Llandrindod Wells & District U3A Lecture Meeting September 2017

An Insider's View of Westminster Abbey

Report by Clive Barrett

Chairman Berwyn Woolnough welcomed everyone to the September meeting, stating that it was the start of a new academic year, and he assumed members had returned refreshed from their summer break. He also gave news of various interest groups, including film, garden visiting, art plus a coffee morning for new members.

He then introduced the speaker for the morning, Rosemary Kennedy from London, who has been a volunteer at Westminster Abbey for over 20 years. Her lecture was entitled " An Insider's View of Westminster Abbey". Rosemary outlined the volunteers' task as helping visitors and answering their questions. She showed relevant slides, explained about the Abbey's history, and told stories of her experiences. Regarding the Abbey's history the Church was Catholic before it became Anglican in the 16th Century, and was founded by Edward the Confessor in 1065. She continued her lecture by showing pictures of various parts of the Abbey including the great west window and door, also speaking about the Lady Chapel, the lovely ceiling with chandeliers, tomb of the unknown warrior(soldier) and the shrine of Edward the Confessor. The speaker explained that the Queen was the head of the Abbey, described the Coronation of 1953, including the Coronation chair, and the famous people who are either buried or commemorated there. Rosemary mentioned the Abbey organist, and the various music played there, and the fact that the building can seat 1,800 people.

Amazingly I thought she stated that the Abbey receives between 4—6 thousand visitors a day, and added " History comes alive in a living church", which is primarily for worship. Rosemary in her career met the Duke of Edinburgh, when he was Chairman of the Renovations Committee. Famous people who have come to visit in recent years include Pope Benedict and former President Obama. She also talked about banners depicting Christian bible scenes, vestments and frontal, rose window, poets corner, stalls and the annual Commonwealth Day Service. Rosemary also spoke about the foundations, buttresses, garden cloisters, and Nightingale Chapel. Finally the speaker described the training and duties of the volunteers, visitors could be blind, be young soldiers, and outreach undertaken by the Abbey staff. Rosemary who is still a volunteer said it is a privilege to work there. As Chairman Berwyn said in his thank you speech to the speaker it was such a extensive,comprehensive lecture he was not surprised at the lack of questions from U3A members at the conclusion.