

A memorable day out

Having been to see the Queen Mother lying in state in 2002 in Westminster Hall and treasured the moment, we thought that we also had to visit the Queen.

We spent most of Thursday, the 15th of September planning how to do it and buying new rail cards and tickets. We got up at 4am for the first train out of Liphook at 5:15, arriving at Waterloo at 6:30. On the train we followed the progress of the queue on our phones – it had gone up massively from the day before, to an estimated 10-11 hours! We concluded that it was not practical or possible with a back condition to stand for that long – no chairs allowed in the main queue. A friend had told us the night before that they had tried the Accessible Queue so we thought that we should enquire at the Tate Britain queue in Millbank, and if not possible just to enjoy the atmosphere in the Mall and the Royal Parks.

We walked to Tate Britain arriving at 7:15 and joined a sizable queue of similar people. After about an hour and a half and chatting to some lovely people and several Scout Marshalls from all over the UK, we were delighted to be given wristbands for a timed entry between 4 & 5 o'clock. The Tate was open early for people to sit in the warm and drink coffee, and some were given thermal blankets to keep comfortable.

With several hours at our disposal and the sun shining, and a warm atmosphere in every sense, we took the tube to Marble Arch. Then on to Trafalgar Square, Admiralty Arch, and Horse Guards Parade, where we luckily saw a full half hour display of the changing of the guard on horseback.

Their trumpets, flags and colourful shiny uniforms and immaculate horses were quite a spectacle in the warm sunshine.

We moved on to the flags in the Mall, a St. James's Park picnic (food we took to eat in the queue!), Buckingham Palace, and then Green Park - a massive queue, but constantly moving.

The floral tributes were beautiful – arranged in groups, around the trees and avenues. All the wrappings were removed at the gate so the flowers were all in full view. The blaze of colour and the floral scents created a wonderfully tranquil atmosphere, and the tributes both elaborate and simple we're quite moving. One we were particularly affected by was a hand written letter from a little girl called Freya. It read "Please Queen, when you get to heaven, please say Hello to my Daddy".

We returned early to Westminster to join the Accessible Queue entry point. Not long to wait and then through a very friendly airport style police security. They let our left over sandwiches through and only our water had to be poured out! We entered Westminster Hall via a basement maze (no steps) into the side of the very hushed hall, and were ushered up alongside the main queue to be called into it at intervals to walk past the catafalque and its guard of Policemen and Royal Guards. All very still and beautifully done – time for our own moment of thanks and reflection - a moment to remember!

We paused near the exit for a last look back when everything stopped as they changed the guard – three knocks on the floor followed by a meticulous routine – a

spectacle in itself – how lucky we were to be there at that moment!

Out into the throng in Parliament Square, friendly chatty crowds. There was excitement in the air as David Beckham had just emerged and the rest were waiting for the King and his siblings to arrive for their personal vigil.

Back to the Southbank, eat, and train home after a very special memorable day.

The only hiccup was that we were turned off the train at Woking because a van had hit a bridge in Haslemere. We had to find a way home – but who cared by then!

So very pleased we made the effort, travelled optimistically and were rewarded with the most memorable day.

Dick and Mary Eyre