



How did I miss this? Nick Kimber has been at the stove at The Kings Hotel in Stokenchurch since last June, but I've only just discovered what a gem of a chef he is. Village locals have been keeping it secret, writes **Sandra Carter**



Share a secret

Along we go to explore the changes at this 16th century coaching inn. The first surprise is the smart new al fresco eating area at the front. The bar and restaurant area have also received a complete makeover which is both stylish and comfortable and makes nods to local history with a lacemaking pattern on the wallpaper, fascinating old photos on the walls, and a charming collection of dining chairs to reflect the local chairmaking tradition.

A second bar has been opened where people can watch sport on TV, leaving the main bar and restaurant – renamed The Kings Eating House – as a welcoming place to enjoy a drink, a snack or a full three-course meal.

Nick can certainly hit the high notes, having spent the past 12 years working his way up in quality kitchens. His most significant influence, he says, was his role as sous-chef in the Duke of Westminster's 5-star Chester Grosvenor Hotel, which has a Michelin star. He is keen to ensure that anyone coming in for a

meal or a snack enjoys first-class food. He does his own butchery, smokes his own salmon, makes his own desserts, and employs classic techniques for stocks and sauces.

The menu has something for everyone. A 'home comforts' section offers everything from fish and chips with home-made tartare sauce and hand-cut chips to home-ground steak burgers and wild mushroom linguini. The choice of starters is creative, ranging from foie gras and duck liver parfait to crispy whitebait and squid. My Oxford blue cheesecake was fabulously smooth, with a fresh-tasting beetroot purée and pickled walnuts. My companion raved over his potato blini topped with a heap of oak smoked salmon with crème fraîche and caper berries.

We were urged to try the pork by Kevin, the attentive restaurant manager. It was good advice as the belly of pork had been slowly roasted until meltingly tender, the crackling cooked separately to a crisp and the bubble and squeak cake was good enough to eat on its own, with green veg and rich sauce completing an excellent dish.

Nick's experience cooking in Spain bore fruit in my companion's dish of sea bass on an exceptionally flavoursome and spicy white bean and chorizo cassoulet.

Desserts range from chocolate orange cheesecake with blood orange coulis to home-made ices and a sharing platter.

My Bakewell tart was the best I have tasted, with fresh crushed raspberries and clotted cream ice cream.

Iced banana parfait came with salted peanut Chantilly cream and caramel – a decadent end to a really special meal.

This is a secret that really must be shared.



The Kings Eating House, Kings Hotel,
Stokenchurch 01494 609090