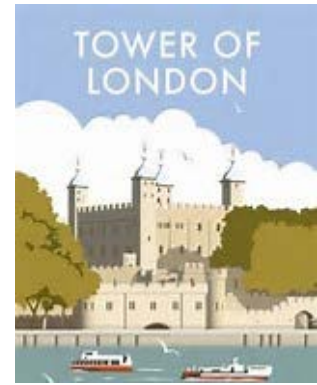




“Send ‘em to the Tower!”
**Vice-Chairman Dick
Brewster reports on the
Tower of London Visit
13 October 2017**



Friday the 13th certainly did not prove unlucky for some; in fact, the Association visit to the Tower of London was voted an outstanding success by all that attended. This was in no small part down to Yeoman Warder Spike Abbott who, to quote the US Embassy guests who joined us, *“Hit it outta the Park!”*.

The evening started in a drinking establishment on Tower Hill where the fifty Association members and guests rendezvoused for a drink prior to the bewitching hour. It was there that I was informed by Paul Davies that Dave and Lorraine Stewart were unable to attend, and I was now ‘Lead’ and would have to give a number of speeches. Having expressed my surprise, Paul replied, *“You’re good at winging it!”* Filled with confidence I herded the great and the good out of the pub and down to the entrance to the Tower. We had a quick count up to ensure all were present, and it was here that we were joined by two small parties from the American Embassy and the Bielefeld Garrison. At this point Spike arrived, and we moved through into the Tower where, after passing through security, he briefed us on that night’s visit. Spike said that the BBC were filming ‘King Lear’ in the ‘White Tower’ with Sir Antony Hopkins, Jim Broadbent and other acting royalty and, sadly, we would not be able to enter the Chapel as there was a choir practice in progress, none of which detracted from the evening ahead.



On the way to the Tower

Spike guided us through the Tower, stopping regularly along the way to impart the complete history of the Tower, from William the Conqueror to the present day. This included who had been interned, tortured and escaped, as well as who had been executed. Spike also explained some of many the roles of the Tower throughout the centuries: safe storage for the Crown Jewels, the Royal Mint and

the Royal Zoo. Spike also gave an insight into a Yeoman Warder's life, including his many and varied duties and their living arrangements within the ancient, and very thick, Tower walls.

At the end of the tour we went into the Yeoman Warders' Mess. 'The Keys' is the oldest drinking establishment in London, dating back to 1450. Here we dined on the excellent buffet, and partook in a few drinks at definitely not London prices! At 9.30pm Spike rounded us all up and took us outside to where the Tower Ravens are held. After a quick brief on the history of the Ravens he then explained the ancient ritual that we were about to witness, the Ceremony of the Keys. The ritual has been held every evening for the last 750 years and occurs when the main gates are locked for the night. It is said to be the oldest military ceremony in the world, and is the best-known ceremonial tradition of the Tower. The ceremony has never been cancelled, it was delayed once due to an air raid during the Second World War. A number of incendiary bombs fell on the old Victorian guardroom just as the Chief Warder and the escort were coming through the Bloody Tower archway. They were all blown off their feet, but they recovered and carried on. The Tower holds a letter from the Officer of the Guard apologising to King George VI that the ceremony was late, along with a reply from the King which said that the officer was not to be punished as the delay was due to enemy action.



**Above: Spike Abbott briefing the Association members about the Ceremony of the Keys
Below: The Chief Yeoman Warder approaches**



At exactly 9.52 pm, the Chief Yeoman Warder, dressed in Tudor watchcoat and bonnet, and carrying a candle lantern, leaves the Byward Tower and falls in with the Escort to the Keys, a military escort made up of armed members of the Tower of London Guard. The Warder passes his lantern to a soldier, and marches with his escort to the outer gate. The sentries on duty salute the Queen's Keys as they pass.

The Warder first locks the outer gate and then the gates of the Middle and Byward Towers. The Warder and escort march down Water Lane, until they reach the Bloody Tower archway where a sentry challenges the party to identify themselves:

Sentry: *"Halt! Who comes there?"*

Chief Warder: *"The keys."*

Sentry: *"Whose keys?"*

Chief Warder: *"Queen Elizabeth's keys."*

Sentry: *"Pass Queen Elizabeth's Keys. All's well."*

The Warder and escort march down to the foot of Broadwalk Steps where the main Tower Guard is drawn up to meet them. The party halts, and the officer in charge gives the command to present arms. The Chief Warder steps forward, doffs his bonnet, and proclaims:

Chief Warder: *"God preserve Queen Elizabeth."*

Guard: *"Amen!"*

On the answering *"Amen"* the clock at Waterloo Barracks strikes 10pm and the Last Post is sounded, marking the end of the ceremony. The Guard is dismissed, and the Chief Warder takes the keys to the Queen's House for safekeeping overnight.

At the conclusion of the ceremony we moved back to the Mess to undertake the formal part of the evening, with thank you speeches, a raffle and a few more drinks. It was an honour and a privilege to thank Spike formally on behalf of the Association, and to present him with a bottle of `33 Squadron Anniversary Whisky` by way of a simple thanks for the evening. On conclusion of that speech, I said a few words and proposed a toast to `Will Lovelock`, a beloved and much missed 33 Squadron member who lost his life a decade previously, and who is still very much missed by all those who knew him.

In conclusion, a superb time was had by all, and this was borne out through several very positive Facebook posts by the members who attended this memorable evening. The consensus is that we should repeat this tour in two years' time. In the meantime the Committee is investigating a similar event for 2018 which will be advertised soon, so `Watch this space`.



Dick and Glenn



Glenn working the room – this time with Jerry



Spike holds court in 'The Keys'



Spike as a Yeoman Warder and a Beadle