

early March snowfall we were glad to get out of the night chill, warmed by welcoming smiles. We perused the menu and wine list while enjoying aperitifs and amuses-bouche on a comfortable sofa in front of a cheery fire in the soft-lit lounge.

The bright and airy light-walled dining room provided a striking contrast, though no less classy. Vanessa had a view of the dining room, which was virtually full on a Wednesday evening (perhaps Wednesday is the new Friday). My view was of an elegant floodlit courtyard. Mostly we only had eyes for the mouthwatering fare on our plates – and, of course, each other, so romantic was the ambience.

I started with the warm goat's cheese and tarragon tart which came with a rocket salad and with pickled ginger for added kick. Vanessa chose the sauté of chicken livers and smoked bacon enlivened by red wine and raspberry sauce and accompanied by olive bruchetta.

A grapefruit sorbet refreshed us for our mains. I chose the inventive venison suet pudding and marinated duck, which came with celeriac-and-smoked-bacon purée and a cherry tarragon sauce.

Vanessa went for the slow-cooked Morville beef with horseradish pomme anna and confit of shallot.

These came with a generous dish of fresh vegetables.

For dessert I had the lemon and clotted cream tart, with clotted cream ice-cream and toasted panettone. Vanessa chose the selection of British cheeses with biscuits and fruit, a platter which included Appleby's Cheshire, Shropshire Blue, Somerset Brie, Long Clawson Dairy Stilton from Melton Mowbray, Wrekin White and Newport, a locally made hard cheese.

Individual comment on any of these dishes would be a waste of words. They can all be summed up in one – superb. I could waffle on about texture and seasoning but what's the point? You're only really interested in the upshot and it is that there were no weak links. This was a seamlessly exquisite meal, cooked with skill and care, plated with panache and served with good-humoured efficiency. In fact there was a general air of bonhomie and an old-fashioned sense of hospitality about The Raven that was rather uplifting.

There was an excellent variety of wines from which we chose a Brown Brothers red that proved an ideal complement to our food. A splendid filter coffee and delicious ice-cream truffles rounded off our meal to perfection.

The bill came to just over £100 for two which I thought money well spent.

And so out into the night. It was dark and cold, though thankfully had stopped snowing. However, relief of the babysitter was our priority and so a tour of Much Wenlock and the birthplace of Dr William Penny Brookes will have to wait another day.

Since I share the good doctor's birthday perhaps we'll celebrate by returning to Much Wenlock where we can drink a toast to both of us . . . at The Raven, naturally.

**REVIEW: NEIL THOMAS**  
**PICTURES: RUSSELL DAVIES**



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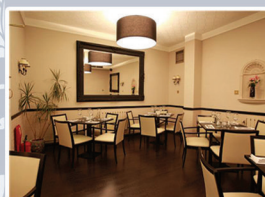
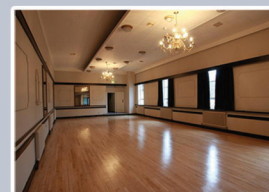
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