

# ring out the bells



**Becky Sheaves** reviews the Five Bells in Clyst Hydon

One of my favourite restaurants hereabouts is The Jack in the Green at Rockbeare, just a few miles to the east of Exeter.

From the outside, it looks like an ordinary roadside pub. Step indoors, however, and you are transported into a world of impeccable service and serious food. It's got a well-deserved Michelin Bib Gourmand and is a regular on the Restaurant magazine top 100 list.

It gets my vote too. I've been to The Jack for birthdays, wedding anniversaries, wine tasting evenings and jolly get-togethers. My children, however, have never set foot in the place.

I love my family, of course. But when it comes to lashing out money on exquisite



**The Five Bells:** Main Road, Clyst Hydon, 01884 277288

**Food:** 9

**Atmosphere:** 10

**Service:** 9

**Price:** Mains around £12 to £15, puddings £5.50

plates of top-quality nosh – well, let's just say that my kids' idea of fine dining is more chips than cassoulet.

I learned that lesson the hard way when the waitress at Jamie Oliver's Fifteen Cornwall placed a dish of beautifully-presented (and very expensive) fresh fish in front of William. He burst into noisy tears: "I wanted fishfingers!"

So when I heard that the team at The Jack has taken on another pub, The Five Bells at Clyst Hydon, where the focus will be on classic pub food done well, I couldn't wait to check it out.

Off I went with husband John, my mum Sue, stepdaughter Philly and our two youngest Luke, 11, and William, eight.

When we arrived, the pub was looking beautifully spick and span. In fact, it is a prettier place than The Jack, with a charming thatched roof and small-paned windows,





all dating back to the 16th century. There's a smart new car park, the garden is bursting with flowers and our first impressions were certainly very positive. Inside, there were new floors, fresh paintwork and a general sense of major makeover. Our table was towards the back of the pub, near an impressive inglenook fireplace. We didn't have views over the gorgeous garden, but that was simply because the place was fully booked and we'd come at the last minute.

Chris Charles is running the Five Bells nowadays and this is very much his venture, after years of honing his customer service skills at The Jack. He's doing a great job, too - we ate superbly well, launching straight into mains so we'd all have room for dessert. I had broad bean, pea and mint risotto with added chicken (£13.45) which was a tasty plateful of fresh, summery goodness. Mum went for a risotto too - lightly curried smoked haddock, topped off with a perfectly-poached duck egg (£11.95). It possibly just edged my dish for sheer flavour, with the rich unctuousness of the egg yolk adding a sense of lavishness. Yum.

We were there on a Sunday, so Philly, John and William had the Sunday roast. This was everything it should be and more, with the slight exception that Will's gravy on his pork, although delicious, was a little on the cool side. A minor niggle. But then, we were here on the new management's very first opening weekend - how unfair to be reviewing it then, sorry!

A cheery note chalked up on the wall pointed out: "Please bear with us," and we were happy to do just that. John described his roast beef as 'sublime'. The mouthful I managed to pinch off him reminded me of how fabulous good beef really can be.

Luke ordered a child's beer-battered fish and chips (£6.95) with big hand-cut home-made chips, crisp batter and succulent fish. His only complaint was the portion size. It would have been fine for a younger child but for a hungry 11-year-old who plays rugby for Exeter Chiefs we should have gone for the

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adult's version (£13.50). Our mistake. The puds (all £5.50) lived up to the same standard, too. Mum and I had a gloriously smooth, citrusy lemon posset served in an elegant tall glass. Luke had a faultless (and pleasingly large) sticky toffee pudding, Philly loved her crème brulee and John tucked into a sizeable slab of pistachio cheesecake. William's chocolate tart was, like all the desserts, home-made and very good. Full marks. I have to add a line about the wines which were, perhaps predictably, excellent. After all Paul Parnell, who owns The Jack in the Green, really knows his stuff. We had a bottle of Montes Estate sauvignon blanc from Chile (£16.95) which was clean and fruity with a hint (but not too much of a hit) of passion fruit. I also rounded the evening off with a fragrant glass of Brown Brothers Orange Muscat and Flora pudding wine - one of my real indulgences. Gorgeous. I understand that the pretty little village of Clyst Hydon fought long and hard against proposals to close this wonderful pub and turn it into housing. The locals here must be absolutely ecstatic to see it alive and well, and in such capable hands. It's a bit of a drive from our house but well worth the journey. We will certainly be back before too long - kids and all.