



THE HIGHFIELDER SPECIAL LONDON EDITION JUNE 2013

**On Tuesday 4th June
twelve Highfield children
and three members of
staff made the journey to
London to visit The
Houses of Parliament.**



Fire!

In 1834 the old building burnt down leaving only Westminster Hall. There was a competition to design a new parliament and the winning design looked very much like a church. This was because in those days so many people went to church and would recognise the building as very English in design.



Strict Security

As you can imagine a place of such importance will need to have some very strict security. After several minutes of x-raying, frisking, checking and photographs we arrived wearing our security passes at the Palace of Westminster. We were met by Fabian Hamilton, MP for North Leeds.



Ben the Bell

A huge bronze bell was commissioned by parliament. The bell was made in Pickering, Yorkshire and shipped all the way to London. However, when it arrived it had a crack in it and had to be melted down and reformed in London. But this bell also developed a crack after three weeks. This time they just twisted it around and that same crack is still there today. You will have all heard the chimes of Big Ben when you watch the news or listen to Big Ben strike twelve on New Year's Eve. Big Ben is the

bell and not the clock which a lot of people get confused about.



Most very important people would simply greet you and then pass you over to a tour guide, but not Mr Hamilton. Instead he spent over two hours giving us a full and informative tour of the rooms in the Houses of Parliament. Throughout the morning Mr Hamilton made us feel comfortable and welcome and told us so many fascinating

stories about his place of work.

Here are just a few:

Anyone for Tennis?

Did you know that a 500 year old tennis ball belonging to Henry VIII was found last year lodged in the roof of Westminster Hall? Obviously Henry enjoyed a spot of tennis in between killing and divorcing his wives!

On a more serious note, Westminster Hall was built in 1099 by the Normans and the roof was made in the 14C. All kings and queens lay in state in the hall, the most recent being the Queen Mother when she died. Some very important Prime Ministers such as Winston Churchill have also lain in state in the hall. Very famous people who have spoken in the hall include: President Obama, Nelson Mandela and The Dalai Lama.



Hats off Strangers!

The Houses of Parliament is rich with tradition, some of which are stranger than others. Every day when the Speaker of The House of Commons arrives, he proceeds through the lobby with his escorts wearing their traditional dress and carrying their golden sticks. Anyone watching must

remove their hats as a police officer calls out, "Hats off strangers!"

Content or Not Content

"And now for the posh bit," said Fabian Hamilton, as he led us into the House of Lords.



The House of Lords is where the monarch and their husband or wife sits each year to read the King or Queen's speech. Their thrones are made of gold leaf and the monarch's throne is always slightly higher. There are red curtains around the top balcony so that the men (in the olden days) were never distracted by the ladies ankles! When the Lords have a vote they do not just say yes or no, they use the terms "content" or "not content." In the the House of Commons they just say aye or no.

Where's Mummy?

In the Royal Gallery, the Lords sit and write letters and do their work. When they are not using their stationery, it is covered up by red velvet cloth. The gallery has lots of beautiful paintings of monarchs and other famous people. There are also two huge paintings depicting the Battle of Trafalgar and the Battle of Waterloo. The artist however, who spent eight years painting these pictures, was not paid a single penny! He was so angry about this that he added two

pictures of his own mother to the paintings. He also told a court reporter about his outrage. This reporter was called Charles Dickens!!



Off with his head!

Democracy is so important in our country that it can even lead to a king losing his head. In 1642 Charles I was charged with treason and beheaded following the Civil War. We saw the death warrant for Charles which was signed (by many people including Oliver Cromwell) and sealed with red wax. The mistake Charles had made was to try and arrest five members of parliament because they had voted against his views on tax. No one person is more important than democracy.

Written by Thomas Hawkins, Abigail Wolfe, Teagan Riches and Mia Ashmore.

