

Graceful charm

Friendly service, great food and a buzzing atmosphere make The Swan much more than your average village pub ...

Words by Ruth Supple

A WARDROBE malfunction meant I had to head straight to the ladies loos on arrival at The Swan in Salford, near Milton Keynes.

I'd stepped into this smart gastropub only to have that sinking feeling of my hold ups losing their grip and sliding down my thighs.

Fortunately I had a spare pair in my handbag so was saved any further embarrassment and was able to give the thumbs up to the stylish lavatories, an essential check point on any restaurant review.

The Swan is tucked away in the pretty village of Salford, situated a few miles north of Milton Keynes and easily reached off the M1.

We'd celebrated a friend's 40th there last year in the adjoining function room, but had never eaten in the main pub. And what an enjoyable experience that proved to be.

The Swan is a traditional English pub which has been given a chic 21st century new look. Locals told us the overhaul has transported The Swan from a rundown village pub, visited only by a handful of locals, to an eclectic place that's always bustling.

After an aperitif of

champagne, the friendly Swedish assistant manager Kris, showed us over to our corner table which was the perfect vantage point.

Leather chairs make dining a comfortable experience and the uncluttered decor of wooden tables with fresh flowers and candles on them, large mirrors everywhere and blackboards with menus of the day written on them, all add to the rustically modern atmosphere of The Swan.

The service is attentive but not over-bearing and we perused the menu while enjoying fresh bread, olive oil and balsamic vinegar.

The Swan is part of Peach pubs franchise and although they all offer the same deli boards, which you can have as starters or nibbles if you are just drinking in one of its pubs, each has its own menu.

The spring menu currently being served at The Swan features a wonderful selection of fish dishes, as well as mouthwatering salads and meat courses.

My husband, Russ, had the fish deli board to start with which featured potted shrimps, taramasalata, crayfish tails, smoked mackerel pate, chutney and rustic bread for £8.75. He



described it as "a barnstorming combination" and polished off the lot.

In the meantime, I'd tucked into a starter from the specials board of seared tuna, orange and watercress salad with a chilli and ginger dressing for £6.50. It was a deliciously light choice and had a real kick thanks to the dressing.

I'd been recommended the pan-fried duck breast with spicy bean tagine and cumin yoghurt (£14.50) for a main course and wasn't disappointed by the unusually tasty combination.

Russ had the 28 day, dry-aged 12oz Aberdeenshire T-bone steak, fat chips and bearnaise sauce (£18.50) which arrived on another wooden board. The steak was a whopper and made him wonder why we don't buy a nice bit of T-bone from the butchers more regularly.

We washed it all down with a bottle of the Argentinian wine, Malbec, which had a rich, heavy flavour that married well with our chosen meat dishes.

Kris, it transpired, used to be an American football player and coach until a knee injury forced him to retire and return to the catering industry, which he has a degree in from his Scandinavian

birthplace. As you would imagine for such a sport, he's a big lad and was amazed therefore to see my 32-inch waisted husband polish off his third board of the evening, this time a selection of artisan cheese, apple, biscuits and chutney for £5. It's just not fair.

I was on my usual Lenten purge of chocolate and sugar – doing it for the wrong reasons as ever to try to lose weight – so had to resist temptation of the gorgeous-sounding desserts, which ranged from pear tart tatin, chocolate and almond torte, lemon meringue knickerbocker glory and baked honey and vanilla cheesecake.

As usual though, I always make a few exceptions to my Lenten rules and decided that I was allowed a selection of ice cream and sorbet. They don't count as sugar in my book and were my guilty pleasure on the night and another thing to add to the confessional list.



■ The Swan is at 2 Wavendon Road, Salford, Milton Keynes; telephone 01908 281008 or visit www.swansalford.co.uk