

# Get your just desserts

Olivia Abbott indulges a sweet tooth with an evening out at the Red Lion's pudding night

Are you one of those people who, when out for a meal, looks at the dessert menu first? Or who refuses a starter to save room for pudding? If so, the Red Lion at Hinxton's monthly pudding night will be heaven for you.

The format of the pudding night – you choose from a small 'specials' selection of starter and a light main course, before going on to all or any of six puddings on offer – has proved extremely popular.

'At first we thought we'd just try it for a few months,' says owner Alex Clarke, 'but from the start they seemed to just catch people's imagination and fly.'

## Join the club

It's been 18 months since the first pudding night and Alex has a core of regulars – 'there is a clubby atmosphere and the regulars do feel as if they're part of it' – as well as people who come for all sorts of different reasons.

'We have gardening clubs, women's clubs looking for something different to do - or staff outings might take a long table of 12. Then there are the couples,' Alex laughs. 'It's

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not all women you know – sometimes the husbands come kicking and screaming but they enjoy it a lot more than they anticipate.'

It could be the self-service nature of the presentation that works. You have your starter and main brought to your table by the waiting staff, then when you're ready, you go to collect your pudding(s) which are served buffet-style, by the pudding chef herself, Regan. You can get as many puddings as you like and you can keep coming back to try others – or for more of the same. People definitely have favourites, Regan explains.

'I do try to do something different every month,' she says, 'but this time I've got the amaretti and apple tart on again, because it's such a favourite.'

## Something savoury

But although the puddings are the stars of the show, the savoury courses are important too. 'If it was just about puddings I'm not sure people would come back,' says Alex. 'The starters and the mains are fun, too and it's a great opportunity for the chef to experiment. We'll try dishes we haven't tried before and see how they go down, and we might put them on the menu next month.'

Certainly, the starter and main that I had very nearly overshadowed the puddings altogether – I had local Bottisham River Farm Smoked Eel, followed by Scottish salmon fillets with crushed new potatoes, turned courgettes and honey cumin dressing. Both were gorgeous, and despite the claim to be 'light' left room for only three puddings – I tried the chocolate cheesecake brownie with blueberry cream, the famed amaretti and apple tart, and the cherry brulee, but couldn't bring myself to go back up to the table for more. Next time I'll eat less – if I can resist the temptation, that is. 🍷

● The next Red Lion pudding night is on May 15 and costs £23.95 per person including starter, main and six puddings, plus coffee. Visit [www.redlionhinxton.co.uk](http://www.redlionhinxton.co.uk) or call 01799 530601 to book.

