



Restaurant Profile

Shapwick House Hotel
Monks Drive, Shapwick, TA7 9NL
 ☎01458 210321
www.shapwick-house.com

Open:

The Abbot Restaurant is open Weds-Fri evenings, reservations essential.

The Monks Bar is open Thurs and Fri 7pm-10.30pm for drinks and bar meals.

Prices:

Starters from £3.95

Main courses from £9.50

Desserts £4.25

Wine from £12.95 per bottle

Shapwick House Hotel

Karen Daniel finds a perfectly formed dining room at the heart of this Tudor manor house

I've always favoured small, intimate restaurants. A place where you can stay all evening surrounded by real fires, candlelight, white linen napery and wickedly comfortable chairs, before cheerfully and tipsily paying up with the feeling that you have dined in an extension of a gentleman's oak-panelled house. But along came the era of 'new British' restaurants built like aircraft hangers, where you could more easily conduct a symphony orchestra than a discreet *affaire*, and I stopped eating out (well, *almost...*).

This month's visit to Shapwick House in the village of Shapwick took me back to those lovely, long-gone days. A rambling but beautifully proportioned Tudor manor set in the brand of countryside that ravishes the eye in an Andrew Davies adaptation of Jane Austen, it nonetheless features the kind of cosy and intimate dining room that Jane herself would have looked on with satisfaction.

While the structure itself was built in the late 15th century, it was in the 17th century that wealthy London lawyer Sir Henry Rolle of Shapwick – later Lord Chief Justice of the Commonwealth and Chancellor of the Exchequer – provided the impetus, and the cash, to transform the shell into a fashionable and beautiful manor house. And today it is the flair and imagination of executive chef David Courtney-Jones that is helping transform it into what he hopes will become one of the most outstanding restaurants in this part of Somerset.

His remarkable CV is one of the reasons why he is likely to achieve that objective. His introduction to catering came at 15 years of age via an apprenticeship as catering assistant on the Royal Research Ship *Discovery*, during its nine-month voyage to the South Pole. What started as a useful stopgap until he was old enough to become a merchant seaman became his life's work. On

that first voyage he learned patisserie, bakery, butchery, fishmongery – skills which helped him, later in his career, to become a qualified lecturer in hospitality and catering.

Since then he has created menus aboard luxury yachts during the Monaco Grand Prix, worked as head chef in a series of five star hotels and, via a series of television appearances in Wales, helped the Welsh Federation of Farmers rehabilitate the reputation of beef following the BSE crisis. Immediately before moving to Shapwick House he helped turn around the fortunes of the highly successful Home Farm Hotel near Honiton, Devon, and his arrival at Shapwick is now transforming the fortunes of this lovely place.

Already enjoying an enviable reputation among Shapwick locals is the Monks Bar. Open every Thursday and Friday evening from 7pm-10.30pm for drinks and bar meals, it features a magnificent inglenook fireplace and provides a peaceful and picturesque setting for light suppers or early dinners.

The Abbot Restaurant is where the main foodie action takes place and features food based on David's tried and trusted philosophy of simplicity allied to the freshest of local ingredients. His passion for well-hung, humanely and naturally reared beef and lamb is evident and an occasional special meat menu features anything from Aberdeen Angus fillet to Welsh black beef, Welsh salt-marsh lamb and Cornish T-bones.

Quality rather than quantity is the key here and no more than six or seven tables occupy the lovely dining room. A feeling of light and space is generously provided by the high ceiling and the uninterrupted view beyond the windows. Additionally – and this is the real icing on the cake – the prices are much more reasonable than you would expect in such elegant surroundings. □