

AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE

In Bury St Edmunds, expect a heavenly environment for the kids and a cosy, friendly hotel with delicious local fare

HOTEL REVIEW

THE ANGEL HOTEL
3 Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds,
Suffolk

NICK CURTIS

THE Angel Hotel won me over to Bury St Edmunds. My only previous, brief and unhappy visit to the Suffolk city 20 years ago was spent picking blood-stained shards of glass out of my Datsun's front seat after my windscreen imploded on the way home from university in Norwich. Friends made encouraging noises before my nervous return. "Bury's lovely," said one, "and it's retained some industry, so it also feels like a proper town." "The Angel's a gorgeous building," said another. "Nick Cave used to write songs there."

Sure enough, after two hours on a National Express train, we fetched up in front of the Angel's handsome, Georgian façade. The hotel is massive (it won the 2008 award for "best large hotel in Suffolk") and is undergoing gradual renovation. The public spaces and many of the rooms have been stylishly modernised (although the art and the armchairs are boilerplate "boutique" and self-consciously quirky) while yet-to-be refurbished rooms are let at lower rates. The staff are absurdly young but able, and gave us the warmest welcome I've had in this country.

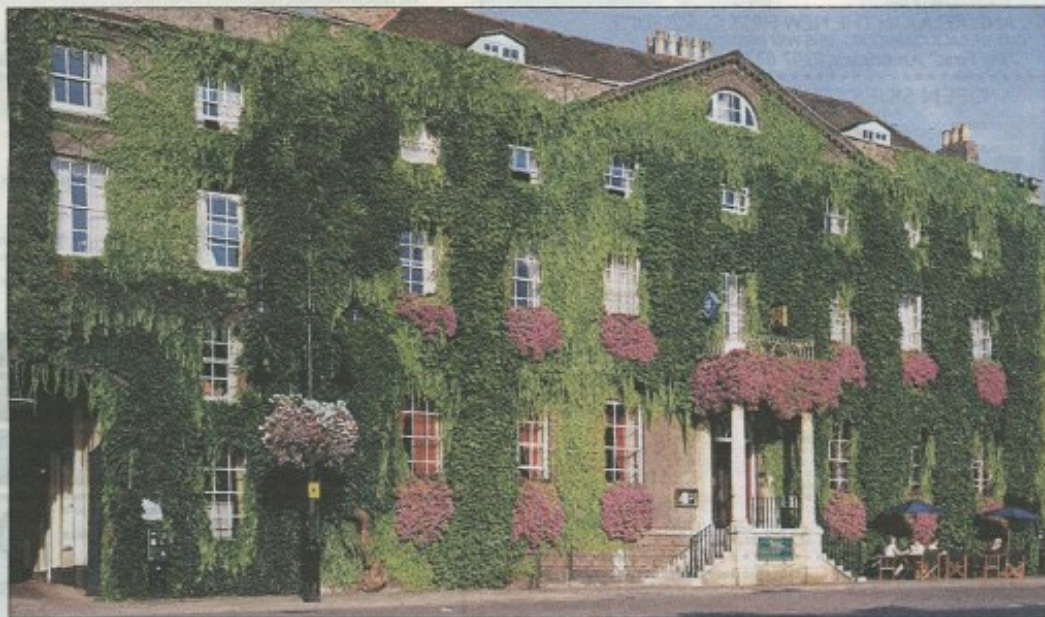
"This is my favourite room," said the receptionist, opening the door to our suite. No wonder. It was vast, with a small balcony above the hotel's front

'For those with access to a car, the absurdly pretty Tudor town of Lavenham is nearby'

door, flanked by vintage RAC and AA signs, and overlooking the city's magnificent Abbey Gate and the classically inspired Assembly Rooms. The room and bathroom had been sympathetically and simply upgraded. There's Freeview on the telly, no minibar, nothing too flash and fancy. Perfect for what we all must call "the current climate".

After a glass of champagne, from a choice of four no less, by the open fire in the lobby, it was time to explore the town. "Turn left, then left again, and you're in the market square," said the same sparky receptionist, "and that's pretty much all of Bury." Right again. The still largely-Georgian town centre is compact, with industrial hulks including the Greene King brewery looming in the distance. But it packs a lot in.

There's a proper market overlooked by the Moyses's Hall Museum, housed in a stately Norman building, which gives



Picture perfect: The Angel's impressive frontage



Snug and stylish: the rooms (below) have been simply and sympathetically upgraded – nothing too flash or fancy

a succinct history of the city. There are two cinemas, the lovely Theatre Royal, and a wealth of independent shops, as well as outposts of Christie's and Bonhams. We had a quick drink in the smallest pub in Bury, The Nutshell, just big enough for six and papered with currency from around the world, bought a quarter of chocolate bonbons from Auntie Pam's sweet shop and lunch at a nearby deli. There were kids everywhere. Bury seems safe enough for children to play out on the streets. Certainly, it lacks the air of despondent aggression among teenagers that curses so many provincial towns.

Indeed, the older youth seemed happy to spend their Saturday loafing around St Edmundsbury Cathedral, and the giant ruins and gardens of the old Abbey. Smashed during the dissolution of the monasteries, the Abbey was dedicated to the Christian martyr St

Edmund, shot to death with arrows by Vikings when he refused to convert. A river runs through this tranquil district, and the grounds contain an aviary of colourful birds. Back at the hotel, we drifted off into an afternoon nap.

That evening, we had a drink in the Angel's bar, which has been simply done over in dark wood with clean lines, then hit the restaurant, which has been given the unlovely name of the Eaterie. Here were a couple of disappointments. More of that "kooky" art and furniture and intrusive canned music. But the room is full and friendly, and serves local produce, imaginatively but not fussily presented. My starter of Blytheburn pork belly with pan-fried squid and chilli dressing was an inspired combination of texture and flavour, and plates of pan-roasted seabass and medallions of monkfish were both huge and cooked to a turn. The sommelier, who looked

too young to drink, brought us a bottle of 2007 Pouilly Fumé Masson-Bondelet, warning us it might not be cold enough. We demurred. But he was right.

It's quiet overnight in Bury so we slept very well, and, still gluttoned from the night before, enjoyed a simple breakfast in our room, watching people stroll through the Abbey Gate, and listening to the bells of St Mary's Church next to the cathedral. After that, we had another wander through the Abbey grounds, and down some back alleys stuffed with even more foursquare Georgian buildings. For those with access to a car, the absurdly pretty Tudor town of Lavenham is nearby, as is Ickworth House, the ancestral home of the Hervey family. Southwold and Aldeburgh are reachable. So is Norwich, as I know to my cost.

But as we headed off to the train, feeling refreshed and laden with papers, I

realised that memories of broken glass and the wind whipping through my suddenly open-air Datsun had vanished entirely. Well done, Bury St Edmunds. Bless you, Angel.

WAY TO GO

THE ANGEL HOTEL
3 Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds,
Suffolk, IP33 1LT (01284 714000,
www.theangel.co.uk). Standard
doubles from £90 to £150 B&B, suites
from £150 to £220 B&B.

There's a special Dine and Recline package on offer to Evening Standard readers until the end of June: spend £55 or more in the Angel's Eaterie and get four-star accommodation from only £70 per room, including a traditional Suffolk breakfast. This offer represents a saving of £56pp and is available on Fridays and Sundays only.

Relax, with a sun lounger, a cocktail and ATOL protection.

Turkey from £289
7 nights 5* All Inclusive in June

Egypt from £379
7 nights 5* All Inclusive in June



teletextholidays.co.uk
Freeview 101 & Sky 672

Relax it's
teletext
HOLIDAYS