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Birmingham Area – Big Ben visit

February 2011

Rationale

I had read an article on a visit to the Westminster Clock Tower (generally known as Big Ben) which seemed to be very interesting – particularly the mechanical mechanisms involved. Despite being over 120 miles away this seemed to be a great opportunity for our area.

The Plan

This visit must be booked through your local MP. Possibly the easiest is via the web (www.writetothem.com or through the parliament website www.parliament.uk). Following the application you will receive a letter from the Big Ben Tours Office at the House of Commons explaining how to proceed.

Costing

There is no cost for the visit to the tower. Our only costs were the coach fair and an optional arranged lunch. All costs were fully covered by the attendees booking fees.

Attendance

The party size is limited to 16 for the tower visit. We were vastly oversubscribed and indeed ran a second visit during the year.

General

This is a really great visit and the tour guides are excellent. The technical part is fascinating (the guide was as well versed on technical aspects as with the general background information) as is the history and other points of the visit.

We were present at the clock mechanism during its operation and at the bell chamber during striking (obligatory H&S ear protectors are issued!) and the view is good.

Full details of all attendees must be sent in advance for security reasons and identification must be held on the day. There are also some issues on general fitness and health requirements (332 stone steps to climb).

We used the IMechE headquarters as a base (10 minutes walk from the tower). If booked in advance you should obtain a meeting room for free. We also had a sandwich lunch provided (chargeable – and quite expensive).

It was an opportunity for some members to have a tour round the HQ – many had not been before. Also we had an excellent tour of the library and its facilities and saw (and handled) some very old manuscripts – first class arrangements from Sarah Rogers in the Library.

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Birmingham Area