

# 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, Jill Marsh and this time in the company of Emily Marsh and baby Scarlett, complete with pram to test the access issues, visit the Crypt Cafe at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Westminster close by Victoria station to savour the Crypt Cafe and what it had to offer to the busy person seeking a lunch in an unusual place. This is our 3rd report on 12 such venues during 2011.

## 1. Ambience



We were disappointed at Westminster Cathedral crypt cafe. It seemed to all of us to be dingy, with dirty yellow walls and dusty paper flowers on the tables. Our table had just been wiped and was wet.

The place spoke of amateurism and there wasn't one thing swish about the whole place. The dull lighting enhanced the down-at-heel feeling and there were lots of peeling notices on the walls including a strange one about people not forming a queue for the loo through the cafe. What were they supposed to do?

## 2. Welcome

There was no sign of a welcome. We were served by Randy (pictured) who spoke so quietly, we had to ask him to repeat himself.



## 3. Service

We were served immediately, and the atmosphere was languidly helpful, rather than enthusiastic.

## 4. Price

I bought a tuna and sweetcorn sandwich with salad for £2.80 and Marion ate a Cheese salad sandwich at £2.60. Jill and Emily had a jacket potato with cheese for £2.20. Tea was 70p and sparkling water 75p. They don't sell crisps at all. How odd!

## 5. Comfort

We sat in a set of table and four chairs built as one unit. Very unyielding and uncomfortable indeed.

## 6. Menu

There was a reasonable choice of menu ranging from soups, toast and butter to roast dinner at £5.75. We were disappointed that inexplicably, they had no salmon or ham on the menu that day.

## 7. Opening hours

Monday to Saturday 10am to 4pm. Sundays 10am to 3pm.

## 8. Food quality

Neil's sandwich was of a good quality and plenty of salad with it. Marion was also satisfied. The sandwiches were freshly made in sight of the cafe. Jill and Emily were not pleased. Their potatoes were obviously pre-cooked and then microwaved to serving temperature on request. The cheese was overcooked and burned on the bottom of their plates. The microwave effect was uneven and much of the dish was left on the table.

### 9. Can we bring our own?

Definitely not!

### 10. Accessible?

The Cathedral entrance is beautifully accessible, but from there on, if you are in search of the crypt cafe, it is a disaster. A difficult spiral staircase meant that we had to pick Scarlett out of her pram, carry her down and fold the pram for carrying as well. Impossible for anyone with mobility problems. The good news is that the Cathedral authorities are aware and they are currently fund-raising to overcome the problem as soon as possible.



### 11. Value added?

You are in a major cathedral, so please take advantage of the beauty of this unfinished building. The Cathedral was ready for use, although incomplete, in 1903. It is a dark, brooding interior, with flashes of gold and light, and then the inevitability of the dark brick cavernous roof space, seemingly eating up the light and joy emanating from the nave floor. One of the really good things is that the cathedral has a campanile tower with a viewing platform 273 feet over the sights of London, and, good news, it is easily accessed by a lift. The senior citizens paid £2.50 and the adults £5 each for the tower ascent.

There are theatres in the Victoria area and the bustle of the great rail terminal has its own charm, they say! But the area is also close to St. James' Park leading to Buckingham Palace and just up Victoria Street may be found Westminster Abbey, the Palace of Westminster and then the river.

### 12. Toilet quality

Marion reported no problems in the ladies. The gents is a single wc in a very narrow room. I was shocked when my arm brushed against the hand dryer and I got a shot of very hot air unexpectedly, twice. The odd thing is that the toilets are in a little area where the fire escape is also situated. This whole cafe needs a re-think and a re-furb to make it attractive to the general public.

### 13. How to get there?

Victoria (0.2 miles)  National Rail  Circle, District, Victoria - underground  
Buses 11, 24, 148, 507 and 211 stop immediately in front of the Cathedral Piazza

