

Bavarian Bier Cafe in York Street

By David Jordan

And by and by Christopher Robin came to an end of things, and he was silent, and he sat there, looking out over the world, just wishing it wouldn't stop.

Winnie the Pooh

The House at Pooh Corner

The tradition of lunch with John Coombs QC ended somewhat abruptly in 2007. In a post-Coombsie world, there are still things to which to look forward, or to look forward to, as he would have said. Mostly it revolves around going to lunch. Sometimes it involves a game of snooker, although Coombsie would have preferred the old gaming room at the Uni & Schools Club rather than the garish 1950s motifs at the merged Union Uni & Schools. Too much dark paneling. Too far from the bar. And no extended bench seating from which one could gently sledge one's far younger opponent.

But I digress.

It was time to honour the memory of the bar's last public lunch. With a napkin tucked into the limited space nature had allowed between neck and collar, and a beaming smile, John would eat for the bar. Hence, Rabbit and I set off in a quest for a meal, and something to write about. For our first venture, it had to be the Bavarian Bier Café in York St.

With far more soothing ambience than the snooker room at the Union (etc) Club, and an acceptably convenient bar, the BBCYS presents many attractions to a barrister with

a couple of days to spare. Although there are a few steps to overcome to gain entrance into the main eating area, such obstacles should present no barrier to the recently released advocate, fresh from negotiating a way around the Civil Liability Act or some such. Indeed, on the occasion we were there most recently, Rabbit commented on how much steeper – and more dangerous – the stairs looked as we were leaving.

But leaving the stairs, and avoiding the bar, our German waitress (with a distinctly English accent) ushered us to that most underrated of eating hardware – the booth. Now, the booth is one of the most universally under-acknowledged friends of the lunching barrister. It restricts the numbers of freeloaders one can invite, it provides a sanctuary from the din of noisy stockbrokers holding their interminable farewell lunches at the longer and less classy bench tables, and it gives reasonable cover from the prying eyes of floor juniors sent to look for the MIA barrister. If only bar tables could be similarly configured to provide privacy from one's opponent, and a cone of silence from the bench.

So the eating furniture was good.

We both started with Paulaner. A good cleansing pilsner with which to start. Or to start with, as Coombsie would have said. And, as it turns out, with an excellent

website (www.paulaner.com, or www.paulaner.de for the more adventurous). Not only does one have to answer the question – not asked of me for a long time – 'Are you over 16?', but answer the question correctly and one is taken into a virtual bier garten, 'Paulanergarten' with background music, and laughter. If only LexisNexis had this sort of pizzazz.

And you shouldn't worry if you get the answer to the entry question wrong – it's not like trying to enter a research database (say) using a mate's log-on at all. Just for fun I 'admitted' that I was not over 16, and was taken to a very warm and fuzzy page that said something about coming back later. Much later. But just hit the 'back' button, and try again (it's not hard – 'JA, ich bin bereits 16 Jahre alt' is the 'password'). Easy. And with the wonders of mobile internet one can experience the bier garten anywhere, anytime. What better way to spend the Friday motions list in the District Court, the LEC, or any old day in Downing Centre 3.1 than heading off to the virtual bier garten (sound on mute, of course).

Back at the BBCYS, with your first beer it really is necessary to have the pretzel offered. Not only have you, of course, worked up a powerful hunger from many many seconds of adversarial high-jinks before lunch, but the pretzel offers another opportunity to engage in a foreign custom. That is, eating a pretzel. Which was quite



nice. Rabbit thought it went with the Paulaner so well that he had another Paulaner.

We then looked at the menu further. Now Rabbit and I are modern chaps (yes, a quota system will be applied on the next Coombsie event, but in the meantime I had to make do with Rabbit), and we thought that pretzel plus some form of schnitzel PLUS entrée would interfere too much with our plans for the evening. Not to mention with being able to bring a discerning eye to reviewing the lunch. So in the interests of journalistic integrity, it was mains only for us. Rabbit chose the Bavarian tasting plate. I chose the beef schnitzel, which I was told was the same size as the unavailable pork schnitzel I'd originally chosen. With fries (we asked if they were French, or American – our Pommie waiter was unable to say). Notwithstanding, we ordered them anyway. After all, if the BBCYS had gone to the extent of employing a Pom to serve us, we thought all of the Allies should get some sort of look in at the meal.

While waiting for our mains, young Rabbit thought to move the conversation onto our patron, Coombsie. Why did he write those reviews, he asked. It was a good question. I think Coombsie liked eating, I said. Yes, but why write about the meal, asked Rabbit. Because he could, I suggested. But for the *Bar News*, he asked further. This was a very good question, to which there were 2 complete answers. 1 – Coombsie wanted

something to read about in the *Bar News*, even if he had to write it himself. And 2 – Philip Selth needed guidance, he thought, on where to eat. So while we were unable to state with confidence that we would be able to fulfill the first of Coombsie's objectives, we were going to be able to honour the second.

Meanwhile, Rabbit for a reason he failed to disclose at the time moved onto Franziskaner Mango (a wheat beer with mango flavour – yes) while I had moved on to Hofbräu Original. Now while we're talking websites (which I know Coombsie didn't talk about a lot), you have to go to the Franziskaner one (www.franziskaner.com). This one you have to pick a birth date that is more than 16 years ago. Which is rather more challenging to a witness than just asking if you are 16 or over. But do make sure that you have the sound down if heading into this type of research site while in the aforementioned courts – this last website has a very effective popping and pouring sound effect which is the very last thing that a busy commercial list judge might want to hear at 10.15am.

Just then the mains arrived. Actually, the word 'arrived' does not really do them justice (and goodness knows we were interested in justice at this point). The beef schnitzel hung out over the sides of the plate like a midribs used to from under bar jackets in the old Workers Comp court. Big, juicy and totally unformed. But Rabbit's meal

was a triumph. Looking more like a cross-section of Bergin J's bench on directions day, the rectangular plate was stacked along its length with sausages, pork belly, schnitzel, sour kraut, and mashed potato. Continuing the unexpectedly international nature of the meal to that time, the BBCYS had managed to arrange German food with the same principles of *feng shui* with which her Honour insists her bench is arranged. In this case, both heaven and earth had been brought together by some culinary artisan to help Rabbit improve his life by receiving positive energy flow.

Which was lucky because after eating it all we were both a little weary. By this time, we had moved on to the rather excellent Hofbräu Dunkel dark beer. Caring rather less by this time as to whether Philip Selth enjoyed dark ales, Rabbit asked me whether Coombsie would have liked the meal, and the place itself. This was both an easy, and a difficult, question. There were many things to like about the BBCYS. Coombsie would have rated the booth for sure (as opposed to the tall stools and tables at its O'Connell St cousin). He might have liked the meal, but would have been looking to a more robust wine with the meal. But what he would have liked was the idea of having lunch after court in an atmosphere of convivial languor. Which the meal induced, and the booth allowed.

Yes, he would have rated this place.