

Under-Floor Eating

Or a series of reports on eating places
in the crypts of central London churches and other venues

Continuing this series, Neil and Marion Richardson, now in the company of Jill Marsh, visit the Crypt Cafe at Methodist Central Hall, close by Westminster Abbey to savour the Crypt Cafe and what it had to offer to the busy person seeking a lunch in an unusual place. We hope to report on 12 such venues during 2011.

1. Ambience



We went to this venue on Wednesday 5th January and arrived at 12.30pm. It was quiet and relaxed.

The ambience was definitely of an underground area, plain, functional, not really beautiful in any way, with yellow walls and a rather dull light. In the background, playing very quietly, was "Gabriel's Oboe" a beguiling tune by Ennio Morricone. The melody is part of a soundtrack from Roland Joffe's 1986 film "The Mission." Was there a joke here, I wondered?

Among the other diners were a couple of nuns, some strange middle-aged men who were

identically dressed and who looked like what imagine officers of the KGB, might look like, and a few odd foreign tourists.

2. Welcome

Everyone we met was warm and smiled at us, and we felt welcome immediately. As there were very few diners, we were probably doubly welcome! Here is a photograph of a young man walking among the tables, clearing up and his name was Das (pronounced Dash) from Bangladesh.



3. Service

As it was a quiet day, we were served immediately, without a wait. We selected pre-packaged sandwiches, but there was a small queue at the hot food counter.

4. Price

The egg mayonnaise sandwich cost £2.90 and the chicken, bacon and sweet corn £3.15. Tea was £1.60 and coffee £1.80. I had a bag of standard Walker's crisps at 77p and I drank a bottle of sparkling water at £1.50 and Marion a cup of tea. Our total bill was £9.92.

5. Comfort

There were hard plastic chairs where we sat, and Marion noted how easy these would be to clean. At the side there was a more cosy area with sofas and low tables. The cafe was warm, clean, neat and tidy.

6. Menu

The cafe has a very nice salad bar with attractive food on display. The prepared sandwiches were limited to three types. There were no wholemeal or baguette options. There is an obvious policy of attracting the attention of customers to the salad bar and the hot food, which looked very good. In addition, they were offering two more elaborate cold dishes, a bagel with salmon, cucumber and cream cheese and then

Mediterranean focaccine with roasted peppers and mozzarella cheese at £4.85. In addition, Jacket Potatoes with a selection of fillings cost £5.59.

7. Opening hours

Monday-Friday, from 8am to 4pm. Week-end and Bank holidays, 9am-4pm.

8. Food quality

The fresh sandwiches were unexciting but in decent condition, at the ordinary level, but what else is a sandwich! I now feel stuck in a rut! If I adventure into a different lunch menu, I will lose the ability to compare price and quality. Should have gone for the more exciting option in January.

9. Can we bring our own?

No, definitely not.

10. Accessible?

Yes, the entrance for those with mobility issues is close to the main entrance, which is up steps and then down steps. The access would be easily manageable by a solo person in a wheel-chair, using the lift to all levels.



11. Value added?

Close to Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. Central Hall itself is a building with many interesting features and a rather special place in history, being the venue for the first meeting of the United Nations in 1946. Neil also attended a conference here when he was 16 and became one of only 4 students to be chosen to address the full conference at a full plenary session in the main Central Hall! What memories came flooding back.

12. Toilet quality

No issues, no odours, good quality – even excellent.

13. How to get there?

Circle and District Line underground- either St. James' Park or Westminster.

Buses- 11, 24, 211, 148 pass the door.

Buses 3, 12, 53, 87, 88, 159, 453 stop nearby.

