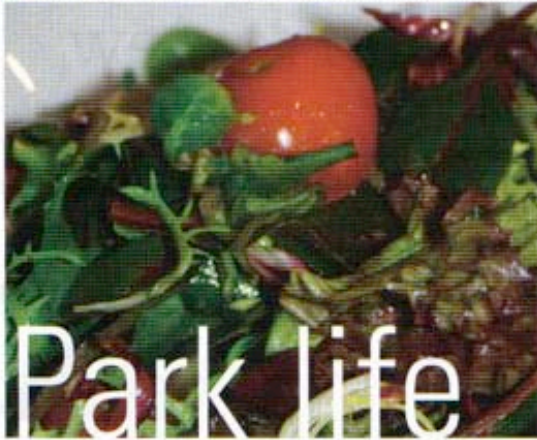




PRESTON PARK TAVERN

ANDREW KAY'S FOOD&DRINK

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Park life

While first to bemoan the demise of the backstreet boozier, Andrew Kay loves the **Preston Park Tavern**

Call me old fashioned but I really love a good backstreet boozier, preferably one with a swirly carpet, flock wallpaper and a sticky mahogany bar. Too many of our city's lovely pubs have gone the way of bars, all flavoured shots and bottled lager. Contrary to my perceived lounge lizard image I am a pint of bitter sort of guy.

I'm also happy to admit that in recent years some of the best places I have eaten have been backstreet boozers reborn as gastro pubs. It's not a term I like but in some cases it fits, like The Chimney House.

Well now I have another to add to the list, a pub in what until recently had seemed a barren wasteland when it came to potatory establishments and dining dens. Then BOOM! All of a sudden there's a new Tin Drum and the Preston Park Tavern.

The last time I was in the Preston Park Tavern was so long ago that pint cost less than £2 and the fashion trend was builder's bum. Yes, I know that builder's bum is still hot with adolescent girls and older girls who should know better, but then it was a fashion sported by builders – and not an attractive one.

Well, what a change, not a swirl or sticky patch to be found but instead an airy open space with bright colours and clean lines. There was a chic wall of bold pattern, perhaps an ironic reference to the flock of old, but the place could not look nicer.

"I'm happy to admit that in recent years some of the best places I have eaten have been backstreet boozers reborn as gastro pubs"

Nor could it have been more atmospheric, and I mean that in two ways. First because at a busy Wednesday lunchtime the crowd was politely amiable, even the kids present were well behaved, and second because the atmosphere was not polluted by smoke. How bold to go for the ban before the deadline, and how wise. That new interior will never see the taint of nicotine.

I was with two work colleagues, and business was top of the menu, a working lunch to look at the statistics we gathered for the survey that so many of you completed. Many thanks for that.

It did not, however, mean that we could not enjoy a nice lunch. We even got a bit giddy and decided to have a drink – two spritzers for the gels and a pint of Adnams for me, good clean Adnams too!

The menu at lunch is short and simple, a selection of sandwiches, a soup, a few mains and a pud. I was far from hungry so it was going to be a one course affair and the others felt the same. I know it cuts down the coverage, but sometimes lunch is like that.

It cuts it down further if two people order the same, but I could hardly insist that we all choose different dishes could I. Even though they did offer, Lynne quite clearly looking for an excuse to change her order from a dainty pasta dish to the burger and chips. Had I been hungrier I would have gone for the burger. One passed by and looked really excellent.

In the end Lynne and I had the pappardelle with wild mushrooms and chestnuts. We were not disappointed either. There was plenty of funky fungus dotted with nuggets of sweet chestnut in just the right amount of rich clinging sauce. Any more sauce in fact and the good ribbons of noodle would have been drowned and that fresh watery pasta flavour lost.

Kate, yes the mate with the appetite, once more displayed her prowess by opting for a fish stew. This came simply bursting with clams and mussels and beans and fish of all kinds – all in a rich garlicky gloop that, for shame, she dared not ask for bread to mop it up. It was very nice indeed, or so she told me, as she failed to offer either of us even a morsel to taste. Why is it then that she has the figure of a sapling?

I had a salad on the side, predictable mixed leafy stuff, but with a good hearty dressing. If there was anything to criticise it would have been the pace, which was relaxed, not slow, and nice if you have the time but tough if you are on a schedule. Probably our own fault though, as we could have let them know that we had a deadline.

It would be good to have something else to complain about but I haven't. Oh yes, I was too full to tackle a pud and there were a few I would have liked to tackle.

The menu is a bit grander in the evening but the prices remain sensible, up to £4.95 for starters, from £9.50 to £12.95 for mains and puds around the £4 mark. On Sundays there are roasts and the like for those of a traditional bent. Our lunch came to £11 a head-ish, not bad for quality food using what clearly were prime ingredients. I love the huge window onto the kitchen too; it's a great way of stopping the chef spitting into the consommé.

The Preston Park Tavern, 88 Havelock Rd, Brighton, 01273 542271



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