



It is testament to a venue's popularity that a place is heaving even on a wet and windy Wednesday night. That's what my husband and I discovered on arrival at The Red Lion Hotel in East Haddon, where we'd spent our wedding night 17 years earlier.

Back then The Red Lion was a typical English pub with bedrooms. Now it is a stylish hotel with lovely open plan areas, yet still retaining that traditional village feel.

New co-owner Adam Gray, a Michelin staff chef originally from East Haddon washed pots in The Red Lion as a teenager.

He went on to work alongside celebrity chef Gary Rhodes and was awarded the coveted Michelin star for his culinary expertise at Rhodes Twenty Four in London.

Adam has great plans for The Red Lion Hotel and is creating a new cookery school in the grounds that's due to open in January 2011.

While we perused the new menu that has been devised by Adam, we surmised that news of his arrival had made The Red Lion so busy mid-week.

Ingredients are sourced locally, wherever possible, and the head chef has worked with Adam for several years in London.

Starters were incredible. I chose the special of the day: warm baby leeks with torn garlic croutons and English air-dried ham (£7) while my husband, Russ, had the baked beetroot and goat's cheese salad with Port dressing (£4.95). Both dishes were beautifully presented and the fusion of tastes was sumptuous.

Our main courses were equally fantastic. My choice of pan-fried Cornish lemon sole with nut butter dressing and smoked bacon runner beans (£14.50) was cooked to perfection and light enough to feel as though I could have a dessert.

Meanwhile Russ selected the 21-day aged Northamptonshire rib eye steak with hand cut chips, roasted English tomatoes and Béarnaise sauce (£18.50), a wonderfully filling and warming meal.

Desserts were too tempting to resist so I opted for the blackberries (in season during our visit) and apple with toasted macadamia nuts with warm custard (£5). The combination of flavours was wonderful and I vowed to try and recreate this crumble topping at home, but haven't mastered it yet.

Russ, ever traditional in his dessert choice, chose cheese. The selection offered is British Isles cheeses served with biscuits and dried fruit chutney (homemade of course). You can have three choices for £7.50, five for £12.50 or every cheese on the dessert list for £20. Russ managed five and thoroughly enjoyed each one.

After coffee and mint tea, we headed out.

With food like this on its menu, The Red Lion Hotel is sure to become even more popular in the future and makes it the kind of place you'll want to visit every day of the week and not just on wedding anniversaries.

■ The Red Lion, Main Street, East Haddon, NN6 8BU.
Telephone 01604 770223 or visit www.redlioneasthaddon.co.uk



Adam Gray

Worth his SALT

Adam Gray, who works alongside celebrity chef Gary Rhodes, is now the new co-owner of The Red Lion. Ruth Supple samples the food