

**THE TELEGRAPH ARTICLE – REVIEW ON SEBASTIANS HOTEL & RESTAURANT
WHICH APPEARED IN PAPER 8TH JUNE 2008**

Paddy Burt spends the night at Sebastians Hotel and Restaurant, a 16th-century lodging in Oswestry, Shropshire.

When I Google “Sebastians Restaurant” the list stretches from Burbank CA to Perth WA, but the one I’m interested in is in Oswestry, Shropshire, and it has rooms. I wonder what’s wrong with it when the man who answers the phone accepts my reservation without asking for any form of deposit.

Arriving in Oswestry, we find Sebastians at the end of a row of shops. It looks deserted. Going through the bar to a pretty courtyard, full of little tables, we find a small boy. “Is anyone around?” we ask. “Yes,” he says, before shouting: “Da-a-ad!”

A wiry man in chef’s whites appears. “You must be Sebastian,” I say, recognising him from the drawing on the website, although he has less hair. “Yes, that’s me, but my name is really Mark,” he replies.

Our car is in the street. “Drive up to the crossroads and turn left; you’ll see me waving at you,” he says. He beckons us into a parking area behind the courtyard.

Then he gallops up the stairs at the end of the courtyard with our bags, leading us into an attractive room with attic beams, a Victorian brass bed and a squashy sofa.

It’s a warm evening, so we decide to have a drink in the courtyard. After a few minutes, Mark appears alone, carrying a large fridge/freezer. After a failed attempt to push it through a window, he gets help and two of them carry it into the kitchen. In between times, he exchanges a few pleasantries, telling us that he has three children: “I think the youngest might be the next chef in the family.”

A waitress brings us the “Menu de Mai, 2008”, in French with English sub-titles. It is a set-price, five-course meal. Tonight’s diners are beginning to arrive. Then she brings a plate of delicious canapés. As we make our choices, we marvel at the collection of artwork — mostly French and food-themed — on the oak-panelled walls, including the cartoon drawing of Mark and Michelle, his wife, which is their logo.

Everybody’s first course is a powerfully flavoured green pea soup with pancetta. Then, for him, mushrooms sautéed in garlic, cream and Roquefort cheese — a delicious balance of flavours and the quantity is just right. Peppered tuna with tossed French leaves and a

caviar vinaigrette dressing for me — perfectly prepared and enough to be appetising without being filling. Then a sorbet, followed by fillet of cod on carrot purée with spring greens poached with vegetables.

My husband orders roast loin of lamb, pink, which is how it arrives — pink and perfect. Next, we are brought a tiny dish of vegetables each. Because the portion sizes are sensible, we actually look forward to puddings. As there is no more baked Alaska, I order the replacement, fresh fruit au gratin; my husband is enthusing about his rice pudding scented with wonderfully mysterious meadowsweet.

Back in our room, the entire bathroom, apart from the ceiling, is covered with pink mosaic tiles. We realise that the shower tray doubles as a bath. "I can imagine Cleopatra reclining in there," I say. "Yes, complete with hot and cold running ass's milk," suggests my husband.

At breakfast time, it's only us. Mark is there, bright as a button. He brings glasses of freshly squeezed orange juice and little dishes of fresh fruit. Porridge is on the menu, with golden syrup, in a jug. As well as perfectly cooked eggs and bacon, there are cereals, muesli, a basket of croissants and pastries as well as two types of toast and a selection of Sunday newspapers to choose from. What a wonderful breakfast.

Later, when we are ready to leave, Michelle appears. The indefatigable Mark is busily fixing a new fountain in the goldfish pond. She tells us that they have been running this place, first as a restaurant, for 19 years. And they are still running it with as much enthusiasm as they undoubtedly had on day one.