

FLEDGLING BUSINESS: Blackpool hotelier Claire Smith

Picture: MIKE FOSTER

Quirky hotel flies the flag for resort

By **CRAIG FLEMING**
Tourism Writer

BLACKPOOL'S "quirky" hotel has done it again – flying the flag for the resort in *The Good Hotel Guide 2006*.

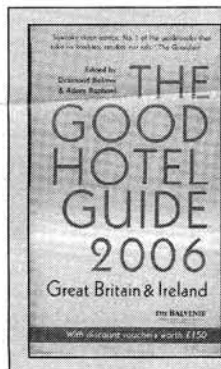
Raffles, in central Blackpool, is lauded for the sixth year running, described as being "quirky, friendly and offering superb value for money".

But it is the only full entry in the guide for the Fylde coast now that another regular – The Old Coach House in South Shore – has been dropped after several years.

Claire and Mark Smith, who sold The Old Coach House to create a smaller boutique hotel, make a back of the book appearance with their fledgling business, also in South Shore, Number One in St Lukes Road.

Completing the Fylde line-up is the Clifton Arms, Lytham, which also has a "shortlist" entry at the back, described as "Paul Caddy's traditional seafront hotel opposite Lytham Green".

Raffles, on Hornby Road, is owned and run by partners Ian Balmforth and Graham Poole,



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Answer the following question and ring 0901 890 6002 with your name, address, telephone number and answer.

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QUESTION: What is the name of the

road on which you can find Raffles?

Don't worry if you are not a winner – the publishers are offering the guide, which costs £16.99 in the shops, for £14.50 which includes postage and packing. Quote reference Blackpool Gazette when you order by hitting www.goodhotelguide.com, emailing Goodhotel@aol.com, writing to The Good Hotel Guide, 50 Addison Avenue, London W11 4QP, or phoning/faxing (0207) 602 4182.

who are described as "amazingly cheery, helpful hosts" at their small, flower-fronted bay-windowed hotel.

Anonymous inspectors praised their down-to-earth service and upmarket furnishings, particularly in the two new suites Venetian and Colonial, with breakfast well cooked and well presented.

Quality

Mr Poole said today: "We are thrilled to be in the guide again. We don't mind being called quirky as it is a nice little term which we can agree with and to which we would add honest, fun and clean.

"Raffles is completely full for the Conservative conference and over the last few days we have

been trying to find other hotels of similar quality to ours that we can recommend."

Meanwhile, Mark and Claire Smith's new three-bedroomed hotel, where smoking is banned, is hailed as "a stylish new B&B in a period house on regenerated South Shore".

Guests enjoy a generous breakfast or room service Champagne hamper with rooms having city chic trappings such as plasma TVs and DVD player.

Desmond Balmer, guide co-ordinator, said: "It used to be quite embarrassing that Blackpool never got a mention in the guide, but that has all changed with Raffles, which has now been in for several years.

"The guide is independent and

ruthlessly honest and the policy of refusing payment and not accepting hospitality or advertising from hotels guarantees forthright descriptions based on anonymous inspections and readers' reports.

"It is nice to have style, one that goes with the personality of the owner, and that is what we are looking for in our entries.

"The Smiths are no stranger to the guide, having been there with a previous business.

"We only came across their new venture Number One quite recently but we hope that it will be there in the main guide next year."

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