

The Oyster Shack

Located at Millard's Orchard between Aveton Gifford and St Anne's Chapel

The unique character of this seafood place invites fish lovers, like myself, back again and again. It is always a treat whether I eat inside on a chilly day or outside under cover on a warm day.

The theme is nautical. Overhead netting covers the ceiling and has seagulls, glass baubles, fish and crustations attached to it. Other artefacts include a fisherman's coat, a coil of rope and a wooden shelf that was once a box containing Avon oysters. There's an old scale that originally weighed mussels. Patterned oil cloths cover the tables. Some are in gingham, but others have a world map, or shellfish with T lights and all are in blue, white and orange colours.

That mix of white, orange and blue is used for the decor and also for the waiters' attire. I find the waiters gracious. Their friendliness contributes to the ambiance and embraces a respect for food from the sea.

We read what is in the day's catch from a display board. What the fishermen brought in that day is listed there. Lobsters, crabs, jumbo prawns are itemised and numbered so that diners can see what's available. On another board we are invited to a cookery demonstration. There will be music and community song. A sign that stands near an aquarium reads "Home is where the anchor drops."

Conversation comes easily here. We talk of many things with a feeling of good-will where we are assured of the "freshest locally sourced produce, cooked simply in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere." In this inviting environment, fine fish is beautifully presented.

"If you can't get good fish where the sea runs nearby, things have come to a pretty sad state," my companion remarks. The oysters are brought from Constantine, Cornwall where they go through a purification process to produce the oysters of high quality that are served at their tables.

The Oyster Shack was originally an oyster farm. Back then the same purification process was done in rows of tanks alongside the Avon River. It really was just a shack then and picnickers would pitch deckchairs in a peaceful river setting to buy and enjoy fresh oysters. That has changed, but what hasn't altered is the attention to atmosphere.

This licensed restaurant is closed in January, but is otherwise open 7 days a week. It serves wine from a range that's carefully selected to compliment your meal. You will eat in a sheltered position outside on sunny warm days, but indoors when it's not nice to eat out.

The fare is almost exclusively from the sea, but if you really want meat, there is something for you on the menu. Starters range from whitebait for which we paid £6.50, to one with mussels, bacon, leeks, cream & crusty bread for £8.95. Main courses are between £14 and £21.50 with vegetables on the side to add on. Desserts are upwards of £4.50. Ask about the Shack Set Lunch Menu. It offers 1 course for £10.00; 2 for £12.00 and 3 for £14.00.

The drive from Thurlestone is 5-6 miles via Avon Valley tidal road, but it is advisable to check on the state of the tide before setting out. Otherwise it's a longer journey via Ashford or Harraton Cross. Find out more by making a call to 01548 810876 or view on line:

www.oystershack.co.uk **For more local restaurants see also the directory of the South Hams Eating Out Guide 2014/15, a useful free handbook from S. Hams Newspapers**