



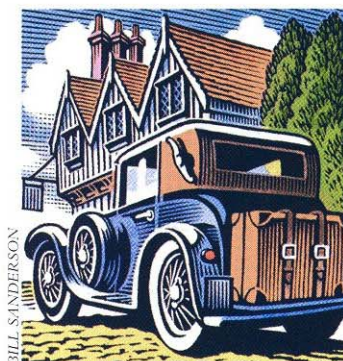
THE LAMB

MARY MIERS enjoys the timeless pleasures of a historic coaching inn in Wiltshire

WAKING early to the clang of heavy metal, I watched a tumble of fat barrels being rolled across the pavement beneath my bedroom window. The Lamb's weekly beer delivery made for an unexpected wake-up call, but I found it infinitely preferable to the usual clamour of traffic and annoying ringtones (no mobiles here: they do not work). It reminded me that I had spent the night in a genuine village pub, and that Hindon's broad High Street—surely one of the handsomest in the West Country—is a place where the rhythms of traditional rural life go on.

In fact, the Lamb is more than just a pub: it is the 'famous posting-house of the great old days', described by W. H. Hudson in *A Shepherd's Life*, and still a favourite stopping-off place for travellers on the London-to-Exeter road. Of late it has undergone something of a revival under the ownership of Ranald Macdonald of the London restaurant Boisdale, who has preserved the atmosphere of an old-fashioned inn while introducing standards of accommodation and food to satisfy the most sophisticated traveller. Turning a country hostelry into a gastro pub without destroying its unpretentious character or killing off local competition is a difficult challenge, but Mr Macdonald seems to have struck the balance right.

His recent interventions have been deferential to the Lamb's greater heritage, and he understands the importance of using local suppliers and allowing a regional menu to evolve. Nevertheless, local produce is supplemented with the best



Scottish game and fish and, as you might expect from Boisdale, there is an excellent cellar and humidor, and the bar's shelves now glint with the largest range of malt whiskies in the South West.

With parts dating back to the 17th century and plenty of rustic Georgian detail, the Lamb forms a picturesque landmark at the top of the High Street. Inside are numerous candlelit sitting areas, each warmed by an open fire, so that what is actually quite a large, rambling plan (there are 14 en-suite bedrooms upstairs) feels cosy and intimate. The warm Boisdale livery of red and green works well with the exposed beams and panelling and the eclectic mix of pictures and furnishings, mostly acquired from local salerooms.

A spirited game of shove ha'penny—the ideal way to round off a fireside supper before bed—caused the only audible disturbance the evening I stayed there. Oh, and the church bells, which rang out at dusk through the 13th-century village 'rustic and pretty amidst its green, swelling downs, with great woods crowning the heights beyond'.

The Lamb, Hindon, Wiltshire (www.lambathindon.co.uk; 01747 820573). Bed and breakfast from £65 for a single room.