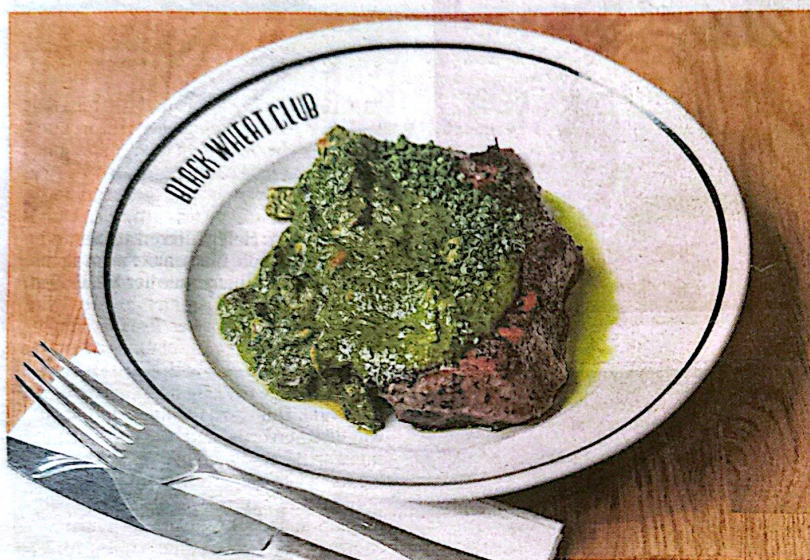


Joining the Club

The Black Wheat Club in York, run by a young Polish couple, has started to open for evening meals. Jill Turton went along and was full of praise for the food which comes with a Polish twist.



IF you are ever stuck for somewhere to eat in York, then head to Fossgate, the street that has become a hub for independent bars and restaurants. There is the Hop for pizza, Marzano Italian, Mumbai Lounge, the Polish Blue Bar-bakan and over the bridge into Walmgate, the French Chopping Block and York's favourite noisy Italian, Il Paradiso Del Cibo. The newest arrival at number 53, next to the Blue Bell Inn, reputedly the smallest pub in York, is the Black Wheat Club, and it's terrific.

Tomasz Mlynarski and Marta Obuchowska are the young Polish couple behind the enterprise.

They arrived here from France first with Krep, a crepe and galette van on Shambles Market then after some eight years they were ready for something more ambitious. In June this year, they opened the Black Wheat Club (from hereon in known as BWC), which they describe as a "modern European bistro".

I was in the queue for brunch on the opening day for galettes and creamy scrambled egg and bacon served with crusty sourdough made in their attic bakery by their talented baker Sam Battwood (soon to move on and be replaced by Chrysti Fragkoulaki).

Besides pastries, cardamom buns, lemon buns, sourdough loaves and tin loaves, there are morning buns filled with their marjoram-

flavoured sausage, fried egg, horseradish mayonnaise, parsley salsa, pickles and Cheddar sourced from the superb cheesemakers at Botton Village, the supported village community on the North York Moors.

If you've never had cashew cream, I can recommend this gentle, soothing sauce which is often a useful alternative to dairy for vegans. It's the base for a dish of braised cabbage and beetroot given a savoury crunch from sunflower seed, dukkah and swirl of chilli oil.

The BWC pay due respect to both vegetarians and vegans with plenty of VE and VG dishes on the menu, created by daytime chef Alex Grew and sous chef, the delightfully named Dignity Froud.

I was back at the BWC in June when they began opening for dinner, having secured Louis Gilroy as head chef. That's quite a signing. He's served time in the Tommy Banks stable of both Roots and the Black Swan at Oldstead and was their in-house forager. If you don't know the 'Flower Fella' look at his Instagram feed and at all the jars of pickles and ferments that line the shelves of the BWC.

In the evening (Thurs to Sun) the menu takes things up a notch with dishes to share. Starting at £12 for a generous plate of spicy sausages served with *ćwikła*, a Polish dish of earthy pickled beetroot with just a whisper of horseradish heat, then a dill and chervil pesto.

GRAIN STORE: Main picture, charred spring cabbage, turnip puree, Balkan salsa, fennel pickle and lemon verbena; above left, 12-hour pork steak, leek and lovage BBQ sauce, celeriac; below, burnt cheesecake with Krakow-style raisin sauce.

Even better is tender pierogi. Forget any thoughts of stodgy dumplings, these are featherlight, filled with cheese and potato, served in a moat of sage brown butter and finished with sour cream and crisp sage leaves. Just fabulous.

Larger dishes like their 12-hour pork steak at £19 is soft and tender, heaped with leek, lovage and celeriac.

I had to ask younger pals about the smash in a smashburger.

They patiently explained that the burger is flattened on a hot griddle using a heavy cast iron press, to create a crisp edge and a juicy interior.

There was talk of the Maillard reaction, amino acids and reducing sugars, but basically it is about browning the meat. This one is taken to the next level with Gilroy's rhubarb ketchup, black garlic mayo, salad, pickles and cheese, all stuffed into a BWC milk bun and delivered to the table wrapped in a paper parcel like a Maccy D, but so much better.

Celeriac, the ugly, knobbly root veg, comes into its own in Gilroy's hands.

Braised until very soft and tender, then sliced and served on a romesco sauce (yellow peppers, almonds, cheese) and finished with spicy dukkah. It's a brilliant fusion of flavours. Who knew celeriac could be this good?

Just two puddings and both terrific. If the

RATINGS

Welcome	5/5
Food	5/5
Atmosphere	5/5
Prices	5/5



bakery has leftover bread to use up then there can be no better way than bread and butter pudding. This one is outstanding, layers of good bread soaked in sweetened custard and served with a nutty brown butter ice cream.

Burnt cheesecake also known as Basque cheesecake is having a moment right now. It turns up everywhere. Here the balance between the mousse-like mix of cream cheese, eggs and cream and the burnished top, is spot

on. It's taken further with a sweet berry sauce poured over the top and allowed to drizzle down the sides. They call this Krakow-style raisin sauce.

There are several references to the owners' native Poland scattered across the menu, though they do not consider BWC a Polish restaurant.

Nevertheless, the name itself harks back to their roots, in which black wheat is another name for buckwheat, a grain much loved in Poland and something Marta and Tomasz remember from childhood.

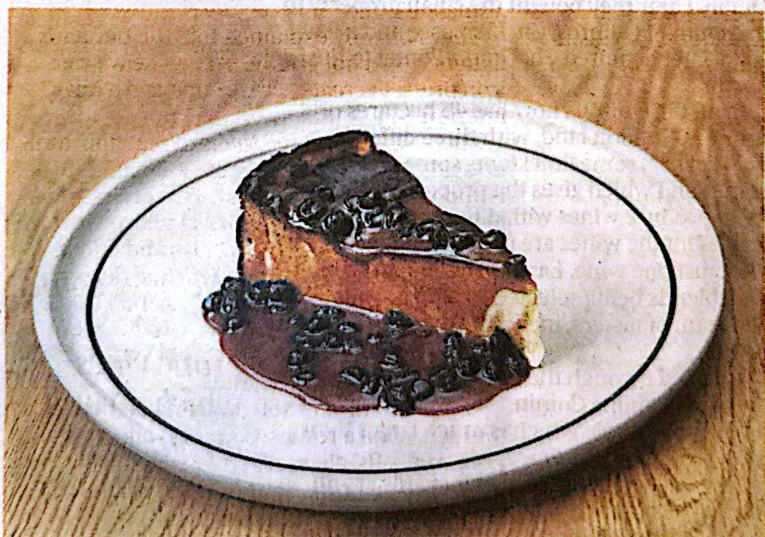
Besides buckwheat, there are the pickles, the ferments and the foraged foods – all part of Polish food culture just as cabbage, beetroot and celeriac are vegetables of the cold North.

Marta calls BWC a modern European bistro. Tomasz describes it as "nothing fancy, nothing overwhelming, nothing extravagant..." and it is all these things.

The blending of Polish, British and European food cultures matched with the skill and creativity of this young couple, chef Louis Gilroy and their talented bakers, makes for a new and exciting bistro for York.

Dinner for two £110 including wine and service.

The Black Wheat Club, 52 Fossgate, York YO1 9TF. www.blackwheatclub



JONATHAN GAWTHORPE