



GROWIT COOKIT

TERRY WALTON of Rhondda Allotments and Radio Two fame

NOT much to report on the allotments as the weather still plays a significant part in preventing me carrying out my daily visits. In the words of that famous carol it has been snow on snow and the allotments are well and truly buried under this crisp white sheet. This does not mean I have not visited on an occasional basis and you can see the plots used by the locals who travel on foot by the deep trails of footprints leading to their plot. It is at times like this I wished I lived within walking distance. Mind you, how anyone knows what plot is what under six inches of snow amazes me.

The café has been closed for more than two weeks now and this is the longest time it has been out of operation in 30 years. Albie must be getting old and the fact that he has had a very bad cold has not helped. So even when I get to the plot there is not the incentive of a steaming cup of coffee to entice me.

Despite the frozen entrance to the gate and the deep snow, some intrepid allotmenters carry out their duties diligently. Dave arrived the other morning with a load of manure in tubs and despite the difficult conditions still got this load to his plot. Is there nothing that will stop a determined plot holder?

I should now be liming my area of the plot where I am going to plant my cabbages this year. But with it already under a covering of white there is not much point. So as soon as one covering of white has disappeared then I will cover it again under a coat of lime. This however will not be as cold as its present covering but nevertheless doing as much good. These icy coverings are great for the soil as they help break it down into a fine tilth and hopefully freeze out some of the pests that are lurking over winter on the allotments.

The seed orders that were placed before Christmas have all arrived with our members and like me some of them must be champing at the bit to sow some early crops. These very arctic night-time temperatures make this impossible as they will not germinate despite a lamp burning non stop. It is best to wait a while and Mother Nature has the ability to bring the seasons back into check. If it lasts more than another week I may have to resort to having to butter up my wife to spare me a window sill in an empty bedroom. Above the radiator will make a great place to start a few seeds off. I think they will add character to that room and look more pleasing to the eye than that ornament that is sitting there. Such are the sacrifices of a keen gardener's wife.

Still, let's all enjoy the beauty of this pristine, white sight because it is not often in these mild winters that we get the chance to admire the real sight of winter.

Soon life will return to normal.

Good gardening.

Terry



Get the Star treatment



THOSE who remember Cardiff's Maindy Pub probably won't recognise what's happened at the converted Victorian pub on North Road.

After a takeover in September by the owners of two city centre nightclubs, it's now a smart and cozy boutique bar called The North Star, and it happens to serve some pretty tasty food too.

It wasn't an obvious choice to travel slightly off the track for a meal on a Wednesday night in Maindy, but it was closer than it seemed, just a few minutes away from town and a welcome change at a place you would probably miss if it hadn't come recommended.

The scruffy pub I remembered from my younger days has now been completely transformed; the pool table's gone for one, and there's a sophisticated feel to the place, with quirky artwork, large gilded frame mirrors, oversized lampshades, and occasional exposed brick.

It's all based on the decor at their contemporary warehouse-chic sister venue Mocka Lounge on Mill Lane (they also own St Mary Street's Crystal nightclub).

We also loved the trumpet light fittings suspended from the ceiling, plus it now has its own heated courtyard, but best of all, a brand new Italian kitchen.

Regulars who've been going there for years now drink alongside students and couples and, thanks to a competitive menu, its restaurant

makes it definitely worth staying longer.

Slightly separated from the bar and lounge areas by heavy velvet curtains, the dining area looked enticing with its low chandelier lighting and fresh white tablecloths and menus presented on trendy clipboards.

As for the food itself, it's all made fresh to order, and the wait was just long enough for us to be sure of that – and we found some lovely surprises. My Salsiccie Spinacci, Italian sausage, pan-fried with onion, garlic, chilli, white wine and fresh spinach, was full of flavour, and

an impressive

£3.90

from the

starters

menu, as were the dough balls (£2.90) which came with a moreish creamy cheese sauce.

For mains, I ordered from the specials menu which is updated every few days, and found the beef in the Spezzatino Di Manzo (£6.50) with linguine tender and the peppery sauce tasty. My friend chose an oven-baked pasta, the Penne Vegetarian al Forno (£7.50) which is available on a two-for-£13 deal. Both our main dishes came in decent-sized portions, with our only quibble being the size of the chunky chips (£1.50) we greedily ordered on the side. The waitress had recommended them and we thought it was a shame not to try them whether they complemented our meals or not, but while they were golden and crunchy they were a bit on the large side and more like wedges.

For dessert we shared a suitably creamy vanilla cheesecake, served deep in a large ramekin. All desserts are £3.95 but every Sunday they offer a 'guest' pudding for £3 – based on a recipe submitted by one of the locals. After our meal was we stayed to listen to the live music from an acoustic guitarist – a relaxing and expectation-defying evening out.

They also do breakfasts all-day on Saturdays, until noon on Sundays, and Sunday roasts.

■ The North Star, 131 North Road, Maindy, Cardiff CF14 3AE. Tel: 029 2062 1736.

The North Star

by Claire Rees

The bill

Starters

Salsiccie Spinacci, £3.90

Dough balls, £2.90

Mains

Spezzatino di Manzo, £6.50

Penne Vegetable Forno, £7.50

Chunky chips, £1.50

Dessert

Vanilla cheesecake, £3.95

Drinks

Three 250ml glasses of Pinot Grigio, £9

Total: £35.25.

READY, STEADY, SHEDDIE

with Andrew Wilcox

www.readersheds.co.uk

DO you want a shed on wheels? As you know I love a unique shed, be they pub sheds, office sheds or even a temple.

One of the nicest sheds you can buy is a hand-built shepherd's hut.

That's if you have the money, that is, as they start from around £6,000.

One of my sheddies, Richard King from Norfolk, on the other hand, restores unloved huts.

And his latest project, Kimberly, has a really interesting history.

"I have just finished putting her in running order over the last two years," he says.

"We got her from a real shepherd who moved up north and had to sell.

"The shed was used as a meeting point in the last war for the Home Guard.

"It has a clover leaf hole in the side which we think the shepherd may have popped his 12-

bore gum out of to bug the odd bunny for the pot.

"We have kept as much of the old wood cladding as we could.

"The stove now works again (called a Caledonian Dumpty No 2) and makes a mean pot of tea!"

So if you see one of these odd sheds on wheels out and about, stop and take a look.

It may have a very interesting tale to tell.