

From *The Sunday Times*

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# Carpenter's arms

AA Gill: Table talk



St Peter's Square is one of those surprisingly expansive corners of the suburban city that squats between the motorway west and Chiswick High Road. It is a showy moment of aspirational Victorian villa life plopped among the terraces, the skilled tradesmen's cottages. But it isn't anything like as surprising as the Carpenter's Arms, on the corner, a lost pub of the type that is now useful only as a spivvy conversion to studio flats. It's a long, plain room with a bit of a courtyard out the back, and doesn't make any effort to be anything other than a down-on-its-luck backstreet boozier. Philippa, who lives round the corner, said we should try the food. The menu is English, in the current genre of robust and enthusiastic use of interesting ingredients and cheaper cuts. The starters include leek and potato soup with oysters, saut\_ of smoked eel, chanterelle and jerusalem artichokes, steamed razor clams with parsley, garlic and cream, quail with grapes and braised bacon, chicory and mustard. For main courses, you can have a hot salt-beef sandwich with beetroot and pickles, a proper poacher's pie, bream with octopus and butternut squash, bits of beef, a Tamworth pork chop or duck-fat oven chips with roast garlic and foie-gras mayonnaise. Altogether, that's a pretty good spread for a pub. It's not pretentious or weird, it's not got a concept, it's just bloody brilliant.

I've eaten here twice. The first time, I had a mutton soup that left me speechless with admiration; each time, every dish has been faultless. The room is plain, quiet and relaxed. The grub is served by a pretty, quiet and relaxed waitress who knows what's what. It comes on plates that are round and white, with cutlery that does what it's told. And it comes without ta-ra, falderal or soliloquy. It's honest, accomplished and confident, full of its own flavour, and as well made as a grandfather clock. I could now go on to sauce each dish with metaphor and simile, I could garnish it all with alliteration and allegory, serve it up to you on napery of verbiage, but I shan't. Simply and truly, this is a kitchen that wholly succeeds in doing what it sets out to do, in a room that is gently hospitable, without assumption or pretension. It is as fine and joyous a lunch as you will find the length and breadth of Britain this week.

91 Black Lion Lane, W6; 0208 7418386

Lunch, Mon-Fri, noon-3pm, Sat, Sun, 12.30pm-4pm; dinner, Mon-Sat, 7pm-10pm (Sun 9.30pm)



## AA Gill

AA Gill is a features writer and restaurant critic for *The Sunday Times* and he writes regular travel pieces for *The Sunday Times Magazine*, for which he has won two Glenfiddich Awards