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Royal seal of approval for a Scots gem



EDINBURGH is home to hundreds of restaurants ranging from uber-trendy joints where staff dress as if going to a night-club, to those which are so posh that you need to brace yourself with a stiff drink before asking for the bill.

The city is also home to several hidden gems.

The Royal Scots Club on Abercromby Place, in the heart of the city's beautiful Georgian New Town, falls into the latter category.

It was originally founded as a memorial to the thousands of Royal Scots who gave their lives during the Great War.

Unusually for the time, the club welcomed all ranks, offering an oasis of calm where they could relax and enjoy fine food.

Today, it still feels like a very special place, and while it runs as a club, it welcomes non-members.

The surroundings pay homage to the regiment with lots of interesting artefacts and memorabilia adorning the walls but it isn't the least bit stuffy.

While the style here is relaxed, there are a couple of rules. No jeans to be worn in the dining room, and gents dining through the week need a jacket and tie. Mobile phones must also be switched

off during dinner which is a great rule, and one every restaurant should insist on.

Having dressed suitably, we made our way to the first-floor dining room and were immediately glad we'd made an effort, as the surroundings demand it.

The room, overlooking Queen Street Gardens, is one of the finest rooms in Edinburgh, filled with classical Georgian features such as huge, ornate-carved door frames and splendid windows, with illuminated glass cabinets filled with sparkling regimental silverware.

Waiting staff, wearing tartan waistcoats, are friendly and efficient, and every task is carried out with a sense of cheerful purpose.

The dinner menu, available from 7-8pm Monday to Thursday and 7-9pm, Friday and Saturday, costs £22.50 for three courses - non-members pay a £3 supplement.

Given the surroundings, quality of food and service, the price is remarkable, which is why I assume the restaurant was busy.

Head chef is Bobby Clarke, originally from Belfast and who trained in London and Switzerland. He has been top man here for the past 12 years.

To start I ordered a warm goats cheese salad while my



Eating Out

companion opted for smoked salmon.

Warm rolls and beautifully-curved fresh butter appeared as we studied the wine list.

In the mood for something a bit girly, we plumped for a bottle of Rose d Anjou La Jaglerie, a lovely fruity rose with lots of strawberry flavours priced at just £17 per bottle.

My starter was superb. The goats cheese, just starting to melt, was served on a thick oatcake with a good dollop of caramelised tangey red onion chutney and a spicy rocket salad. Delicious.

The salmon, served with lots of thickly-buttered brown bread, lemon and freshly-cracked pepper had a delicious smoky flavour and a nice, flaky texture which suggested it had come from a fish merchant rather than a packet.

I should mention here the table settings which were very pretty. White tablecloths, blue candles, heavy silver cutlery and white chinaware bearing the Royal Scots badge.

Background music was good too, with a mixture of modern classics and wartime favourites.

For the main course, the vegetarian option of mushroom ravioli with pesto and cream sauce took my friend's fancy while the venison steak with red currant sauce was too hard for me to resist.

My steak, two fine cuts of venison, was nicely pink and tender without being bloody. It came with a generous portion of potatoes and a good selection of fresh vegetables, including carrots, mange tout, roasted onions and peppers, which we shared.

The ravioli was a hit as the

parcels of pasta were a good size and filled with tender mushrooms. The pesto/mushroom combination of flavours worked surprisingly well.

After asking if we could wait at least 15 minutes before ordering dessert, I tucked into a gorgeous homemade ice-cream terrine which had layers of different flavoured ice creams including a wonderful toffee, all served with colourful autumnal fruits.

My companion chose cheese and biscuits and received a nice selection of Scottish and continental cheeses including a very moreish, tangy blue cheese which, despite being full, I had to finish on her behalf.

The friendly, relaxed atmosphere meant we, and the other diners, were in no rush to leave so we had coffee and

stayed chatting for ages - it's the sort of place you don't feel pressured into leaving as soon as you've eaten.

The club has plenty to offer non-members and special mention must be made of its smoking area, a lovely modern decked space, filled with colourful flowers and offering dramatic rooftop views across the city.

It's the sort of place even non-smokers like myself could happily hang out while enjoying a post-dinner liqueur.

For those in the mood for a special-occasion dinner, at an everyday price, the Royal Scots Club is spot on.

A visit here also serves as a timely reminder to buy Remembrance Day poppies and acknowledge the tremendous sacrifices members of the Armed Forces made, and continue to make.

■ Royal Scots Club, 29-31 Abercromby Place, Edinburgh. Phone 0131 556 4270.

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|-------------------|----|
| QUALITY OF FOOD | 5 |
| MENU CHOICE | 4 |
| SURROUNDINGS | 5 |
| LOCATION | 5 |
| SERVICE | 4 |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | 5 |
| TOTAL [OUT OF 30] | 28 |

