



Pint to pint

Our guide to the best British pubs. This week: *City Tavern*, Newcastle upon Tyne

Although the City Tavern was built as a stables in 1872, it has been through many reincarnations over the past 140 years: office accommodation, Adams Garage, Carrick's Dairy and Tilley's Café.

Since 1971 it has been the City Tavern, but a refurbishment in 2014 has really transformed its appeal. Now the classic Tudor façade leads you into a series of multilevel rooms, outside terraces and staircases with glass chandeliers and bookcases – a cross between a medieval banqueting hall and Trinity College library, but somehow it works. Perching tables are made from beer barrels, and there is a long modern bar under stripped-back ceilings.

A deer's head stares at me from the wall, over an impressive collection of beer pumps. I order a pint of dry and spicy City Tavern Ale (4.1%), brewed with five malts and full-flower hops by Caledonian in Edinburgh. The air bubbles with lively Geordie banter.

As seems to be the norm everywhere in Newcastle, the staff are friendly and relaxed. The eight cask ales on offer include Hobgoblin (4.5%), Theakston's Bitter (3.8%), Deuchars (3.8%) and Three Hop Lager (4.5%). There are more than 60 gins, including one called Death's Door – you'd need to be brave to try that one – and a Northumbrian gin rejoicing

in the name of Steam Punk.

There are also dozens of whiskies and rums (one of the latter is called Pirates Grog), and an interesting cocktail menu.

Upstairs, beneath pictures on the bare brick wall of rather gentlemanly-looking foxes and rabbits a group of lecturers from nearby Northumbria University are sharing a drink or two; the talk is of real estate and farming.

One, who with his shock of wayward white hair bears more than a passing resemblance to Doc in *Back to the Future*, is explaining why climbing in the Lake District is better than cycling. His fit-looking colleague disagrees.

Bar bait, sandwiches and a daily menu are on offer until nine each evening. Fare such as a cheese on the ubiquitous plank with oatcakes and smoked bacon jam are tempting; but the Northumbrian beef in red wine gravy appeals more. Televisions with the sound turned down show old black-and-white films. Excellent – today it is Laurel and Hardy.

City Tavern prides itself on being dog friendly and has its own resident bar hounds – Alfie, Hector and Dillon – one of which is relaxing near the bar.

A really good pub in the shopping district of a city is a rare and wonderful thing to find and I count my blessings as I order another pint.

Ed Jowsey

10 Northumberland Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8JF (0191 232 1308); citytavern.co.uk

