

GIBBONS

— SOLICITORS —

Howard and Big Ben

This month I write to you with much excitement. After arrangements that were a year in the making, I was privileged to be able to join a tour of Big Ben in London. I had to be at Portcullis House (which is opposite Big Ben) by 8.45 in the morning. My housekeeper Maria was none too pleased but made sure that my chauffeur Frank had brought round the motor car



from the Motor House spick and span to leave by 5.30 as dawn was breaking. I was astounded that the trunk road to London was packed with commercial vehicles (vans all in white carrying artisans and tradesmen to the City) so early.

I had expected to be greeted at Westminster by Black Rod but a beadle welcomed me instead. I joined a party of twelve and we made progress down an escalator, then under the pavement and to the door of Elizabeth Tower, Big Ben. The Palace of Westminster had been destroyed by fire in 1834 and it was not until 1859 that Big Ben was complete and ticking. The first bell had fractured and indeed the current bell has a crack and there is a hole in it where the damage has received attention.

It was some 350 steps to the top of the Tower. We saw the workings of the clock itself. Did you know that in 1976 damage occurred to the sails that control the 2 ton weights causing them to crash to the ground and for the massive clock mechanism to fly out of its housing. It was fortunate that no one was killed but the clock was rebuilt in 9 months for the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977. It was 9.45 am when we were looking at the clock and shortly before 10.00 am we had sat on the shelf inside the clock face lit by loads of Philips bulbs on an opposite wall and then we were up in the open by the bells. There were 16 chimes on smaller bells prior to the 10 strikes which followed 11 seconds later. I waited with great anticipation, my ear plugs in place. Big Ben struck and I felt the bell reverberate through every bone of my being. It was a very emotional experience. I felt that I was at the heart of Great Britain, as indeed I was. I had had a remarkable time which I will remember and speak of for the rest of my days. Frank borrowed my ear plugs on the return journey!

As with the devastation to the Big Ben clock one never knows what is around the corner so it is best to be prepared. All of my readers should have in place a Lasting Power of Attorney so that other people can run their affairs should one no longer have mental capacity. No soul should leave us without having a Will in place so that one's affairs can be administered and distributed. Do give me a call if these issues ring a bell. The house market is reasonably buoyant and please do ask us to take on your conveyancing. As you all know, I have thirty years of experience as a Solicitor, a qualification of which I am proud.

Howard Gibbons

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