

# 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, went to the Regent Hall, a Salvation Army Citadel on Oxford Street, to have lunch at Cafe Renew. They were in search of what it had to offer to the busy person seeking a lunch in an unusual place. This is the 10th report on 12 such venues during 2011

## 1. Ambience

We arrived at 12.30pm after pushing our way along a very crowded Oxford Street through the hectic crush. It almost felt as though Christmas shopping was in progress. The Regent Hall felt similarly busy. We have to confess that the Regent Hall is not underground, but on street level. However, it feels as though the cafe is below ground because there are no windows and the lighting gives the effect of below ground. This is in strange contrast to the Salvation Army HQ (see Magna July 2011) where the walls are made of glass and give the feel of being at street level even if you are underground. There is a workaday and utilitarian feel to this venue, with cheap tables and chairs, no sense of style, but rather down-market, as cafes go. It was clean and easy to use.



## 2. Welcome

As usual, there isn't much of a welcome because everyone is so busy. Probably under-staffed if anything. Someone pushed in front of us in the queue, the staff didn't notice and he got served without a by-your-leave.

## 3. Service



It is very much a self-service ethos, but Elxhon, one of the staff (pictured) offered to carry our tray to our table, which was very helpful. Elxhon is from Albania and has worked in England for 12 years. There seemed to be two staff working in the kitchen but S.A. officers were around, helping generally and greeting people.

## 4. Price

Cheap! Marion had Quiche and salad at £3.50 and my egg and cress sandwich arrived at £2.70, but without the cress. Crisps were 45p (but they had no salt & vinegar, my favourite!) and sparkling water cost 80p.



## 5. Comfort

It wasn't comfy, but it was acceptable for a quick bite. The cafe encroaches on the corridor and almost to the street. In the corridor area were 3 or 4 comfortable chairs.

## 6. Menu

There were three sandwich options all under £3 and salads of cheese, ham, chicken or prawn at £3 or £3.50. Omelettes were again at £3 or £3.50 and jacket potatoes with various filling all came in at under £4. Soup of the day was £2.85. There were also various cakes and pastries – they don't interest me- but very reasonable prices indeed. If you are strapped for cash after spending all your dosh on Oxford Street, then this is the place!

## 7. Opening hours

Monday-Saturday from 9.30am to 4.00pm. On Sundays, the worship activities take pride of place.

## 8. Food quality

This is a no-frills establishment with a basic approach, for example, no garnish of any kind on my egg sarnie, but the quality is sound and we enjoyed what we had to eat. Not a lot felt it was made on the premises.

## 9. Can we bring our own?

This time, I asked. A resounding NO!

## 10. Accessible?

Street level, no steps and no difficult issues here.

## 11. Value added?

Well, we went on a Friday and after lunch, enjoyed a brilliant piano recital by a third year student at the Royal College of Music, Christopher Atkins. It was a thrilling performance of Mozart, Beethoven and Shostakovich. The pianistic skills on view were breath-taking, especially in one so young. His performance of Shostakovich's Prelude and Fugue 24 in D minor was stunning to hear and to watch. We sat where we could see his hands. Amazing! There are recitals every Friday at 1pm. That said, any day you will be in the heart of London, just yards from Oxford Circus, and if you look around, you will see one of the most popular tourist venues in the world- Central London! All the shops you could desire if you need retail-therapy.



## 12. Toilet quality

The sad and continuing tale of pools of urine in the Gents continued, I am sorry to report. That aside, the toilets were excellent, clean and looking new. The same problem could emerge as at the S.A. H.Q though. The hand-basin design is the same and if anyone has washed their hands and left the water in the basin, the next user would need to get their hands in the dirty water to release the plug.

## 13. How to get there?

275 Oxford Street  
W1C 2DJ

Oxford Circus on the Central Line is the closest underground and many bus routes travel along Oxford Street. Easy!

