

■ Joseph at Dach & Sons in Hampstead



lovely and dominant building with red and cream striped brick and stonework. The huge gold letters proclaiming its name still are attached, though it long ago ceased to be a pub, its most recent incarnation having been a reasonably posh Indian restaurant which I never got around to visiting. And now that's all gone, and in its place is Dach & Sons – which, word had reached me, specialised in hot dogs. Hmm ... well let's go in and have a mooch about.

First impression is “New York vibe” – as in, oh yes: these people are striving very desperately for the New York vibe. So it is clad

in white bevelled tiling (one part London Underground to two parts wet room), the tables are converted iron-clad workbenches and from the ceiling are dangling a series of bare-naked light bulbs. If you're lucky you can bag a chair – otherwise it's workshop stools or else little pouffes made out of industrial sized tin containers of things like plum tomatoes. The rear wall has a mural of a massive bank of safe deposit boxes (maybe a nod to New York money) and a Maker's Mark bourbon barrel end provides further adornment. Manhattan jazz is tootling in the background, the table is set with a squeeze bottle of French's

(American mustard, and actually my favourite) and a kitchen roll. Napkins ...? You putting me on? Just rip yourself off a bunch of kitchen roll, buddy – and then hunker down to a dog.

A dog, yes. There are many speculations as to why a hot dog is called a hot dog, most of them tedious and screamingly unlikely. Basically it comes down to the similarity (if you are blind) between a dachshund and an orange sausage. More amusing is the suspicion as to its content: here is the lyric to an American vaudeville song of 1860: “Where oh where has my little dog gone? Where oh where can he be? Now sausage is good, baloney of course – they make them of dog, they make them of horse ... and I think that they make them of he”. As it happens, the menu offers only two: one they actually call the Dachshund (all beef, unusually) the other being a chilli dog (“spiced pig”, as they put it). Or you can

have dog fish, corndogs, sliders, frickles (fried pickles, I'm afraid), pulled mushroom – burgers, of course, and “meat powder popcorn”, which sounds about as appealing as Lea & Perrin's Golden Grahams.

You might by now be thinking that I hate the place, but you'd be wrong: I was warming steadily, and I hadn't even eaten. My wife was having something called Banger: a sausage made from coarse pork shoulder (and you should just have seen the manners exhibited by the rest of the pig, the pig) with onions and mushroom ketchup. This turned out to be even more enormous than those giants that some people are reckless enough to devour at the fun fair (though this one was meatily delicious, and very well made and seasoned). It came in a bun so long as to be on nodding terms with a loaf of bread, and was accompanied by baked sweet potato wedges. “Lovely,” she said. “It's like eating toffee”. I asked her if she liked eating toffee with a pork sausage and she said that she liked eating toffee with anything. I had a trio of chicken sliders (tiny burgers – and billed as “colonel coated”, this evoking the spectre of KFC). Each little bun was different (seeded, plain, brioche) as were the sauces: Lettuce and mayo, pulled mushroom and barbecue, tomato salsa jelly. They were terrific, actually – but chicken being chicken (colonel coated or otherwise) all you could really taste were the dressing. Triple fried chips were excellent, full stop (or I should maybe say “period”).

Remembering heyday

I had asked the amiable waiter for a drinks list and he had said that they don't have a drinks list. “Uh-huh,” I responded, “but you do have drinks ...?” “Oh yes,” he beamed, pleased as Punch. “So ...” I pursued, “what are they ...?” He thought for a bit. “Well – we have a huge range of American whiskies”. Right. Eventually I unearthed the existence of a glass of red wine, and had that. No idea what it was, but it tasted of plum juice: that's okay – I like plum juice. My wife had a Welsh golden ale called Uttley

that came in the teeniest glass ever: a third of a pint, tops. Their take on drink is singular: during the course of their self-congratulatory mission statement on the back of the menu (and there had to be one) their one recommendation is a “boilermaker” – which, they explain, is two-thirds of a pint of beer with a whiskey chaser. It is, they insist, “insanely good”. Upstairs is a groovy cocktail bar, so I foresee here a fair deal of derangement.

Everything, apart from bread, is made on site. The Hampstead Butcher in Rosslyn Hill is the supplier, but they themselves fashion the sausages and burgers. A home-made tomato ketchup was liquid, sweet, deep and looked like fresh spilled gore. A tarragon mayo was more like sour cream, but good: it is a pretty good place, you see. Ah – but in the Gents, a very un-New York thing: the one hand dryer covered in red tape: out of action. So towels ...? No. Nothing.

Opposite the old Horse & Groom used to be the Cruel Sea pub: now it is an estate agent. Up the road was the Coach & Horses – currently something like a nail bar. Oh dear. You see, I remember Heath Street when it was insanely good.

■ All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk. Joseph Connolly's latest novel, ENGLAND'S LANE, is published by Quercus as a hardback and an ebook.

FACTFILE

- DACH & SONS
68 Heath Street, NW3
Tel: 020 7433 8139
- Open for food every day from noon. “Strictly no reservations” – mandatory for anywhere cool, these days.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆☆
- Cost: Nobody goes the three course with wine route here, so it's very reasonable. Depending upon how insanely good you wish to become.

“It came in a bun so long as to be on nodding terms with a loaf of bread, and was accompanied by baked sweet potato wedges

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