

## The Kentish Hare, a new gastro pub



**T**hreatened with demolition and redevelopment, the dilapidated Hare & Hounds – an Enterprise pub in the village of Bidborough, was given a new lease of life and in May 2015 re-opened as The Kentish Hare. After extensive refurbishment, new owners Sir Keith (of Olympic Committee fame) and Lady Mills, together with celebrity chefs, brothers Chris and James Tanner, have transformed the Victorian building into a stylish gastro pub.

Former Roux apprentices, the Tanner brothers made a name for themselves at Tanners, their restaurant in Plymouth, as well as their acclaimed Barbican Kitchen, housed in the famous Plymouth Gin distillery. Now they've waded into the world of gastro pubs and provide only guidance to head chef Bobby Brown who oversees The Kentish Hare's kitchen and menus. Chef Bobby gained notoriety at Gordon Ramsay's Bread Street Kitchen in London, then Age & Sons in Ramsgate.

The rustic pub features a hare theme and houses two bar/lounge areas – one dispensing local ales, while the main restaurant occupies a traditional vaulted conservatory. Throughout there's quirky wallpaper, exposed beams, wooden floors, leather armchairs, an inglenook fireplace and an open kitchen. It's a light and airy, with a wall of windows in the main restaurant which leads to a decked sun-trap patio. The décor, in hues of dove grey and pale olive, some exposed brick walls, others wood-clad and natural wood tables, is handpicked by Lady Mills, and lends itself to a relaxed yet contemporary ambiance.

Says Melyn Strange, General Manager: "After opening we almost immediately started to gain recognition for our efforts. Thus far we've notched up three prestigious awards, including a Michelin Good Pub Guide entry, a best newcomer commendation in the Top 50 Gastro Pubs in the UK (ranked at no. 33) and 2AA rosettes. We want to explore our potential and push forward to do more tasting weekends, where the chef speaks to diners about the locally sourced produce, the curing, the preparation and of course, the cooking. Often too we have a wine expert to hand, who speaks of pairing wines with menus. We also plan to further explore our cookery masterclasses – but due to space constraints, the numbers will need to be limited."



The food here is something special and this gastro pub, via their modern British menu, have taken full advantage of the abundant larder available to Kent – all of which is complemented by a specially selected range of superb fizz, wines, beers and spirits.

Starting with the artisan bread box served with marmite butter for nibbles, progressing to starters of West Country crab gratin with crostini and parmesan, served in a crab shell which rests on a bed of course sea salt; and goats cheese with salt baked celeriac, beetroot and seeded granola. For mains my lunch date and I selected pink roast duck breast, potato terrine, blackberry mustard, savoy cabbage and duck bacon; and seared stonebass with braised fennel, sea vegetables and fondant potato. There's a vegetarian menu too, plus a selection of five local cheese for a cheese plate – and should you have room for more, there's an assortment of side dishes complimenting the main course.

As most at Aspect County appreciate, I know my way around a dessert trolley – the menu for which was cunningly kept hidden until the end of the main meal. Had I known what was on offer I would have had seven courses – of dessert. How could you possibly choose between the sticky toffee pudding with muscovado caramel and vanilla ice-cream; or the salted peanut chocolate with chocolate ganache and milk sorbet? My lunch companion claimed the lemonade parfait served on chocolate soil and lemon verbena ice cream to be pure poetry. Then there's the vanilla bean crème brulee with cherry madeleine; and raspberry soufflé with chocolate sorbet I didn't get to sample. Thankfully, my choice (which I pained over) was the correct one – the Kentish strawberry cheesecake with strawberry sorbet. This has to be the best cheesecake I've ever had – and I've had a lot of cheesecake! It literally dissolves on the tongue, which is where my love affair with The Kentish Hare begins. **AC**

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To avoid disappointment, book a table online [www.thekentishhare.com](http://www.thekentishhare.com)