



# Eating, Drinking, Lodging

*The Crown Inn, Old Amersham*

The Crown has recently been re-launched as an updated coaching inn. Using locally sourced food, cooked simply. The buildings have been renovated in the spirit of English vernacular, using country materials such as oak, rush matting, and tweeds and furniture from English suppliers, including updated Windsor chairs from Ercol of High Wycombe. The inns are engagingly English, more down to earth than country house hotel, and each with its own special character like a family of individuals, as opposed to an identikit roll out.

Rosie Sykes has set up the kitchens here and at the Olde Bell Inn, Hurley which has been named as one of the Guardian's Top Ten UK food holidays: "Rosie is a cracking good cook and has brought this passion for local and seasonal to (her food. it) has about it a distinctive gastronomic intelligence and literacy." Matthew Fort, the Guardian's food critic.

This renewed identity of the inn is the work of Ilse Crawford and her company Studioilse, known for her ability to create an authentic sense of place and to breathe life into the buildings and to create a place that makes people feel good. The New York Times wrote recently, "Crawford strives to infuse design - in both the visible and physical sense - with what she calls emotional values. She's more focused on life rather than style...thinking about it from a human context, the primal perspective, the things that touch you"

Her starting point was to research the local area and history of the building to understand the context; from that, to tell the ongoing story of the people and the place, rather than impose a style; to express the soul of the building. The inn is not a hotel which turns its back onto the town, but where the common spaces are the heartbeat of the place, providing warmth for all. Somewhere for travellers as well as for locals and a stage for all manner of activities from amateur theatre, gambling, and music.

'The traveller arriving after dark would be able to find wine and warmth. Mine host's fires glowed and roared, his table was stocked with joints of equal size and succulence, his pewter sparkled and everybody seemed to be at the summit of health, heartiness and happiness.' 'Legacy of an England', Brian Cook.

It was customary to be able to order a musician or a wench. Wench's are off the menu these days but there are plans afoot to make a very English spin on music, a regular offer at the Crown.

The High Street, Old Amersham is lined with buildings dating from 16th century, once a bustling coaching town with over 10 coaching inns, half a dozen butchers and almost 10 greengrocers. Exactly a day's travel from London - 26 miles - it was an essential stop until the 1700s when the roads improved. The Amersham Society has done much to protect the character and heritage of the old town; to encourage the town as a living entity, rather than restricting it to a preservation of the past. They are also responsible for setting up the Amersham Museum (with a keenly tended medieval herb garden), which Studioilse found an invaluable resource. There is evidence of past local rural industries, building techniques and folklore. Amersham was celebrated for its black lace, straw plaiting and chairmaking, hence the use of locally made Ercol chairs.

The Crown is a typical coaching inn, with an archway set back from the road, under which the horses passed through to the cobbled courtyard behind. The main building has open fire and snug corners, with a large inglenook fire in the 'back room', which can be hired for feasts for up to forty people. Traces of its past life can be seen throughout the building. in the 'front room', the wall shows the remnants of a painted coat of arms of Queen Elizabeth - location for the Amersham Court of Petty Sessions during her reign. This coat of arms was badly damaged during the 1935 fire, although a full size replica now lives in the bar. The original hand painted wall (circa 1550) in bedroom 12 is one of the

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*The Times newspaper:*  
*Top Ten British Inns*  
*Harpers Bazaar:*  
*Top Ten Rural Retreats*

[www.coachinginn.co.uk](http://www.coachinginn.co.uk)



*'Local chairs, Local cheese'*



finest examples found today and registered at the British Museum.

Crown visitors can enjoy Rosie's spiced nuts or cheese straws at the bar with a pint of the Rebellion ale from the Marlow brewery, or a raspberry and fizz for £4.50. The menu covers breakfast: black pudding hash for £5.00 or jugged kipper for £4.60, day time grazing such as fruit cake and Cashel Blue for £4, smoked mackerel pate with pickled cucumber from £4.90, to

pheasant and mushroom pie with greens for £10.80 and poached pears and ginger bread for £4.80 or local cheeses with oat cakes and quince compote for £6.00. To take home, Rosie's book 'The Kitchen Revolution', Ebury, follows her love of seasonal and quality produce, celebrates the undervalued skills of 'housekeeping' and demonstrates how to put good food on the table everyday, economically, simply and deliciously.



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