

Comfort Food...

Stretton's Jackson Stops Inn is a beautiful country pub restaurant come rain or shine — just as well really, as we experienced both during our visit. Here, we find out how chef Robert Knowles's return to the restaurant marks an era of high quality 'comfort food...'

Words & Photos: Rob Davis.

THE THATCHED ROOF of the Jackson Stops, Stretton's 15th century Grade II listed pub, looked great under bright sunshine during our recent visit.

Its leafy, shaded garden looked really pretty, and with Jubilee bunting hung from its stone front, it was a typically English village scene. Unfortunately, the equally typical changeable English weather was soon to make an appearance, too.

It wasn't long before a fierce June storm was battering the mullioned windows with rain and a clap of thunder rattled the leaded windows that nearly made head chef Robert Knowles drop one of our dishes.

It's a good job he didn't drop it; the food is absolutely great, so it would have been a terrible waste. Though the restaurant's owners — Julia and Robert Reid — only took custodianship of the venue in January 2011, Robert Knowles's has been with Robert Reid for "30 years, from Roberts start in Rutland at The White Horse in Empingham, followed by the opening of Barnsdale Lodge Hotel & The Orangery at Burghley House."



The Jackson Stops is a beautiful thatched pub restaurant that suits any weather, with a beautiful shady garden and little dining rooms that provide an intimate feel...



Main: Pan Fried Sea Bass with Courgette Salad, Lemon and Sesame Dressing.

“Good food doesn’t need to be fussy.” says Robert. “Local ingredients and skilful preparation of dishes provide high quality English cuisine... add to this a comfortable environment too, and diners are assured of a great experience...”

This long-standing relationship leaves Robert with a clear idea of what is demanded from his kitchen; high quality English cuisine in a relaxed and pretty pub restaurant environment.

“Good food doesn’t need to be fussy.” says Robert. “It’s important to use local ingredients, but only if they’re of the highest quality available.”

“Then, it’s a case of skilful preparation in the kitchen with a great setting and good service — it’s the combination of all these that makes a great restaurant.”

First impressions of the venue are commensurate with this philosophy.

Whether you’re enjoying a pint of local ale in sunny weather and admiring the building or hunkering down in the pantiled restaurant to escape the rain by one of the open fires, there’s plenty to appeal visually.

“We’re a really adaptable venue.” says Mandy. “The real fires and small, cosy rooms provide plenty of warmth in the winter, but in the summer the garden looks great and with all the windows open, stays nice and cool.”

The snug, restaurant, bakery and barn collectively affords The Jackson Stops a total of 60 covers, but the feel is one of relaxed intimacy, with lots of little dining rooms rather than one large space. Front of house is managed by Mandy Knowles, with customers assured of unobtrusive attentiveness.

The restaurant has just two menus, a table d’hôte daytime menu with two courses for £12.95 which offers choice of seven starters, eight main courses and seven desserts.

This menu also includes ‘bits and bobs’ — a section with Fish & Chips, Pork & Apple Burger and a Rutland Ploughmans option individually bought.

Our recommendation is the à la carte evening menu which provides two courses for £19.50 or three courses for £23.50. With nine starters, seven main course options plus three additional steaks, and eight desserts, there’s ample choice.

A robust list of local suppliers includes Grasmere Farm for pork, Toft’s Groovy Foods for beef, plus ingredients like trout sourced directly from the shores of Rutland Water, strawberries from Manton and potatoes from Empingham.

Game, when in season, arrives courtesy of local shoots whilst vegetables are grown in the fields surrounding the restaurant and bread is freshly baked in house.

Menus change seasonally, and during our visit, first course highlights from the dinner menu included Rutland Trout served with an Avocado and Basil Parfait, and Buttered Asparagus with Poached Egg and Hollandaise Sauce.

Main courses include Pan Fried Sea Bass with Courgette Salad, Lemon and Sesame Dressing as featured on our opening spread. Other options include Burgundy Beef Pie slowly simmered in a red wine sauce with flaky pastry and onion gravy. A ‘flagship’ dish for two is the Chateaubriand with béarnaise and red wine jus.

Our dessert was a Brown Sugar Pavlova — with strawberries & honeycomb ice cream, the honey being produced adjacent to the company’s Toft House Golf Club. To accompany your meals is over 40 bins of wine, personally selected by Robert & Julia Reid and compiled in association with Bibendum.

“I think what we provide is comfort food.” says Robert. “That’s often a phrase associated with basic food, but it’s not the case here. We believe that food can still have flair and can show some imagination without being too fussy or pretentious. It can still provide true satisfaction.”

With a beautiful setting, local ingredients and all of the charm you’d expect from a traditional thatched country pub, The Jackson Stops is certainly atmospheric.

However, it also offers diners food that doesn’t disappoint, with robust menus of well-thought out dishes — and service to match. A great experience with great food, and a sincere recommendation for dining this summer. ■

Main: Fresh local strawberry Pavlova — strawberries from Manton — with clotted cream ice cream.





The Jackson Stops, Stretton, Rutland

Food: Traditional English cuisine with dinner and bar menus, plus additional 'bits and bobs' with bar favourites and snacks.

Environment: Grade II listed thatched country pub with traditional interior and four separate dining rooms for an intimate atmosphere.

Menus: À la carte menu for evening service including steak options; starters £7.45, main courses £15.45, desserts £6.95. Table d'hôte lunchtime menu; £12.95/two courses.

That's Interesting: The Jackson Stops should actually be called The White Horse Inn — but it was on the market for so long before its previous owner purchased it that it was renamed after its estate agent as a local in-joke!

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