

FRIDAY 4 APRIL 2025
WESTMINSTER ABBEY: EVENSONG – PRIVATE TOUR – DINNER

Friday night's visit to Westminster Abbey had everything required of a very special event indeed: front-row seats in the Quire for Evensong, an exclusive tour led by one of the senior clergy once everyone else had left, and a reserved table at a superb nearby Italian restaurant - and, of course, a delightful group attending!



(Clockwise from top left: examining the banners of the Order of the Bath in the Henry VII Chapel, the zenith of English Perpendicular architecture; the group in front of the historic Cosmati Pavement, the scene of coronations; the Coronation Chair; at the tomb of Sir Isaac Newton; dinner at Colosseo.)

In the absence of the regular choir during Lent, Hertford Chamber Choir treated us at Evensong to some beautiful lesser-known music, a striking unaccompanied Latin setting of the Canticles by Palestrina followed by an Ave Maria by the great pianist-composer Franz Liszt.

We were then fortunate indeed to have as the guide for our tour Canon Anthony Ball, shortly before he leaves the Abbey to take up a new position in Rome as the Anglican representative to the Holy See, a post to which he will surely be ideally suited as a former diplomat.

Canon Ball proved a fount of knowledge, effortlessly unravelling such terms as 'Royal Peculiar' and the 'Order of the Bath' with admirable clarity. He began by explaining the Abbey as the scene of coronations stretching back a thousand years, with recent events having revived the unique symbolism of the celebrated Coronation Chair. We then heard about the Abbey as the place of worship it has become today, following a chain of extraordinary historical events over the centuries.

The whole tour was framed by the theme of Westminster Abbey as the home of national memorials. First, we heard a moving account of the Tomb of the Unknown

Warrior (whose identity, nationality and religion remain a mystery to this day), and our attention was later drawn to memorials to such great figures as Sir Isaac Newton, Stephen Hawking, Robert Peel, Chaucer, Shakespeare and Handel.

Before the tour's conclusion at Poets' Corner we passed the sites of so many royal burials, from Edward the Confessor (the Abbey's original royal founder) to Henry III, Richard II and Henry VII, separately responsible for the building we know today – the reminder that Elizabeth I lies so close to both Mary I and Mary, Queen of Scots never fails to stop you in your tracks!

It was excellent that several club members were able to join the group afterwards for a superb meal at Colosseo, which gave the opportunity to come back down to Earth in the most convivial company. All in all, a most inspiring start to Chris Edge's year as President. We are extremely grateful to him and to Corinna for organising.

Stephen Willis, Junior Vice-President

Comments from those attending:

- **"You always find out something you didn't know on a tour of Westminster Abbey!"**
- **"We are so lucky to be able to attend Evensong in such magnificent settings: always a unique opportunity to draw breath and recharge the batteries."**
- **"Wonderful evening!!!"**
- **"It was a fantastic evening, thanks for organising."**
- **"A spectacular and informative occasion."**