

An Independent analysis of a Pork Pie for the Pork Pie Appreciation Society second report.

Producer: Castlegate Farm Shop, Stoney Middleton, Derbyshire.

Castlegate Farm Shop is a tiny butcher's outlet in the pretty village of Stony Middleton, which is situated in the Peak District some five miles north of Bakewell.

We have to come clean here, after an exhaustive search; this is our preferred supplier of pork pies within easy striking distance Sheffield and has been of consistently high quality for many years.

The Bakewell area has a cluster of quality pork pie makers, quite distinct from the pies of Melton Mowbray or those of West Yorkshire (The Growler), but they combine some features of both these types. In this sense, they are a 'cross-over' variety and well worth seeking out. The pies from Castlegate are properly 'gravied' after baking; something that we have noticed is less prevalent the further south you travel. On the day of baking they can be collected warm and eaten immediately, a fine experience with a view of the hills on a day's walking.



The sample pies were collected late on a Saturday morning in mid-January (Figure 1). Nicely wrapped in plain white paper bags and with a lovely witness of the hot water crust on the base, these pies feel firm and stout. No refrigeration for these pies, just the right temperature.

And so to the evaluation.....The standard pie is "The One Pound Pie" though larger, special occasion pies can be made to order (oval or heart shaped for that special person in your life).

The side and base are smooth and straight, obviously supported when baked and with a

beautiful nut brown, well baked colour (see Figure 2). If we were being hypercritical, it could be said that the final finish re: glazing etc. is not as refined as some examples but the overall look is well cooked and stylishly made. The lid is the giveaway that this is an artisan pie, handmade, hand fitted and decorated, with well-honed skill confirming that this is not a mass produced, factory pie.



Figure 2 Just the feel is enough to know this is a sturdy pie. The surprise is that a relatively thin crust encases and protects the filling. You can tell as soon as you take a good knife to the crust that it is cooked to perfection. There is just the right amount of resistance and crunch as the knife cuts through to the filling, leaving a good clean cut.

The filling is generous uncured pork with the makers secret spicing and is so generous that some would wish for slightly more room for the jelly, or gravy depending on your vernacular. Certainly the visible gravy between the case and the filling in our pair was a little on the light side, but the meat is nicely moist and shows signs of the gravy having penetrated within the filling, a clever trick if it was intended. The meat consisted of moist cubes of minced and chopped pork of various sizes, giving the filling a 'marbled' appearance (Figure 3) and offering up a fine, porky smell with subtle spices. The colour of the meat is greyish pink, suggesting that while there is no cured meat added, the salt/spice content has provided some 'curing' during the making. The gravy itself is tasty and adds to the flavour of the pie.



Figure 3 The first bite confirms that the gravy had penetrated the filling and overall the pie had a lovely moist meaty taste with a good 'bite' texture. The pastry is one of the finest examples of the Hot Water Crust we have tasted and compliments the meaty filling perfectly. It is crisp but not crumbly, thin yet sturdy, with a fine well baked flavour. The filling is properly porky with a good mix of lean and fat. The spicing delivers evidence of Mace and a little pepper, but the proportions and any other spices are as ever a secret of the maker.

These pies, as with all good pork pies are particularly fine at Christmas time. This year in the week up to Christmas this tiny village shop sold around 1000 pies. Pass by the shop day and night that week and the wonderful smell of freshly baked pies filled the air. During the rest of the year, we advise buying on Wednesdays through Saturday as this is when pies are freshly baked, but remember that the shop closes from mid-day on a Saturday. Understandably it is orders only in the run up to the festive season.

Finally, Frank, our resident pie hound of some discernment, is wont to become misty eyed when in the presence of these pies (Figure 4), he clearly knows that sharing is caring!

Figure 4 Overall score: Appearance : 7/10, flavour: 8/10 for meat, 8/10 for gravy, 10/10 pastry, general 8/10. Grand score overall: 82%



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