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Back of the net for ex Newport County man Hamer as he opens gastro pub in his home town

FORMER Newport County apprentice Richard Hamer is hoping for a good result from his latest business venture in South Wales.

The Newport haulage firm boss, universally known by his nickname Rioch after the former Aston Villa and Derby County player Bruce, has opened a gastro pub in his home town.

Richard has ploughed what he says is a 'substantial amount of money' into transforming the former Rock and Fountain Pub and Riverside Restaurant, at Woodfieldside, Blackwood, into Bistro 8.

Richard, who represented Wales at junior level and played football alongside County greats John Aldridge and Tommy Tynan, has taken out a lease on the building.

He said: "The name of the new place is because of three coincidences. My daughter Lisa was both on the eighth, this is the eighth pub I have opened and I played at number eight for Wales at junior level in my first appearance which was against Northern Ireland.

“I live locally so I’ve known the pub all my life. In fact it was the first pub that I had a drink in, illegally mind, when I was sixteen.”

The pub, which had been closed since last year before Richard took it on, now has a mixed Welsh and Spanish themed restaurant as the manager Sami and his wife Mari, the chef, are from Spain.

Richard, who owns Richard Hamer Transport, Newport, formerly owned seven pubs in the south east of England and is now returning to the trade after a 20 year gap.

The gastro pub is on two floors with space for sixty diners on the first floor with drinkers accommodated on the ground floor which is furnished with Chesterfield settees and comfortable chairs. A new internal oak staircase now links the ground and first floors replacing the former external metal steps up to what was previously the Riverside Restaurant.

Car parking for forty vehicles is opposite the building on St David’s Road.

Local man Haydn Thomas, of letting agents Hutchings & Thomas Chartered Surveyors, said: “The Rock and Fountain was a prominent and highly regarded pub for very many years. Rioch has done a wonderful job in renovating the place and transforming it in to a modern, food lead gastro pub which is proving an instant success with locals particularly at the weekend.”

Dating back at least two hundred years, the road and riverside restaurant now occupies the building that was originally a toll house for the bridge that crosses the neighbouring Sirhowy River.

Picture caption: Gr- eight investment: Former County apprentice Richard ‘Rioch’ Hamer (right) and Haydn Thomas, of Hutchings & Thomas Chartered Surveyors, outside Bistro 8 in Blackwood

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