

London Broil *Simpson's-in-the-Strand is a carnivore's delight*

AT SIMPSON'S-IN-THE-STRAND, THE HIGH-POWERED red-meat dining emporium in London's West End, the obligatory portraits of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip hanging by the entrance flank that of a far more significant personage—Mr. Arthur C. Moss, the restaurant's longtime master cook. For years, Moss has done for cows, lambs, ducks and geese just what should be done for cows, lambs, ducks and geese, which is, despite the protests of animal-rights activists, to cook them to juicy perfection and serve them with roasted potatoes and Yorkshire pudding. In his portrait, Moss wears his toque as proudly as Her Majesty wears her crown.

And rightly so. If the English have made any contribution to the culinary arts (admittedly a dubious proposition), it lies in their admirable handling of a loin of beef. And nowhere in Christendom is a loin nearly so well handled as at Simpson's. The cows are raised in Aberdeen, Scotland, specifically for the restaurant, roasted in its enormous antique ovens and then carved in royal style at table-side.

My wife and I had a chance to sample Simpson's fare on a recent trip to London, and we were met, on this occasion, in the upstairs bar by the restaurant's assistant deputy manager, the rather plump Mr. Clivaz, who gave the place the historical run-through while we downed Harley Street beer from silver tankards. "It's like the Victoria and Albert here," said Mr. Clivaz, glancing at the oil portraits and memorabilia lining the walls. "Simpson's is a sort of museum of restaurants."

A Mr. Reiss opened the establishment as a chess club, in 1828, and for this reason, a horse's head (the knight in chess) continues to serve as the restaurant's ubiquitous emblem. (It may not be entirely coincidental that the horse is also about the only animal not consumed on the premises.) John Simpson, a caterer, became an owner, in 1848, and added hot food to the chess club's attractions. His specialty was roasted joints of meat, served off a wagon wheeled right up to the dining tables. He also gave the establishment its name.

We supped amid this history. The main dining room looks like a turn-of-the-century gentlemen's club, with mahogany walls, coffered ceilings and rows of Oxbridge types (all but two of them male), from law, politics and finance, satisfying their savage bloodlust. The original wagons are still in use, and the meat is still covered with the original shining silver lids, much dented now with use.

I selected the roast sirloin of beef, and my wife the saddle of lamb. The carver wheeled our selections to our table and sliced them with nearly Zenlike aplomb before our widened eyes. In twenty-two years in the business, our carver had never nicked himself—until the previous week, when a Merchant Ivory production crew had been in to film a scene from *Howard's End*, due out this spring. It was mortifying: The carver's first movie role, and he'd stuck himself.

Sliced so thin that it was nearly translucent, the beef was light and juicy and flavorful; it seemed to transcend the beef category

altogether and enter the realm of fine delicacies such as smoked Scottish salmon, beluga caviar and pâté de foie gras. I savored each mouthful as my cholesterol count rose heavenward. For dessert, I passed up the Spotted Dick, for obvious reasons, and tried Simpson's very popular treacle roll. I decided that it must be an acquired taste.

Mr. Clivaz sat with us a moment, before the cheese arrived, and, my head lightened by claret, I finally asked him the question I'd been pondering since we had arrived: Did he know about the *other* Simpsons? "Oh, yes, quite," he replied with a laugh. The TV show's producers had wanted to throw a party at the restaurant this past year for *The Simpsons'* debut on English television. "We all thought that was rather interesting," he went on. Then the restaurant managers viewed an episode and discovered that *those* Simpsons were, to use Mr. Clivaz's word, "horrid." On opening night, Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie dined elsewhere.

—JOHN SEDGWICK

