



## Manchester Confidential

28<sup>th</sup> June 2010

The bouncer came flying through the window backwards, shards of glass shattering across the tiled reception floor of what was the Reform restaurant, now Room. Gordo was speechless. The manageress wasn't.

"Gordo, I never, ever want to see you in here again, nor that complete mentalist sales manager of yours. Ever. F\*\*\*ing EVER. Do you understand me?"

That was the first time Gordo had heard her swear.

Still, it's not often you see one of the handiest of the Salford boys picked up and thrown clean through a plate glass window. Certainly not by a middle class blond lad from Northampton who looked like he would be far more comfortable playing cricket. Gordo was gobsmacked. The bouncer was clean out.

It was 1999 and the firm's Christmas party; Gordo had taken the team into the bar at Reform, after a good lunch in Tinsel Town.

This was his company, Mintball.com, one of the coolest in town, building and managing web sites for people as diverse as the New York Police Department and Tony Wilson's Music33.com, the precursor of iTunes. The collective IQ of the thirty lunatics on display that day was up in the heavens, as long as you excluded Gordo and Alastair Wildman, the sales manager.

The manageress had asked Gordo to clear the lot out of the bar, mainly because the lads, nearly all geeks from the Computer Building at Manchester University were reacting badly to being stood next to women for the first time in their lives. They all thought girls like these only existed on the airbrushed centre pages of the glossy mags they bought for the toilets. One of the lads didn't understand the etiquette and had to be restrained from committing a trouser error.

With everyone out of the door Gordo was standing in the reception trying to placate Emily the manageress. He was muttering platitudes. "They aren't normally like this." "They wouldn't hurt a fly." "I am pretty sure that John was only straightening out his undies"



“John”, replies Emily, with steel in her voice, “had already straightened himself out Gordo, and I don’t think he was wearing any underpants.”

It was at that point the bouncer made his unexpected entrance and crash-landed. Alastair stuck his head through the window, took one look at Emily and did a runner, leaving Gordo to be ushered away by the officers of the fast response unit a few minutes later.

These days the building is little changed.

It’s at the top of King Street and stands opposite the old Midland bank, like a hooker standing face to face with a prop forward. The restaurant is on the first floor, easily the best space in town in which to house a restaurant. The refurbishment back in the late nineties was handled by the excellent Bernard Carroll and, although the place has failed twice, the current ownership have moved in three or four years ago and have attracted a good looking, late twenties to early thirties crowd. Not too WAG-ish, more behind the TV than on it.

The reception downstairs is always manned by a pretty girl and a doorman whose intellect runs rather deeper than you would think. He is always reading.

Gordo, leaving early one evening said sarcastically. “What are you reading there Squire, Homer?”

“Nope, Proust,” came the reply. To Gordo’s embarrassment he truthfully was.

Moving up the spiral staircase takes you to a bar where you can get some great cocktails as well as foreign (boo) beers and a good selection of wines. You can hang around in here for as long as you want. The magnificent bar unit splits the room 30:70 between bar and restaurant. The music is a bit too lively for Gordo, but lively enough for the crowd that keeps the place profitable.

Gordo was led to a table on the far side of the room by a cheery, good looking girl and handed the menus. He had brought his best friend of thirty five years, Yousaf Mehnga.

The menu is eclectic, well thought out modern British with small incursions of flavours from other continents. The menu itself describes the dishes in a manner that can be either irritating or fun, depending on your personal view. They rarely arrive as you would have imagined them, but in Gordo’s past experience they have never been unwelcome surprises. If you are unsure ask the staff to explain; they are all great ambassadors for the cuisine along with being highly efficient, knowledgeable and fun.



Nibbles: Cashew nuts (£3) were 'cured' in an Indian salt, with spice and heat used in a very curious way that renders the nuts on the chewy side. Warm sourdough bread (£2.50) arrives with a highly individual 'balsamic butter' which was butter with the addition of balsamic; a little bit of tart magic there folks.

The nuts gave an indication of the influence of 'Raj' influences. Gordo had ordered kedgeree (£6.00); this arrived on a slate (don't like slates fellers, very '08) as three well formed fish cakes of nice and spicy kedgeree, with a sliver of naturally smoked haddock; these were sat on a puree on top of which was a half a quail's egg with a gooey yolk. Bright as a button this lot.

Yousaf chose what turned out to be the complete, in every sense, stunner; prawn and crab cocktail, sliced Whitby crab, tomato jelly (£7.50). Check out the picture folks, it tasted even better. The prawns were in the lightest tempura batter, guarding moist creamy crab of a lightness of being that would have floated off the plate if it hadn't been battered down. Big clean flavours all presented as a work of art.

Steak and oyster pudding, oxtail and crunchy oyster (£17.50), had a small beautifully formed silky, shiny pudding encasing the stewed oxtail meat, well seasoned; the fried oyster sat on top. Off to the right we had a steak, cooked medium rare, sat on a mound of greens, scattered with young shelled broad beans, the whole having been draped in a shiny taste splattered jus made with reduced stock. The only thing this dish needed was a pot of the same - the pudding could be thought a touch dry, but that's a northern thing.

Tikka masala, sea bass, lentil dhal and coconut (£14.50) was a fillet, fried crispy on the skin side with masala spices, draped across the lentils. Yousaf, something of a pro at this spicing had asked for the coconut broth on the side, just in case; it didn't matter, it all matched perfectly.

Puddings were toffee apple, cinnamon cappuccino and Granny Smith's (£5.50) and burnt English cream, white chocolate, pistachio (£5.50) both competing with each other for our affections. These are handled by the kitchen with great tenderness, the flavours being kept apart but moulding together well. They were outstanding - with the brilliant melon-ball sized toffee apple nothing short of divine.

The wine list is useful. The Bishops Leap Sauvignon Blanc (£24, £6 by the glass) is a great example, with the Chapel Down 'Flint Dry' (£27.50) an interesting lad if you want to see how the English wines are coming along (this one was from Kent). Rioja Crianza Ondarre was Gordo's choice, (£26, £6.50 by the glass).



They have a list called The Perfect 10 if you wish to go upmarket. However, ask what vintages they are; unless that Montrachet 1er Cru 'Les Chevenotes' (£90) has a good bit of age on it, there is no point. If it has, it will be divine.

Gordo has eaten in this room many times, under many chefs and is glad that he's now allowed back in. This brigade is the best ever in Room, as is the menu. Something for everyone here folks; choose, sit back and enjoy the ride. Just keep away from the windows if Alistair Wildman is knocking about.

<b>Rating:</b>	16.75/20
<b>Breakdown:</b>	8/10 food 4.25/5 service 4.5/5 ambience
<b>Address:</b>	<b>Room Restaurant</b> 81 King Street Manchester M2 4AH 0161 839 2005

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Venues are rated against the best examples of their kind: fine dining against the best fine dining, cafes against the best cafes. Following on from this the scores represent: 1-5 saw your leg off and eat it, 6-9 get a DVD, 10-11 if you must, 12-13 if you're passing, 14-15 worth a trip, 16-17 very good, 17-18 exceptional, 19 pure quality, 20 perfect. More than 20: Gordo gets carried away