



Bodysgallen Hall in the snow

BLISSFUL BODYSGALLEN

Nestling on a hill minutes from the centre of Llandudno is Bodysgallen Hall, a country house hotel with history stretching back over 700 years.

Review by Louise Allen-Taylor

ENJOYING a coffee in the drawing room of Bodysgallen Hall, we gaze around at the dark wood panelling, the portraits of dour noblefolk and the Mostyn family's latin motto emblazoned over the fireplace, and we muse that others probably sat exactly where we are sitting in post-prandial contemplation more than 400 years ago.

Somehow, I doubt those far-off inhabitants of this grand house would have eaten quite so well as we have. A terrine of pressed ham hock came with a cranberry fritter and a smidgeon of feisty posh piccalilli. Our other starter was a chilled beetroot soup, vivid, sweet and viscous, with crème fraiche and orange oil.

For main courses one of us had melt-in-the-mouth Welsh lamb with hotpot potato and glazed spring onion, the other a butter-poached piece of

Conwy plaice with confit new potatoes, cauliflower purée and crunchy florets of broccoli.

Next came Bodysgallen's take on opera cake - white chocolate and orange mousse with almond sponge and coffee ice cream, while my companion enjoyed pears poached in red wine with cinnamon jelly and a pear soup.

In an age when every menu must use the phrase 'locally-sourced', Bodysgallen's head chef John Williams has the distinct advantage of cooking in the middle of a 200-acre estate. The beetroots in that soup, the pears in that dessert and, one assumes, much else besides had been grown just a short stroll from the kitchen door.

We had seen the evidence of that as we strolled through the gardens of Bodysgallen earlier. After marvelling at the well-clipped geometrical shapes

of the box hedges in the 17th century parterre, we found the business end of the garden, with onions laid out ready for the kitchen, apples ripening on the tree and plots made fallow, waiting for the next food crop to go in.

We are just two miles from the thrum of Llandudno, and the views from Bodysgallen are of Conwy castle and the Welsh mountains. We wander out of the formal gardens onto a forest trail which brings us 15 minutes later to a hill beside a limestone quarry which boasts yet more panoramic views, and also an obelisk - a latter-day folly erected in 1993 to commemorate the hall's renovation.

From this vantage point, only the rooftops of Bodysgallen Hall can be seen above the trees. But as we stroll back through the forest, and Bodysgallen reveals itself again, the hall and the guest cottages seem all of a perfect piece. The remarkable truth is that this glorious conglomeration is the product of construction spanning seven centuries. The first structure here - and still at the heart of the hotel - was a five-storey watch-tower built around 1250 to provide early warning of attack on Conwy castle. (Guests can request a visit to the top of the tower via a cramped spiral staircase. It's worth the climb!) Walk around the hall and you discover its piecemeal construction from the various date stones: 1620, 1765, 1894 and 1905.

By the 20th century, the hall was in decline. Sold by the Mostyns in 1969, it was a bed and breakfast for ten years and in 1980, Bodysgallen was bought by Historic House Hotels, now owned by the National

Trust. A spa and cottage accommodation sensitive to the ambience of the hall were added to give a grade 1 listed historic house also equal to the demands of the 21st century hospitality industry.

The Spa is another reason to visit. There's a large swimming pool as well as a sauna, whirlpool bath and steam rooms. Treatment rooms are dark and seem to be sound-proofed. I enjoyed a fabulous Darphin hydrating facial, which included a neck and foot massage. Bliss!

We return to the dining room for a second night. A

hunk of warm smoked salmon is served with a gingerbread crust and a wasabi mayonnaise. Another starter teams juicy little pork fillets with a tiny black pudding fritter. A main of wild Welsh bass comes with bar-beque aubergine and flavour-packed cherry tomatoes. But the stars of the meal are the desserts: a chocolate and orange bombe - orange sorbet wrapped in white chocolate - and 'tea and biscuits', a subtly delicious combination of Earl Grey tea pannacotta, marmalade ice cream and a honey madeleine. It's a sweet ending to a weekend in one of our favourite places. ♦

Bodysgallen Hall and Spa was recently declared winner of the North Wales Hospitality Award at Cheshire Life and Lancashire Life Food and Drink Awards 2015. Bodysgallen Hall is on The Royal Welsh Way, Llandudno, LL30 1RS, tel 01492 584466. Three-course dinner costs £49, two courses £39. For more details about dining at Bodysgallen, the spa or accommodation in the hall and cottages, visit www.bodysgallen.com.



Dressed for dinner: the dining room



Sorbet and berries dessert



Plaice dish from the menu