**Rushey Green Time Bank Visits Parliament**

***By Lydia Kintu***

On Wednesday 4th of July, members of Rushey Green Time Bank visited the Houses of Parliament. This trip happened as a result of a talk about UK Parliament by Charlotte Dobson, a former FoodCycle Lewisham volunteer, which I found very enlightening. I was looking forward to this visit. I expected  that it will put flesh to the bones as it were. The question is did it? Let us take a tour of parliament and see if it does or not.

On arrival we all underwent airport security screening and only when we had passed it were we given visitor badges to hang around our necks. By the way, I did not check through with the group, however a very discerning guy clocked that my group would be in the hall and they were. I later thanked him when he passed us by.

The tour started in the large hall. This hall had been destroyed and rebuilt. We went up about 4 stairs and we stopped at what our guide pointed out was a window we should observe. This window, she said was designed by women. It's lights are operated by the river Thames current. This means that it changes all the time; we noticed that when we returned here. I found this fascinating. These women who I think were linked to the suffragettes were that in tune with the environment that long ago.

We went through the gallery lobby, the robing room where the Queen puts on her regalia for the opening of parliament and here we discussed the weight of the crown and how the queen remarked on it. We had an explanation of why the queen, the monarchy, is not allowed in the House of Commons. Then again nor were we.

We went through to the House of Lords and saw how the debate of the day were put up on the screen. You are not allowed to sit if you are not a member of the House of Lords, although an exception was made to one of our colleagues with a walking stick who was offered a different standalone chair (not the ones the lords sit on). She is a bit of a lady now we teased her ha! ha! ha! We saw the woolsack and how it was used until the court of appeal was moved elsewhere during Tony Blair's time.

We were not allowed in the House of Commons , not because we are related to the monarchy (ha ha ha!) but because parliament was sitting that day. We were, however, notified that anyone is free to come and sit in the public gallery of the house to watch debates. The engagement officer had shown us how to track parliament’s schedules online and past ones in the Hansard (which is the reports of the debates). We were now in the actual parliamentary frame.

We returned back the same way we entered we saw Jacob Rees-Mogg being interviewed presumably by the press. Our guide said that when we see people on TV that is where they are interviewed. I was surprised that it is done in quite a noisy environment not at all sound proofed. We returned through the gallery with a lot of portraits and paintings of wars with the French. The guide said that in the past parliament was conducted in French.

Back to the women's window and indeed the lights were different as the Thames currents were changing.

Now did we put flesh to the bones? For me it did, except for the House of Commons which we did not see. Someone asked if one can book alone in order to do the tour, the guide replied that you can't.

After the tour of the Houses of Parliament we also visited the royal treasure house which despite its name, has no treasures. I t used to but they were removed to more secure storage.  Charges were indicated at the entrance but I believe, not for our group as this was included as part of our visit.

We all had a good time and became more knowledgeable about our parliament. This is one of the many advantages of being  time bank members. On behalf of all my colleagues on this tour, thanks to Simone Riddle for organising this very enjoyable and educational tour.

By

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