

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, accompanied by Malcolm Ede, went to the National Portrait Gallery where there is the underground Portrait Cafe. They were in search of what it had to offer to the busy person seeking a lunch in an unusual place. This is the 9th report on 12 such venues during 2011

1. Ambience

Busy, welcoming, friendly. The Cafe is under glass and this was a very hot and sunny day and we felt too hot and uncomfortable as the sun shone in our eyes.



2. Welcome

Helpful staff, one of whom helped Marion carry the food to our table.



Outside the NPG

3. Service

There was a queue as in the photo, and a sense of insufficient space, but this is also a sign of the

popularity of the Cafe and its good qualities. This is a picture of Isobel who was very helpful as well as very pretty!



4. Price

Soup was £4 and an egg and cress sandwich was £2.10, but they charged £6 in a bargain swoop! Pasta salad was £3.10, crisps came in a £1.30 with tea at £2.20 and water at £1.75.

5. Comfort

Padded seats but there are too many tables and insufficient space to feel comfortable. The tables are too small for more than two people, and we were three. The sun problem got worse and worse.

6. Menu

The menu consisted mainly of sandwiches and pastries, as far as I could see, but there was a good selection to choose from and it all looked very good and well-presented. There was a selection of filled baps at around £3.95, and you could choose Cheese, Tomato and mayo on crusty bread for £3.95 or Tuna and sweet corn with cheddar and mayo at £4.50. Tuna with sweet corn with cucumber and rocket in a bagel cost £3.10. There were some delicious-looking cakes costing £3.

7. Opening hours

7 days a week, opening from 10am to 5pm, with extended hours to 8pm on Thursdays and Fridays.

8. Food quality

Malcolm and I had Beetroot soup and we both agreed that it was excellent, in fact it tasted as good as home-made soup. Marion reported that her pasta salad was also very good. I had the same egg sarnie as usual (I wish I had started out more exotically) and it was OK, rather than good, but at £2.10, what do you expect. I was pleased to see the name of the person who made the sandwich on the packet alongside the time she had made it that morning. Good idea.

9. Can we bring our own?

Didn't bother to ask! The answer would have been NO!

10. Accessible?

There is big and modern lift which is very handy for the Cafe and is accessed at the entrance to the Cafe street level entrance. Very convenient.

11. Value added?

Well, just take your pick! You are sitting in one of the most interesting galleries in London and next door, there is the National Gallery. You are on the other side of the road to St. Martins-in-the-Fields and their lunch-time concerts. Then there is Trafalgar Square, with Whitehall and Parliament Square inviting you to explore. Leicester Square is nearby. It is all at the end of your nose. Whilst we were there, we visited the BP Portrait Award exhibition for 2011 and really enjoyed it, for free. Some brilliant paintings and excellent results. Art is alive and well!



Looking down into the Cafe from the street

12. Toilet quality

Oh dear! Some of the water taps were not working but in the gents, which is a part of the Gallery, not just the Cafe, there was urine all over the floor near the urinals and a blocked toilet. The Ladies was reported as in good condition. Our experience is building up to convince me that those old-fashioned urinals must soon go and become a thing of the past!

13. How to get there?

By Underground

The nearest Underground stations to the Gallery are: Charing Cross 230 yards, Leicester Square 195 yards, and Embankment 490 yards. Please note these stations do not have a lift.

By bus

Numerous buses pass by the Gallery, including: 3, 6, 12,13, 15, 23, 88, 139, 159, 453

