

Under-Floor Eating

Peter and I have had a drink, and sometimes a snack, many times in the Footstool Restaurant at St. John's, Smith Square but on our most recent visit we pushed the boat out and booked a table for a pre-concert dinner.

The name comes from the nickname of the church "Queen Anne's Footstool", so-called because of the towers at each corner. This eighteenth century was badly bombed in World War 2, but was restored as a concert hall, although the occasional church services are still held in it. It is a wonderful venue in which to listen to classical music.



Ambience

The bar and restaurant is busy before concerts but has a buzz of anticipation. It is not unusual to rub shoulders with some of the performers.

As well as admiring the brickwork and lime mortar of the arched space you can look at some interesting historical notes and photographs, including the night in 1928 when the body of Emmeline Pankhurst laid in the church before her funeral the next day.

Welcome

Staff at the entrance will check your booking if you have one or find you a table if you are dining. Otherwise there is a bar and a separate counter serving cakes, salads etc.

Service

The staff are pleasant and efficient. It is relaxing to know that they are aware you have to finish your meal in good time for the concert!

Prices

Not the cheapest but all good quality and well presented

Coffee £2.20 Cakes from £1.85 - £3.25 per slice

Lunch £5.00 - £8.25

Dinner c. £16-£18

Wine from £3.00 per glass – good selection

There is a 10% discount for Friends of St. John's, which also gives discounts on concert tickets.

Comfort

Although the long, low room is well filled, the table layout between the arches gives you reasonable privacy from other diners.

Most tables are for two or four but larger parties could be accommodated. If you have not booked a table for dining it can be difficult to find a seat and you may have to stand if you just have a drink. This can be a problem in the winter as it gets quite warm in the restaurant so you have coats and bags to manage as well.

Menu

Lunch Soup & bread
 Soup, bread, cheese & salad
 Hot dish eg. Mushroom risotto, Thai green curry or
 Salad eg. Chicken Caesar, Cold salmon

Opening hours

Weekdays from 10.30am for tea, coffee and cakes. Lunch from 12 -2.45 [table service or light buffet from the counter]

Concert days from 5.30pm [or one and a half hours before the performance on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays].

Food quality

Our dinner was very tasty – elegant rather than substantial but that is an advantage if you are going to be sitting through a concert.

The cakes are especially tempting.

Can we bring our own?

Not really especially as space is limited. We have had a picnic on the steps before going inside for a drink which works better when the weather is good!

Accessible

St John's has just completed its own Access Project with a new entrance and lift to make all levels of the building accessible and adapted toilets on the restaurant level. Previously access to all parts of the building was by steps, some of them very steep and winding, so this £1 million project is a major improvement.

Value added?

Mainly useful if you are attending a concert as there is not much else in the vicinity. Our alternative is Pizza Express in Victoria Street.

However it is just around the corner from Mother's Union shop and Church House for anyone visiting and also just a short walk along from Parliament Square which is not over endowed with facilities.

Toilet quality

The toilets have just been upgraded and are most acceptable.

How to get there

Nearest stations are Westminster or St.James's Park.

Frances Hounsell

