



It's all rosy at the newly refurbished favourite Rose & Crown at Romaldkirk

A mini-break is a rare treat for my wife and I, so it was important to find somewhere to make the most of it; a place where we could completely relax and unwind; a place that would also satisfy our never-ending need for delicious food and drink. Having given it a great deal of thought, our attention turned to the Rose and Crown at Romaldkirk, which we heard had undergone a recent refurbishment. We booked two nights. The word in the North East is that the Rose and Crown at Romaldkirk is one of the brightest stars, if not necessarily one of the biggest, in the increasingly sparkling Teesdale crown. We therefore arrived with dangerously high expectations. We were certainly not disappointed. On arrival we were met by the very welcoming Rose & Crown team, including Sarah the Hotel Manager and owner Cheryl, who escorted us to our room.

The thing with this place is it's steeped in history. It's been a coaching inn since back in about 1733, and you'd think that with the passing of a few centuries it might be looking a little tired, maybe in need of a lick of paint. We could not have been more wrong. The room was named High Force, after England's largest waterfall (a convenient nine miles away and well worth a visit), and what we discovered as we walked through the door was an extremely beautiful and well-appointed suite of rooms. Decorated with sumptuous fabrics and furnishings, it was immediately clear that we'd be staying in an esteemed hotel. There was a very comfortable sitting room next door, which can double as a children's room, and the adjoining bathroom was excellently appointed ? my wife was particularly impressed with a heated mirror, which meant she could put her makeup on while I was engaged in what she characterised as a ridiculously long shower.

Despite have hurtled to Romaldkirk straight from work, the shower meant I was very refreshed by the time that we headed down to the newly refurbished, yet still traditional-looking bar for a pre-dinner drink. We were greeted by roaring fires and a choice of three gins for my G&T, along with a very substantial wine list from which my wife took a ridiculously long time to choose a delicious rosé. Olives and menus arrived, which provided us with some considerable difficulty ? with the exception of the vegetarian choices (we're confirmed meat-eaters) there was literally nothing that we didn't fancy. After much deliberation and a degree of mind-changing, my wife

plumped for the goat's cheese mousse followed by the pork. I opted for the whitebait and courgette fritters followed by the sea bream on brown shrimp noodles. Further deliberation followed over the wine until we both agreed on a bottle of Picpoul de Pinet.

The dining room here must be one of the loveliest panelled dining rooms around. It really is gorgeous ? the type of place that makes you take your time so you can enjoy the surroundings as long as possible. Having taken our places we were offered a choice of tasty homemade bread, then an utterly delicious mise bouche of curried parsnip soup. The whitebait were beautifully served ? it was falling out of a cornet with a delicious homemade tartare sauce ? and the goat's cheese was a perfect foil for the beetroot that accompanied it. My wife's pork was an amazing cheek loin in pancetta which almost had her sunk, but it was just too good to leave. My sea bream was delicious with an array of flavours that had my taste buds tingling. Despite a few puddings teasing us on their way to other tables, we'd had our fill and felt it appropriate to retire to our haven, where we collapsed into the very comfortable bed and both had the best night's sleep for ages. The morning dawned clear and bright with the chirp of the local birds. What a refreshing change to be able to open a hotel window properly. For breakfast I had a perfect full English, while my wife had smoked salmon and scrambled eggs. The woman serving us was as bright and chirpy as the day outside. We took advantage of the weather by exploring High Force and enjoying a fine walk through Teesdale, as recommended by the walking book in our room, before returning late to enjoy our comfortable bed once more.