

# Summer Outings

## *Palace of Westminster*

by PAT SHERRATT

**A**fter days of rain, the sun shone on the righteous as we were blessed with a sunny day.

A well-behaved group of 39 members returned to their schooldays of queuing up before assembly, yes a couple of naughty boys hid round the corner for a quick cigarette. Anyway, at the appointed hour we were admitted appropriately through the "Royal Entrance" at the Victoria Tower.

We were then split into two groups each with a most knowledgeable guide. Our guide was Scottish and retired from a lifetime of working in the Palace of Westminster. All questions posed were answered and an informative tour ended in Westminster Hall, the current Palace of Westminster being rebuilt following the destruction by fire in 1834. Little remains of the original building. The Great Hall (Westminster Hall) was originally built as the Palace of Westminster, for William Rufus, in 1097-1099 and remodelled in 1394-99 by Richard II.



Our tour included a visit to the House of Lords, but as it was Prime Ministers question time (no doubt some of our members would have interesting questions for the Prime Minister to answer if given the opportunity!) we were unable to visit the House of Commons. As we passed through the Palace the magnificent furniture, carvings and fittings by Augustus Pugin

abounded and supported the gothic style architecture created by Charles Barry.

On the tour was an interesting exhibition marking the Act of Union in 1707. This traced the events from the two crowns of England and Scotland in 1603, through the civil war and the Glorious Revolution, to the signing of the Articles of Union in July 1706. What a privilege to see such important historical documents on display.

Passing through the Central Lobby with its four arches depicting the four Saints of the United Kingdom, our guide told us that St. Patrick was placed over



the arch nearest to the exit from the Palace of Westminster as Irish members had the furthest to travel, St. George over the arch to the House of Lords as all Englishmen aspire to the Lords, St. David over the arch to the House of Commons as all Welshmen wished to be great orators, whilst St. Andrew was above the arch leading to the Members Bar.

In Westminster Hall there was an interesting exhibition on the abolition of slavery.

After the tour of The Palace of Westminster, many of us enjoyed lunch in the restaurant, at reasonable prices, before leaving to enjoy many other

aspects of London.

Several members crossed the road to enjoy the history of the Jewel Tower, which is one of only two buildings from the medieval Palace of Westminster surviving to the present day. It was built in around 1365 by Edward III to house his personal treasure and wardrobe, in which function it continued until 1621. From this date it was used to store the records of the House of Lords, a stroke of good fortune which ensured that these survived the great fire of 1834 which consumed the rest of the Palace with the exception of Westminster Hall. From 1869 until 1938 it became home to the official Weights and Measures Office.

Today the Jewel Tower is administered by English Heritage and houses an exhibition, *Parliament: Past and Present*, an account of Parliament's history and its workings today.

Others visited the Royal Festival Hall, Churchill's War Rooms, Westminster Abbey, the London Eye and St.



Margaret's Church, where in the grounds an American college had a two-part band, one part Brass and the other Jazz. Others took themselves off to Trafalgar Square, the National Portrait Gallery, the Museum of Florence Nightingale, a trip on the river, Whitehall, Davenport's, just walking along the embankment or just sitting by the river enjoying the sunshine. A most enjoyable walk through St. James's Park, where there was a display in flowers celebrating Le Tour de France which started from London this year.

Once again this was a very successful visit to the ever-popular Palace of Westminster.

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### *Some interesting facts*

#### **The Palace of Westminster**

|                           |                |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Area of site:             | 8 acres        |
| Staircases:               | 100            |
| Length of Passageways:    | Approx 3 miles |
| Number of Rooms:          | 1,100          |
| St Stephen's Hall:        | 95ft x 30ft    |
| Westminster Hall:         | 240ft x 68ft   |
| Height of Clock Tower     |                |
| (Big Ben):                | 316ft          |
| Height of Victoria Tower: | 323ft          |

#### **The Great Clock (Big Ben)**

|                           |          |
|---------------------------|----------|
| Minute hand (copper):     | 14ft     |
| Hour hand (gunmetal):     | 9ft      |
| Glass panes in each face: | 312      |
| Pendulum:                 | 14ft 5in |
| Weight of Big Ben:        | 13 tons  |