

## SOCIETY OUTINGS 2008

Organised and Reported by Sylvia Ladyman *et alii*

### **Westminster Abbey and Methodist Central Hall with John Garrod - 3 May**

We were fortunate to have John once again as our guide. Soon after our entry to the Abbey we were able to witness the turning of the pages of the Books of Remembrance by a small group of soldiers.

The Abbey was built by Edward the Confessor and dedicated in 1065. However, much of the church we see today was built on the orders of Henry III between 1245 and 1272, mainly of stone from Caen and English marble. The Benedictine monastery became one of the wealthiest and most important in the country serving about fifty monks.

The first sight of the tomb of the Unknown Warrior at the west end is most impressive. There were so many memorials and tombs that one must really make several visits to appreciate them. The Royal tombs generate the greatest interest to the majority of visitors - Edward the Confessor's behind the altar and those of Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots in the Lady Chapel. Politicians, poets, scientists, musicians and soldiers are all commemorated here. We saw the Coronation Chair, minus the Stone of Scone, and the octagonal Chapter House with its beautiful tiled floor.

In the afternoon most of us had a guided tour of the Methodist Central Hall, which was opened in 1912 to mark the centenary of John Wesley's death. We learnt that it was built on the site of a music hall, with money subscribed by Methodists from all over the UK. Their names are inscribed in fifty volumes kept in the entrance hall. At one side of the entrance hall there is a statue of John Wesley, and nearby is the site of a branch of the HSBC Bank but which is now a small chapel.

The great hall is at the top of the staircase, which has a beautiful decorated dome, the second largest of its type in the world. Dr. William Lloyd-Webber (father of Andrew and Julian) was musical director here in 1958 - 82. His son Andrew presented the first

performance of *Joseph and his Technicolor Dream Coat* here in 1968. Many famous people have visited this hall, including Billy Graham and Ghandi. It is here also that the very first meeting of the United Nations Organisation took place in 1946.

We were allowed to visit the Donald English Room as I knew him at University College, Leicester. He became the only person to become President of the Methodist Conference twice and was often the speaker on 'Thought for The Day' on BBC radio.

After refreshment in the Hall café we made our way home after another enjoyable day.

### **Lichfield - 14 June**

On a pleasant June day a full coach load of members and friends visited Lichfield, one of the smallest cathedral cities in England, with a 2000 year history. With its situation at the crossroads of Watling Street and the Icknield Way, it became a major military town, coaching centre and market town. Lichfield's colourful past includes being a royal stronghold during the Civil War and the home of David Garrick, Samuel Johnson, Anna Seward and Erasmus Darwin, the equally famous grandfather of Charles. It was also host to the last burning in England for heresy.

After a brief break for coffee, we divided into three groups to be given an extensive 1½ hour guided tour of the city, which introduced us to its 'ladder' street pattern laid out by Bishop Clinton in the 12th century when he fortified and expanded the town.

While some opted for a pub lunch before exploration, others ate their sandwiches without a stop, many making the Cathedral their first call. This, the only medieval Cathedral in Britain to have three spires, has much of interest, including some very fine 16th century Belgian stained glass, a unique octagonal two storey Chapter House, and the shrine of St Chad who brought Christianity to Mercia. Also on view was the Lichfield Angel, an 8th century limestone carving of

the Angel Gabriel discovered during excavations in the nave. Having been told by our tour guide of Sir Francis Chantry's sculpture *The Sleeping Children*, many made a point of feeling under one of the feet, where the sculptor had left a small un-carved detail, explaining that "only God creates perfection".

Depending upon the time available, many made their way to the house of Erasmus Darwin with its most pleasant secluded herb garden, to the Heritage Centre, the Samuel Johnson House, or the market. There was pleasant walking or resting in Beacon Park or by the Minster Pool before returning to the coach and home. St John's Chapel on the edge of the city was a gem.

Lichfield has much to offer to its visitors and thanks are due to Sylvia for another well researched and organised outing.

Beryl Boulton

## Rochester - 12 July

After a short stop at the Information Centre we gathered at the west door of the Cathedral to meet our guides. Almost immediately we were apprised of the brass curves in the floor indicating the eastern end of the Saxon building built in 604 AD. The present building dates from 1080, and contains many 'green men' which are said to be symbols of how Christian faith overcomes death and decay. In the 13th century this was a place of pilgrimage as William of Perth, a baker by trade, was murdered nearby. At 11.00am on Saturday mornings the bell of HMS Kent is rung to commemorate the crew of 33 who lost their lives when the ship was torpedoed in 1940. The 20th century tapestries, designed by Bobbie Cox, are worth seeing in the Lady Chapel. Graffiti are not a new phenomenon - we saw some on the pillars of the nave, including faces, an eagle and a boat.

Some members climbed the steps of the Norman Castle, while others visited the Guildhall Museum, a treasure house of Medway history. The building itself was worth a careful look - the magnificent Guildhall Chamber is the finest 17th century interior in Kent and was immortalised by

Dickens in *Great Expectations*. The partly recreated 19th century Medway prison hulk was most realistic. Needless to say Dickens has a whole room to himself, complete with a short film.

At 2.00pm, those who were not too tired by the morning's activities went on a guided tour around the city. As we passed the buildings of the Kings School we noticed several fire marks on them. Rochester played an important part in the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, as Charles II stayed in what is now called 'Restoration House' (called 'Satis House' by Dickens in *Great Expectations*). Nearby a pleasant park, The Vines, was the site of the monks' vineyard. Now there is a tree stump carved in the image of a monk.

Tired, but feeling that the visit had been most enjoyable, we returned to Ruislip.

## Livery Halls with Yasha Beresiner

### 9 August

This tour was suggested by City of London guide Yasha, who informed us a week before the visit that entry to the Livery Halls was impossible in August! So he took us firstly into the Guildhall. A guildhall is first mentioned in 1128, and the first mayor was installed in 1192. In the Middle Ages it was rebuilt, and a chapel and kitchens added over a large crypt which is the most extensive medieval crypt in London. The hall itself is the second largest hall in London after Westminster Hall, and is the place where Lord Mayors and Sheriffs are elected. Famous trials were held here, such as that of Lady Jane Grey and one of the men responsible for the Gunpowder Plot. The building was damaged in 1666 and again during the Blitz in 1940. However, it did not prevent Winston Churchill being given the Freedom of the City here in 1943, although under a temporary roof.

A short visit to the Guildhall Art Gallery followed, which holds an enormous oil painting by Copley of the *Defeat of the Floating Batteries* (at the Siege of Gibraltar) and portraits from the 16th century to the present day. But for us the 'prize exhibit' was the foundations of the Roman Amphitheatre

discovered when the foundations of the Art Gallery were being excavated in 1988. We could actually walk in one of the entrances, see images of gladiators and hear the crowds roaring encouragement.

After lunch, walking in the rain, we saw the exteriors of several Halls, e.g. Wax Chandlers and Pewterers. Fortunately, the Beadle of the Worshipful Company of Barbers and Surgeons took pity on us and invited us in out of the rain. This Hall was for many the highlight of the day. We were given a short talk and allowed to wander around. In 1540 the Barbers and Surgeons Guilds were amalgamated, but not allowed to undertake each others' work. This union is commemorated in a fine Holbein painting in the Hall, together with a portrait of the Queen Mother. The display cases contained fine examples of barbers' bowls and Tudor surgical instruments.

So we had an enjoyable day in spite of the weather and our initial disappointment.

#### **Westminster and St James with John Garrod 4 September**

Thirty Members of the Society met with our Blue Badge Guide at Westminster Underground Station. The walk commenced at the Battle of Britain Memorial (by Paul Day) which is situated on the Embankment. It was unveiled by Prince Charles in 2005. We then retraced our steps, noting the old Scotland Yard building, to Parliament Square where we stopped to look at the statues of Sir Winston Churchill, (by Ivor Robert Jones), Lloyd George, and two famous South Africans - General Smuts and Nelson Mandela (Ian Walters). It was noted as we passed Oliver Cromwell's statue that he is looking across the road at the bust of Charles I on St Margaret's Church. The church was built in 1523 adjacent to Westminster Abbey. To the west of the Abbey is the Jewel Tower built in 1365 as part of the old Westminster Palace. It was originally used to store the Royal valuables. Our route took us past the Houses of Parliament to Victoria Tower Gardens where we admired the statue of Emmeline Pankhurst (A.G. Walker) and the copy of Rodin's *The Burghers of Calais*, and were pleased to note that the Buxton drinking

fountain commemorating the abolition of slavery had been refurbished. We continued along the Thames side path and looked across the river to St Thomas' Hospital and Lambeth Palace, the London residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury, and imagined the days when the horse ferry plied its way across the river before the construction of Lambeth Bridge. The group stopped on the corner of Millbank and Horseferry Road at the MI5 building and compared it to the large modern MI6 building in the distance. We turned right into Marsham Street passing Government buildings and into Smith Square where both the Conservative and Labour Parties had their Headquarters before moving out to larger premises. The early 18th century church of St Johns occupies the centre of the square and is surrounded by plane trees which obscured our view of the handsome corner towers of the building. The church is now used as a concert hall. We went into Great Peter Street and then to Lord North Street where we were reminded that these were poor dwellings when built in the 18th century and only later became very desirable, and noted a faded wartime sign on one building pointing the way down some steps to the air raid shelter. We continued our walk along Cowley Street where the Liberal SDP Party has their headquarters in an attractive old building. The group skirted Westminster Abbey and turned left into Orchard Street and Old Pye Street to find the market in Strutton Ground. We completed the morning's activities by walking through Butler Place - noting Caxton Hall, and along Broadway passing New Scotland Yard to Tothill St. where we scattered for lunch.

After lunch we noted London Transport's 1930s building, No. 1 Broadway, before going along Cart Street to St Anne's Gate, a street of very elegant large houses, and down Cockpit Steps to Birdcage Walk and St James Park. We admired the view of the Foreign Office and the Treasury from the bridge over the lake. We did not see any pelicans. The group continued on to Buckingham Palace and the Queen Victoria Memorial and then down the Mall passing Clarence House to St James Palace, originally built for Henry VIII on the site of a leper hospital. We stopped to look at Marlborough House designed by Christopher Wren for the

Duchess of Marlborough and now the Commonwealth Centre.

The Chapel Royal opposite St James Palace was designed for Queen Henrietta Maria by Inigo Jones. We walked up St James noting the Gentleman's Clubs, all very discreet, expensive and anonymous. John pointed out Whites founded 1693, the Carlton Club, Brookes and Boodles. We had a diversion into Blue Ball Yard which was originally a Mews where the horses would have been stabled; now it is an expensive hotel.

The shops both in St James and Jermyn Street cater mostly for a rich male clientele. Our last stop was in St James' Church where Delia Montlake met an old friend who gave us a five minute talk on the Church. It is a Wren Church designed as a double cube with large plain glass windows letting in the light and making the most of a restricted site.

Our walk ended here and we all felt that we had had an excellent day.

Jessica Eastwood