

Enjoying the reflections of an ex-Mirror man

Former 'red top' editor Bill Hagerty joins our reviewer for an alfresco lunch at The Waterway in Maida Vale on a glorious summer afternoon

» A funny thing happened to me on my way to The Waterway: I ran slap bang into the owner, Mitch Tillman. Not too surprising really – he has a couple of restaurants quite nearby – but what I wanted to know was this: had he hailed me in the street because he knew I was on my way to lunching in one of them? Because although I never warn a place I'm coming, I tend to book in my own name ... so just maybe, two and two had been deftly put together. As it turned out, not. In fact, he said to me this: "Are you free at the moment? It's such a lovely day, maybe you'd like to have lunch with me at The Waterway?" I hedged. I politely declined. He pressed his case. I hummed, and then I went in for a fair bit of hawing. Eventually I told him that this was exactly where I was currently headed ... and he was genuinely amazed: and you can tell it, genuine amazement, when you see it. So I left him there – covered in genuine amazement – having made him promise not to now phone the restaurant and tip them off.

Friendliness

And when I arrived at this very lovely spot by a canal in Maida Vale, I did wonder. The welcome was terrific – all abundant smiles, courtesy and solitude. But then I looked about me – everybody was being greeted in exactly the same way. The friendliness and efficiency of the service here is very good indeed. So, a pleasant shaded table on the terrace. There are two of these, conjoined – one for diners, one for drinkers – while the interior is deceptively huge and rather welcoming, with a decent loungey bit to the side, nicely plump with Eames-y chairs and cubic leather sofas.

My guest was Fleet Street tabloid legend Bill Hagerty. In his time he has been deputy editor of both the *Daily* and *Sunday Mirror*, and edited *The People*. It was he, in-



■ Joseph Connolly with Fleet Street tabloid legend Bill Hagerty

Picture: Polly Hancock

deed, who first coined the term 'red top', in order to distinguish such papers from the likes of the *Mail* and *Express*. He is currently chairman of the *British Journalism Review* (having just stepped down as editor) and continues to review the theatre regularly, along with his beloved jazz. He has published several books, was the editor of the *Alastair Campbell diaries* ... and oh look! Here he comes now! Over here, Bill! Welcome, let's have a drink.

They're good on drink, with a long, varied and reasonably priced wine list, along with summery jugs of things. 'Celery Martini' is one of them: Tanqueray gin, Cointreau, passion fruit and 'muddled celery'. Yes well – after a jugful of that lot, I can hardly think that the celery would be alone. I had a glass of champagne (which might have been colder) and Bill went for a Beck's. The sun had got his hat on, the towpath was peaceful, the canal just glinted – while the terrace was packed with happy eaters. Service,

though, was swift – and I don't actually think our waitress could have stopped all her beaming even if she had been paid to: she truly appeared to be having a whale of a time. So: meze for Bill – all the usual Greek stuff that I just can't stand – hummus, taramasalata, stuffed vine leaves, bankruptcy. My Spanish charcu-

made a funny noise. "Oh God," he moaned. "I hate this phone. I don't understand it. It's a cheap little thing. I had a wonderful smartphone, but I lost it down the lavatory. Too boring to go into details. So I replaced it with a better one, but that got smashed in the washing machine."

The thing on the menu

The sun had got his hat on, the towpath was peaceful, the canal just glinted – while the terrace was packed with happy eaters.

terie was pretty nice – the ham considerably better than the chorizo, which was rather too fatty. Olives, fine – and a chunk of Spanish Manchego cheese, which is a bit like extremely young Parmesan, and not too much of anything, frankly. At which point Bill's phone

that was calling out to him was honey marinated Barnsley lamb chop: good tough-guy grub, that sounded – even if the John Wayne macho spirit was slightly blunted by the accompanying sun-dried tomato and basil couscous. "I interviewed him," said Bill.

"Who, Bill? You interviewed who?" "One of the best things I've done. Twice. I interviewed him twice." "And who would that be, Bill?" "John Wayne! A hero. First thing he said to me was 'Do you drink tequila, son?' I said I did. The rest of the day was a bit of a blur. Trevor McDonald asked me once who was the greatest person I had ever interviewed, and I told him. John Wayne. Twice. He told me he had interviewed the Pope. I said so what? I've interviewed John Wayne. Twice."

I was toying with the 'Waterway Burger', simply because by calling it that, they seemed to be quite proud of it, but I've been let down by burgers a lot just lately, and I really didn't want a disappointment to mess up this rather glorious afternoon. There was also a chicken burger, which I asked about. Turns out not to be a burger at all, but a grilled breast, somewhat superfluously stuck into a bun. Well I had that – and the chicken was a dream: utterly tender and juicy flavoursome. Chips

not bad: I left the bun. Bill's Barnsley chop made up for in spread what it lacked in girth. It did look slightly overdone to me, but he loved it. And the Côtés du Rhône was a good match for us both.

Great job

Bill's background is in line with many Fleet Street veterans: "I left school when I was 16. Hopeless at everything except English. My first job was on the *Sunday Citizen*, writing about pop music. There were a few of us doing that at the time: Ray Connolly, Maureen Cleave, Virginia Ironside. I liked that job. Another great job came along about 100 years later, for *Hello!* I did what you do." "What I do? What I do? Oh Jesus – what do I do, Bill?" "Review restaurants." Ah, I said: got you.

As some tables on this delightful terrace emptied, they were immediately taken by further influxes of hungry punters: quite clearly, the word is out about this Maida Vale gem. The puddings looked tempting (spiced rice pudding with roasted peaches, for a start) ... but charcuterie, meze, meat – it all does fill you up. So we contented ourselves with sipping in the sun. Which prompted me to remark that it was a shame that the weather over the jubilee weekend was not as lovely as this. "Yes well," concluded Bill philosophically, "into each reign some life must fall..."

■ All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.

FACTFILE

- **THE WATERWAY**
54 Formosa Street, W9
Tel: 020 7266 3557
- Open Monday-Friday noon-11pm, Saturday 10.30am-11pm, Sunday 11am-10.30pm.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆ (on a sunny day)
- Cost: About £80 for two-course meal for two with wine.

mycityway LONDON 24
Get our FREE app for great places to eat

help grant the wishes of seriously ill children

oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5.
In a bowl, mix the flour, baking soda and salt.
In another bowl, beat the butter, sugar, brown sugar and vanilla extract until creamy. Beat in the eggs. Gently stir in the flour mixture. Stir in the chocolate chips.
Split the dough into two

halves, rolling each out into sausage shapes, approximately 5cm in diameter. Wrap them in cling film and transfer to the fridge until ready to use.

When you are ready to bake the cookies, simply cut the log into slices 2cm thick and lay on a baking tray, widely spaced apart and decorate with the

Smarties. Bake for nine to 11 minutes.

Other local celebs whose dishes appear in the book include Gwyneth Paltrow with her chicken Milanese, Daisy Lowe's sweet potato shepherd's pie and Lisa Snowdon's turkey chilli. It can be ordered for £20 from www.raysofsunshine.org.uk.



■ Belsize Park actress Helena Bonham Carter has donated her recipe for Smartie Cookies to help raise money for the charity Rays of Sunshine