



PUB REVIEW

THE RIVERSIDE INN
Aymestrey, Herefordshire, HR6 9ST
riversideaymestrey.co.uk

TRISTAN O'HANA EATS AT THE RIVERSIDE AT AYMESTREY

In the quaint Herefordshire countryside, The Riverside at Aymestrey has built itself quite the reputation

Upon telling my Herefordshire-homed friend that I was in his neck of the woods last month and staying in place called 'Aymestrey', he promptly replied: "Oh yeah, The Riverside, right?" Right he was. Either I've been over sharing online or my buddy had gained unauthorised access to my diary.

In fact it was neither that led him to such an assumption – it was more to do with the point that, apart from a number of glorious locations and landscapes, aside from The Riverside, there's not much else in Aymestrey. And that is by no means a criticism; for once you're settled in such a secluded location, with nothing more than fields, streams and hills to absorb, why on earth would you want anything more than an outstanding pub to base yourself in? At the turn of the year, Andy Link, who is chef patron of the pub, got in touch about a number of new rooms he had added to the back of the site, urging us to come and have a look at what he was doing at the 16th-century building. Needless to say, we didn't take much convincing.

As the name would suggest, The Riverside at Aymestrey sits alongside the idyllic country flow of the River Lugg. From the road, the wide-spanning frontage of the black and white building offers no clue to the expansive rear of the operation. Climb the steep steps beyond the back patio and you'll arrive at the

new garden rooms that Link has added to the business – imagine if Bilbo Baggins had taken a modern-day interior design course and you'll start to picture the charming structures that now overlook the pub and its countryside surroundings (just mind your head when you enter). Climb further still and you'll get to the kitchen garden, where Link and his team prepare the ground, sow and reap the seasonal vegetables and fruits – an integral part of The Riverside's business. From the rooms, you're at the perfect height to watch the mist roll off the hills and smell the log fires coming from the pub's chimneys. Remind me why I live in London again?

The bar area of the pub has a continual bustle of locals on a Friday night, some supping a pre-dinner drink, others popping in for a pint at their local. The former outweigh the latter, though, as many of the families and couples spotted in the bar are sat around us when we move to the downstairs dining area. Pre-dinner 'bar nibbles' were spicy rice crackers and chilli broad beans, both £1.50. It's also worth seeing what aperitifs are on while you're in the bar. I opted for the quince Negroni, which was made with some Herefordshire Chase Extra Dry gin and some quince liquor – only £7.50 too! We're not in London anymore, Toto.

Local sourcing is child's play for The Riverside – there isn't much on





Link's menu that hasn't come from the surrounding areas. As such, we decided to order the dishes that were closest to our temporary home. The roasted parsnip and cider soup (£5.75) comes with a decent dollop of crème fraîche and is made with the vegetables grown in the garden outside our room. It's not so much food miles, but food meters. The same goes for the cured Rainbow Trout (£7), which is caught from the aforementioned River Lugg. It's served with fennel, apple and chicory. Judging by how many tables I saw it placed upon, it's clearly a fan favourite in these parts.

The trout appears again in the mains, but this time alongside some cauliflower, sunflower seeds and a parsley sauce (£16). I was keen to move on from fish, but my companion went for the hake with spinach, capers and a fennel sauce (£17.25). Alas, hake can't be fished in these parts, but The Riverside's menu does add the nice touch of not only listing the area of Cornwall where it was caught (Kelynack), but the boat too (Ajax) – a personal touch not often seen on pub menus. There are plenty of meat options listed as main courses, and you could do far worse than the 12-hour slow braised beef, served

with a smoked mash, kale and an oxtail sauce (£16.90). This is a rich dish that warrants a strong glass of red – perhaps a large glass of the Château Cissac, Haut-Médoc Bordeaux (£10.50) would suffice? It certainly did the trick for me.

Desserts all come in at a more than reasonable £6.50 – such a bargain that you may as well get two. The bread and butter pudding is made using a recipe that has been in the pub for more than 15 years – it comes with a date purée and some crème anglaise. Order it and never look back. As you'd expect, the rest of the sweets are equally as alluring... the buttermilk panna cotta, for example, or the chocolate delice. Fill your boots... once you can decide.

The Riverside is a treat of a pub. Now that Link has added such appealing accommodation to a venue that was already a destination in its own right, you can only predict greater success for this chef patron. While he has held that position for three years, Link was head chef at The Riverside for 10 years prior to that – you can tell how much the pub means to him on those rare occasions when he is torn from the kitchen and is able to chat to guests. He's very excited to see what the recent investment will do to summer trading and, quite frankly, so are we. **P&B**



Andy Link in the pub garden