



INNERPLACE

When dining, there are occasions that call for a modicum of ceremony, a soupcon of tradition, and in London, there happens to be an institution that has been serving it up in generously apportioned plates since 1742. Wiltons, on St James, boasts origins that predate the American Revolution by over thirty years. However, it is not through revolution but by a careful, thoughtful evolution that it has been able to become one of the oldest restaurants in the world.

We'd be remiss not to give at least a cursory description of Wiltons' rich history. The iconic restaurant borrows its name from its founder, one George William Wilton, who peddled bivalves from a cart in Haymarket, before operations were shifted to Trafalgar Square and eventually St James in 1840. In 1884, Wiltons received the Royal Warrant as a Purveyor of Oysters to Queen Victoria, and in 1942, as a bomb crashed into St James's Church on Piccadilly, Mr Olaf Hambro finished his meal and asked that the restaurant be added to his bill. It's been owned by the Hambro family ever since - who moved the restaurant to its current Jermyn Street site in 1984. If you'd like some more information on the history of Wiltons, feel free to take a look at this video.

As one would expect, the oyster receives pride of place here. Those who sit at the newly renovated bar will not only gourmandize on some of the largest, crispest molluscs in the land - they'll also have the opportunity to see them shucked by Oyster Man Sam Tansanguan, a World Champion Oyster Opener who has plied his trade with Wiltons for over three decades.

However, oysters can be divisive little creatures, and for those who prefer their dinner cooked, there is a glut of options to choose from. The oyster bar is without doubt a convivial environment, but when you really feel like pushing the boat out, opt for the starched formality of the dining room and ask if you can be seated in Barbara's section. Servers are dressed in matronly uniforms and referred to as "nannies", a tradition that harkens back to the era when the governess was an indispensable facet of the family. Barbara Kozłowska, head waitress (nanny), has been in the employ of Wiltons since 1991 and certainly has the people's touch. Wiltons has always been popular amongst prominent

politicians, business tycoons and film stars alike, and Barbara has always displayed an adept talent at making them comfortable, something that was no different during our visit.

The kitchens are helmed by Head Chef Daniel Kent, who excelled in the culinary arts whilst working at restaurants including Le Café Anglais, Skylon and The Wolseley. During our visit he produced perfect, infallible seafood dishes that made it distinctly clear why Wiltons has such longevity. For starters we opted for scallops with morels and asparagus. The opalescent shellfish was kissed with enough heat to form a buttery golden crust. It played well with the freshness of its seasonal accompaniments.

Both the oysters and the smoked salmon at Wiltons are unlike anything you've ever had. The oyster are shucked in a special manner, severing the adductor muscle whilst the oyster shell is still intact, which makes for a compact, structurally integral treat. The smoked salmon is cut from a large fillet with precision and one can choose from the product of three different smokehouses. The smoked Lincolnshire eel is also worth a mention, its flesh was silken and delicious. For mains, we opted to try the halibut. A large, impeccably grilled tranche of fish was brought to the table with a variety of accoutrements that we'd ordered, including a rich garden pea purée and a crisp potato Dauphinois.

The desserts at Wiltons are classically British and terrifically toothsome. The crème caramel with Sauternes jelly and golden raisins was sweet and sumptuous, but not overly so, while the Amadei chocolate fondant with salted caramel ice cream and hazelnuts would satisfy the most demanding palate. Throughout the meal, our dishes were complemented by astute choices from the head sommelier Enri Cesarato, and we were left with the overriding sensation of having been treated with an immense warmth, precision and familiarity.