

Oxford Catenians Visit the Houses of Parliament.

On a murky Saturday morning in May, 22 Oxford Catenians and their wives gathered at Redbridge in Oxford to board a coach that was taking them to visit the Palace of Westminster. This was not an attempt to help the Government move Brexit along, but none the less, Circle Vice President, Pat Mulqueen checked each of the travellers to ensure there weren't any barrels of gun powder hidden anywhere!



An uneventful coach journey finished a short walk from the visitors' entrance, where the group disembarked and strolled to the marshalling point to await our entrance time.

Our tour started snaking through the scaffolding that has been erected to support the extensive refurbishment work that is on-going, arriving at the security check point where our belongings were put through the x-ray scanners and bags checked. Then we were given the OK to move to Westminster Hall to meet our guide.

Inside the vast hall it is easy to imagine how it must have felt when it was full of members of the house of Lords, the House of Commons and other dignitaries to listen to leaders such as Ronald Regan, Nelson Mandela and Pope Benedict XV1. The hall is also used for the laying out in state, deceased royals and other important figures such as Winston Churchill.



There is also a plate cemented into the floor commemorating the place where St Thomas More was condemned to death on 1st July 1535

From here we walked to far end of the Palace and found ourselves in the House of Lords. We were instructed that on no account were we to take any photographs until we returned to Westminster Hall. We passed statues and busts of statesmen from history through the royal robing chamber and then taken into the debating chamber and were able to stand (not sit) in the rows of red leather benches.

We then found ourselves at the crossroads in the middle of the palace where every night we can see the political journalists brining us the happenings of the day on the evening news. It was here that we were informed that anyone can go to the desk in this area and ask to "lobby" their MP. And, providing the MP is in the House, they are bound to meet their constituents.

From here we were taken around the back of the Speaker's Chair and found ourselves in the chamber of green backed benches. We stood two rows back from where the Prime Minister has stood at the dispatch box trying to convince the other members to vote for her plan. We were also able to see quite clearly a plaque commemorating the late Jo Cox who was brutally murdered by one of her constituents.

It was then a short walk back to Westminster Hall where our guide left us to the temptation of coffee and cake, before we made our way back to the coach and a restful journey home.

