

# Under-Floor Eating

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

Neil and Marion Richardson are joined by Abi Purkis, daughter of Susan Noble, the Edward Betham School Senior Administrator, and they visit the Crypt Cafe at the famous St. Martin-in-the Field Church in Trafalgar Square. We were there 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 5th report on 12 such venues during 2011

## 1. Ambience

We arrived at 12.30pm and found a busy, alive, bustling eating place, with lots of tourists. It felt like a large cafeteria designed for mass catering, despite being a crypt designed for burials! We thought that in general, the space was well used rather than being kept privately. The high level of ambient noise could have been made easier on the ear by rubber cups being placed on the chairs which were frequently scraped on the ground by diners. Abi liked the mixing of older and younger people mingling within a religious setting and engaging the country's cultural heritage. The upward lighting was easy on the eye and illuminated the vaulting well. Abi thought that the crowds of people coming in more than justified the £6 million recently spent on the church and environs, a fine fusion of ancient and modern.



Abi Purkis and Marion Richardson  
Note the posh new lift!

## 2. Welcome

There wasn't a particularly personal welcoming feeling. They all looked too busy to see us as individuals and were rushing to make sure customers had food as quickly as possible

## 3. Service

There is a mixed provision, with hot food being served over a server and help-yourself to sandwiches and drinks. We saw very little queuing and we were served quickly.

## 4. Price

Fish and Chips was £8.75, main meat dish was £8.25 and the main vegetarian dish £7.10. Crisps cost 90p and a small bottle of water £2.30. Soups were £3.90. Neil's sandwich was £3.95. Unfortunately, after having Jill paying the bill last month, I had to foot this one!

## 5. Comfort

A quick lunch was the longest you would want to sit on these chairs and at these tables.

## 6. Menu

There was an excellent selection of hot and cold dishes and it all appeared to be delicious and appetising.

## 7. Opening hours

Mondays and Tuesdays, 8am to 8pm. Wednesdays 8am to 11pm, but after 6.30pm, entrance only with a jazz ticket. Thursdays to Saturdays 8am to 9pm and Sundays 11am to 6pm.

## 8. Food quality

Neil couldn't find an egg sandwich and so opted for Tuna, red onion with bacon and cucumber. The addition of fresh basil made this a very good sandwich, in a granary bloomer but oddly, only 1 and a half rounds of bread. The filling was generous and tasty. Marion ate Leek and potato soup with a choice of roll. It was just about hot enough! Abi, seeking to remain within kosher regulations, chose Gnocchi with tomato and mushroom which she pronounced delicious.

## 9. Can we bring our own?

In the cafeteria, we spoke to Ladka, a Czech lady (pictured) who had been with the restaurant for 11 years and she said that the people in the foyer would allow you to eat a sandwich there, but when we asked they pointed out that the tables and chairs in the foyer were for brass rubbing. We guessed that if you just sat down and munched your own sarnie, nobody would notice, probably.



## 10. Accessible?

Totally. Part of the amazing £36 million was spent on a lift from street level.

## 11. Value added?



You are in a famous church, designed by James Gibbs in 1721, but also on foundations which go back to Roman times. Plenty of famous people are buried here, including Nell Gwynne. Within sight is Trafalgar Square, and Whitehall, leading down to the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey. Just opposite are the National Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery. In the crypt is an interesting exhibition about the recent works and most days you may attend concerts in the church, some free.

## 12. Toilet quality

The Ladies found the toilets to appear to be clean and new. The Men's had the same problem as anywhere with a urinal. Some always finds its way to the floor and the resultant smell is not an attraction. Surely, the days of urinals is well and truly over? However, even if everywhere had individual cubicles, some men will always wet the floor.

## 13. How to get there?

Embankment Tube, but look for the Trafalgar Square exit. Leicester Square is also close by. Walk down Charing Cross Road and on to St. Martin's Place.

Buses 3, 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 23, 24, 29, 53, 87, 88, 91, 139, 159, 176, 388 and 453 all pass close to Trafalgar Square.

