

WEEKENDERS

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HOTEL HIT SQUAD
FIONA DUNCAN

MEET THE TEAM
Fiona began writing about hotels nearly 30 years ago, when she launched the *Charming Small Hotels* guides. She has been reviewing hotels regularly for *The Telegraph* for the past 15 years.

In the food capital of the north, The Talbot has been transformed into the most deliciously stylish bolthole

Back in 2013 I reviewed The Talbot in Malton, close to the North York Moors, and I wasn't kind. The handsome 17th-century coaching inn overlooking the River Derwent had just been taken over by Sir Philip Naylor-Leyland, 4th Baronet and his son Tom and given a major revamp. Sir Philip is the owner of Fitzwilliam Estates, of which much of Malton, including The Talbot, forms a part. Tom will eventually inherit land in various parts of the country, but for now he is overseeing Fitzwilliam Malton Estate himself.

Originally built as a hunting lodge, The Talbot's lovely panelled double drawing room, with two log fires was, I wrote in 2013, "furnished with a sea of identical chairs and sofas and portraits that were, on second glance, photographic reproductions". As for the bedrooms that circle the gracious stairway, they were "full of dull brown reproduction furniture, straight from the catalogue... how they cry

out for a sympathetic touch - it wouldn't take much".

Another major revamp has just taken place. My friend Tiggy and I whizzed up to Malton on the train, me to see the hotel's changes, she to meet her friend, Malton resident Ava Easton. Shortly after arriving, and cooing over the warm, velvety, slightly boho surroundings in which we now found ourselves, we were ensconced in the bar with Ava, who sang the praises of both David Macdonald, the hotel's general manager, and Tom Naylor-Leyland. "He has done wonders for this town," she told us, "and now The Talbot is a great place for locals to come to."

Tom, who is married to the fashion blogger Alice Naylor-Leyland, has in the last decade - thanks to his love of all things culinary - passionately spearheaded the transformation of the sleepy market town into the "Food Capital of Yorkshire". Notable achievements are his hugely popular annual Food Lovers Festival, plus his monthly food market, Cookery School, and now Talbot Yard, a former coach house opposite the hotel recently converted into premises for artisan food producers. Toddle across the road and you'll find master pâtissier Florian Poirot and his macarons, a gin distillery, bakery, butcher, coffee roaster and Groovy Moo for authentic gelato. Tom also hosts an engrossing three-hour Malton Food Tour and has great plans to bring yet more local food makers (cheese, cider, a smoke house) into town, all with the purpose of allowing it to thrive.

And then there's The Talbot. "We got the first refurbishment wrong," he says candidly, "and so we've started again." Very sensibly, this time round,



Tom turned to Georgie and Sam Pearman, who created The Lucky Onion group of laid-back Cotswold hotels, notably the Wheatsheaf at Northleach, for Superdry founder Julian Dunkerton.

I loved them all - like Judy and Robin Hutson at the Pig Hotels, Georgie and Sam have a natural talent for making places look cool but comfortable, hip yet homely.

With a limited budget but deft touches - such as painting a four-poster bed, removing the valences from the old fashioned but very pretty floral curtains, adding a velvet button-back sofa here, a charming

fabric lampshade there - they have humanised the bedrooms (many of them beautifully shaped, with original features) and given them the eclectic personality that they so sorely lacked.

It's the same downstairs. That elegant drawing room is now a lovely place to while away time, perhaps best described as rustic-indulgent, with engaging pictures on the walls, velvet wing armchairs and low sofas.

The restaurant now has a wooden floor, country tables, pretty china and cutlery and an informal feel for its (given that Malton is a food capital) locally sourced menu, prepared with care. For dinner, Tiggy tucked into steamed and creamed Whitby cockles and sea bream; I had scallops and black pudding followed by chicken with spring vegetables and pistou.

We were the last to leave the dining room. Thanks to a nice piece of serendipity, our newfound fondness for The Talbot had gone deeper than just its looks. Some years ago, Tiggy lost her 17-year old son to encephalitis. Since then, she and her husband Rob have raised a very great deal of money for the Encephalitis Society. The reason she came with me to The Talbot was to visit the Malton-based charity and its brilliant chief executive - Ava Easton. What we didn't know until our stay was that The Talbot is an enthusiastic supporter of the Encephalitis Society and Tom is a generous patron. Talk about crying out for a sympathetic touch: The Talbot has delivered, and not just in terms of its decoration.

Doubles from £100 B&B (wheelchair access possible). Encephalitis Society: encephalitis.info

THE TALBOT
MALTON

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Natalie Millar-Partridge, *Telegraph Travel* writer, says: "This cool and contemporary adults-only spa hotel offers incredible sea views, an innovative cocktail menu and wonderfully fresh seafood caught on Cornish shores. Soak up the relaxed ocean-inspired interiors that channel a chilled beach vibe to a backdrop of surf and sand."