, nor left wanting more; again, the balance was just right. Fortunately, this meant that we had a little bit of room for pudding. For a few seconds we thought about sharing something sweet. But... once again we found so much that appealed on the menu

for me. Delicate, beautifully presented and light, both puddings gave a few delicious bursts of flavour without any heaviness. The rosemary shortbread is a real winner.

As we chatted to Paul, after our feast, we learnt more about how the Fox & Goose has branched out into other areas of hospitality. In 2007 the pub undertook to provide food for a wedding and hasn't looked back since. Now, the Little Green Wedding Barn is run by Paul and his team, and provides not only delicious food, but a stunning venue for up to 250 guests. Future plans include the building of rooms to stay at the venue.

Whether you live near this fascinating and beautifully run pub, or far, a trip to the Fox & Goose at Fressingfield is a treat not to be missed – a true delight to visit. ●

