

The Flavour Smith

www.theflavoursmith.co.uk

REVIEW



PICTURES: courtesy of Morag Macdonald



A magical mystery meal

The pop-up scene is thriving in Bristol. Empty shops have been occupied by temporary art galleries, while new businesses are taking advantage of short-term lets to test the market. And, thanks to the power of the internet and Twitter, perhaps the most fun is the rise and rise of the supper club, or pop-up restaurant.

A supper club can be a few people gathered in someone's home, whereas a pop-up restaurant can be anywhere, from a meadow or a boat, to a disused warehouse. The latest venture is by chef Tom Green, aka the Flavour Smith, who three years after being invited to host a pop-up, has succumbed, with delightful results.

Tom used to be a chef at the Riverstation but has lately been busy catering for private dinner parties and weddings. He is very discreet and will not betray any client confidentiality, but that doesn't stop people gossiping about some of the big names they've heard have enjoyed his stylish, seasonal British cuisine.

A Night with Flavour Smith was advertised through Twitter and by word of mouth. Tickets were on sale for £45 and all we knew was that we'd have a reception with canapés and British fizz, followed by a five course dinner, all in a medieval setting somewhere in central Bristol.

On the day of the dinner we were emailed our mystery destination – which turned out to be the 14th century St John the Baptist Church in Broad Street. I must admit I did have visions of plastic chairs, paper plates and a church hall tucked somewhere round the back of the altar.

It was altogether a far more impressive experience. Diners were greeted outside the ancient church door by a smartly dressed maitre d'. The interior of the simple nave was candlelit and the sound of gentle organ music lent a real sense of occasion as canapés and drinks were served.

On the dot of eight, Tom in his chef's whites, took to the pulpit to welcome his congregation. There was no electricity, he warned us, and no loos either. If we needed a comfort break the pub along the street had offered the use of their loos.

At this point we all trooped out of the church and round the corner into Nelson Street, past the graffiti and through a little door down into the medieval vaulted crypt. This was one of those 'wow!' moments, like walking into a film set. Long tables were laid with white cloths and dotted with tall candelabra, the lit

candles casting a romantic light around the medieval vaults. A harpist was playing as we found seats and set to reading the menu while sampling some very good purple beetroot and green-hued wild garlic bread.

It was a little odd to be sitting less than a foot away from the effigies of a long-dead Bristol merchant and his wife, with their ten children lined up on the side of their tomb, but I hope they didn't find the company disrespectful.

We had a full restaurant experience, with good service and great food. Wine is extra from the short but good wine list. We began with a small but exquisite terrine of chicken with wild garlic, followed by a smoked salmon mousse that packed a punch, served with peppery watercress and creamy quail's egg.

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Our main course was mutton and we all wondered how he had managed to cook it slowly and yet retain its tender pink interior. On the side was a small crusty pasty of pulled mutton, and a slice of potato, rosemary and onion cake. All very savoury and tasty.

Pudding was another seasonal dish of rhubarb with white chocolate and ginger. The grand finale was British cheese from Park Farm at Kelston, served with Miller's Damsels biscuits. By now we were all chatting merrily, like the best of dinner parties when you meet old friends and make new ones too.

If you missed that venture, don't worry, the Flavour Smith has more. As I write, a theatrical culinary partnership between The Raven and the Writing Desk and the Milk Thistle Hotel will see guests spirited away down the rabbit hole for a theatrical experience and a three course *Alice in Wonderland* themed feast, courtesy of the Flavour Smith himself, Tom Green.

The last of these three pop-ups is on 5 May – you may be lucky and grab a few remaining tickets, although I suspect they may be a sell-out. ■

GMC

DEARLY BELOVED: main picture, Tom Green, the Flavour Smith takes to the pulpit

Top right, guests enjoy dinner in the crypt of St John the Baptist Church

Bottom, a divine pudding of white chocolate and ginger