

Our food. Our passion. Easter ale festival.

Sometimes unpalatable facts slowly emerge and their speed of acceptance is slowed both by the truth being uncomfortable and the link being one which, though statistically significant, has plenty of anecdotal data that is at odds with the conclusion.

We all used to point to 95 year old Grandpa who was hardly seen without a Woodbine in his mouth and knew someone who knew someone who was flung clear from a car that caught fire and who would have been burned to a crisp had they been wearing a seat belt.

But eventually we had to face up to facts; smoking, on average, statistically, reduces life expectancy and seat belts save lives. Call it a nanny state or good government, but taxes and laws have made us smoke less and wear seatbelts more often and, guess what, related deaths have fallen sharply.



Chris & Tarah going through menus and prep

Now the same large long term studies that outed the weed are being applied to processed foods and consumption of processed foods is directly linked to cancer. One day we will know why; perhaps trans fats, high salt, nitrites or sugar are the culprit. Or the monosodium glutamate that reduces the need to create deep flavours. Someone, one day will find out but until they do we have to acknowledge the uncomfortable truth that cutting down on processed foods will help us live longer.

If you want to look at a compelling study see the work of Thibault Fiolet and others who looked at the diets and health of over 100,000 people over eight years and demonstrated that a 10% increase in the proportion of processed foods in someone's diet gave them a slightly greater than 10% increase in their likelihood of developing cancer. It's a big study and the results are significant and conclusive. What it doesn't attempt to do is say what it is in processed foods that does us all damage.

But we all lead busy lives, have little time to cook and buying prepped meals rather than baskets of ingredients reduces the time spent on the awful weekly supermarket run. So we are going to be the last people to lecture anyone on their diets.

But when you go out for a meal things are different, are they not? You have chosen to pay someone else to cook for you and they surely ought to have the time to buy the correct ingredients and cook them properly? We are not going to say anything negative about other places but we do want you to know that you can eat with a pretty clear health conscience at the Tap and Kitchen.



4th plate up and photograph of fresh pasta, butternut and spinach dish

We say that 'If We Can Make It, We Will' and that is pretty much the case. To enable us to do that we have a brigade of five full time chefs led by Head Chef Chris. We do all we can to source locally and the plates of food that come from the kitchen are pretty much made from scratch. By way of illustration we looked at our Valentine's Day menu and can report how it was cooked.

The oysters and scallops were delivered fresh from Colchester and Scotland respectively; the king prawns from a little further afield but the Bloody Mary sauce was prepped in the bar with the only bought in items being the Henderson's Relish (gluten free) and Tabasco (there is no substitute and we know it).

Spanish Yellowfin Tuna sashimi was served with a sauce created in the kitchen although we did incorporate fish sauce from Laos and Mirin from Japan.



Mondays in the kitchen always include new dishes, experiments, and cooking!!

As for the mains, the Beef Wellington was local Hereford beef combined with pâté made from chicken livers sourced from the same Norfolk producer as the chicken dish. The Pig and Scarf pork breast was smoked for five hours in the yard beside the kitchen and then slow roasted to maximise the flavour. But we did buy in one ingredient; black pudding for the bon bons. Blood is hard to buy and this is one thing that is best left to a specialist who has ready access to it.

The butternut squash was baked with pine nuts, rocket, pomegranate and maple syrup under a puff pastry crust. And, yes, we had bought in the pastry as it is something that is so time consuming to make and, frankly, machines create a more consistent result that we freeze until needed.

Puddings are where lots and lots of restaurants cheat. Ask your favourite ones to tell you, honestly, where they get theirs from. There is a factory in Bedford that makes puds for a surprisingly high percentage of all the restaurants in the UK and we often get sent catalogues from which we could choose frozen, oven ready puddings. A local restaurateur told us before we started that only the very mad made their own puddings and home-made ice-cream is the preserve of the financial lunatic.



Banoffee mille feuille, salted caramel and home made vanilla ice cream

Well, we don't think we are mad but we love our puddings and can't bring ourselves to cheat. Thus the strawberry shortcake, Chocolate Bailey's mousse and sticky toffee pudding served on Valentine's Day were all made from quality ingredients by Matt who is the chef who runs the pudding section.

Before you accuse us of being holier than thou, there are some foods that we make that some think may contain a health risk. Sausage meat has to have nitrite added to prevent any risk of botulism and smoked food is something your doctor would probably recommend you don't eat every day. But when you taste Ben's smoked meat the rich smoky flavour makes it all worthwhile. And the main reason why we want you to come to the Tap and Kitchen is the great food, service, wine and beer and a welcoming atmosphere.

We definitely don't want to be the sort of place where you come to be virtuous but on the other hand we don't want you to feel guilty either. However, we do want you to know that you are not getting factory made meals, frozen or vac packed, that are made to pared down recipes to hit margin targets.

We leave you with one question. Why do most of the lamb shanks you see on so many menus all look very similar? Could it be because they come from the same factory?



Gnocchi, swede and sage with an apple and rocket salad

This Easter weekend sees our third annual ale festival. Friday 30th March to Monday 1st April we have plenty of good food and drink, plus live music on the Saturday afternoon. Facebook and Instagram are the two best places to see updated event information.

Finally for late spring and throughout the summer we will be opening a bar on the terraces. This naturally takes a bit of pressure from the main bar inside and will serve us well in the gloriously sunny months ahead.

Best wishes, see you at the wharf.

TK