



and the space has now been developed into an open area of grass – ideal for summer time relaxing.

As well as planting hedgerow and making a commitment to look after the old oak tree in the back, Mark and his team have also planted 100 hops here.

“It’s a good use of the space,” he said. “It teaches us about hop growing and the process. Only when you grow something do you really thoroughly appreciate it.”

And these hops hint at his plans to develop a mini micro-brewery on site, where the team can experiment with different beer brewing recipes and techniques.

“Each September we’re hoping to have a week when seven or eight different home grown beers will be available,” he said.

Inside, the pub oozes character and history and it’s clear Mark loves the laid-back atmosphere of the place.

As you’d expect, food, wine and beer take centre stage.

Head chef Steven Miles (formerly of the British Larder and Brudenell) has created an exciting menu of interesting dishes, which includes the likes of roasted lamb rump with spiced lentils, turnip puree and lamb samosa, beef hash which comes with braised savoy cabbage and a fried egg, and artichoke and chestnut gnocchi gratin with pickled shitake mushroom. A recommended beer and/or wine is listed alongside each of the dishes and these suggestions are put together by Mark who looks closely at the ingredients Steven uses.

“He gives me a lot of stimulation with matching the food and beer. There’s always something that’s slightly leftfield that

challenges me,” Mark said.

And indeed, it’s a brave man that will suggest a beer to go with a chocolate-based dessert, but – as I can safely vouch – the suggested Rochefort 10 tastes simply beautiful alongside the pub’s bitter chocolate and salted caramel tart.

While a fan of both beer and wine, Mark is particularly keen to encourage people to experiment with different types of beer in the same way they would try different wines. He wants to give people the confidence and knowledge to allow them to discover different varieties themselves.

“What you can do with beer is drink some of the greatest beers in the world for a fraction of the price that you would spend on wine,” he said.

“The range of flavours in beer is much greater than the flavours in wine too,” he added, explaining that the possibilities are endless when it comes to creating different beers.

Mark keeps a keen eye on beer trends and is finding the surge in popularity of ‘craft beer’ really pleasing.

“It’s incredibly exciting to see the way everyone’s imaginations are working,” Mark said. “It looks like

young people who have been alienated from the industry in the past are now coming in - there’s a lot of creative and inspirational talent coming to the front.”

And, Mark is certainly encouraging this pool of talent to grow with his commitment to stocking new and unknown brands and developing our country’s appreciation of beer through the Beer Academy.



Dish:
Pan-fried hake fillet, garlic and parsley croquette with blanched razor clams and smoke bacon veloute

Matched beer: Vedett Extra White, Antwerp, Belgium

Mark says: One of the best examples of a Belgian white wheat beer, this is spiced with crushed coriander seeds giving a delightful lemon/lime kick and curacao orange peel. The beer is clean and vibrant and plays the role of a Chablis with its acid backbone and restrained fruitiness cutting through pan juices and highlighting the delicacy of the hake and the richness of the razor clams. Its aromatic complexity keeps the drinker hooked.

If you prefer wine: go for a glass of Greywacke Sauvignon Blanc.

Mark says: The Greywacke Sauvignon Blanc is a serious rival to Sancerre and has the maturation and depth of flavour to illuminate the subtleties of this dish.

Dish:
Plate of English cheeses including Keen’s mature cheddar, Colston Basset blue stilton and Mrs Temple’s Copy’s Cloud with apple and pear chutney

Beer matched: Brooklyn Monster Ale, New York, USA

Mark says: “This is brewed from three mashes of heirloom British malt and spiced with aromatic American Willamette, Cascade and Fuggle hops. After four months of aging, it has a magnificent burnished copper color, an aroma redolent of Oloroso sherry, citrusy hops and fruit, a soft, warming, complex palate, a spiritous finish, and a strength of 10.1%. It is vivacious when young, but will age gracefully for many years, becoming more complex over time. The mature mellow fruit flavours act as a traditional chutney-like contrast to unpasteurised mature cheddar and Blue Stilton. The inherent sweetness is a foil to the saltiness of the cheese, especially the Colston Basset and the firm bitterness and carbonation provide the cutting edge to reveal the complexities of each cheese in turn.

If you prefer sherry: try a glass of Valdespino Palo Cortado





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