

A taste of the good life

Scrumdiddlyumptious, might be a word Roald Dahl could well have used to describe the delights on the menu at The Nags Head in Great Missenden where he used to dine, writes **Sandra Carter**

The children's author whose descriptions of food are so swizfiggling, visited the Great Missenden inn and restaurant frequently with his family. He always ate steak.

Steak still takes pride of place on the menu – 21-day-aged fillet with brandy or port jus and duck liver and foie gras mousse, enjoyed with a smile as pictures of Oompa-Loompas and Twits, from Dahl's stories, look down from the walls.

But there's more to The Nags Head than memories of Dahl, or indeed the PMs who have stopped by en route to Chequers over the years. The 15th-century building, originally three workers' cottages, has been an inn since the 16th century. Its latest caretakers are the Michaels family whose first pub, the Bricklayers Arms in Flaunden, has won a string of food awards thanks to its Michelin-trained chef Claude Paillet.

The family took over The Nags Head in 2008, with Paillet overseeing the food, and with two promising young chefs in the kitchen, Alan Bell (Young Chef of the Year finalist) and Howard Gale (four years with Albert Roux) they are carving out a reputation for good food and fine dining.

Alvin Michaels says: "I'm absolutely delighted with how The Nags Head has been received by local people and visitors from further afield. It's already won an AA rosette, is accredited in guides including a Hardens commendation, AA four stars and Pick of the Pubs, and it even features on the front cover of Michelin's Eating Out in Pubs guide 2010. Even in this current climate, people still want to enjoy good value quality food."

The inn got a complete makeover, and the decor is now chic and contemporary while keeping all the best from its long history – the beams, the inglenook fireplace, the old bricks. There are five boutique bedrooms upstairs, ensuring that it receives plenty of visitors from around the world.

So why has this inn become a destination restaurant so quickly? The first attraction is the bread brought to your table – it's delicious, made specially for the two pub restaurants and served hot and crusty, and Adam Michaels who heads the team here says many people make a point of asking for it.

The menu is a medley of what they call Anglo-French fusion dishes. The most popular starter is an assiette of home smoked fish (salmon, tuna, swordfish, £7.95), or you might choose eggs Benedict with halloumi cheese, or a plate of prawns, mussels, crayfish tails and rock oysters, from a range of options.

Our choice was crab topped with home smoked salmon, served with a chive cream and blinis (£7.95): generous portion, full of flavour, beautifully presented, rich but not heavy, a lovely starter.

The options for mains run from their famous fillet steak to boned quails stuffed with mushrooms, Barbary duck or fish dishes. We chose an excellent lamb dish: three tender best end of lamb cutlets on a bed of slowly cooked and shredded leg meat, with red wine sauce and creamy bouchon potatoes (£18.95). Wherever possible the ingredients are locally sourced, and this lamb was certainly first class.

If you've room for more, the pudding menu has lots of regular favourites, from lemon tart to crêpe, sticky toffee pudding to apple and cinnamon tart (£5.45).

Everything comes in large portions, stylishly presented, and at a reasonable price for fresh cooked food of this quality. For a good-value introduction to The Nags Head, try their set menu for lunch or dinner from Monday to Friday midday, at two courses for £14.95.

It's no surprise that The Nags Head has become a destination restaurant.



The Nags Head, London Road, Great Missenden
HP16 0DG. Tel: 01494 862200