

# Bank of England Visit

Mike Weston

9

On the 23rd September the day dawned beautifully sunny and warm which boded well for the thirty two (maximum permitted) members of the Society who joined the coach for the visit to the Bank of England.

Arriving late morning at the area near to The Tower of London we had two hours to spend as we wished before being taken on to the Bank. Two hours were all too short to absorb the exciting developments which have taken place around the old St. Catherine Dock and London Dock areas close by the Tower of London. Who would have thought forty years or so ago that this area of then dingy, dirty but very busy enclosed dock lands, with its many ships, barges and other craft moving in and out on the tides, would be turned into a pristine area of 'up-market' apartments and shops in and around the docks, with the docks themselves home to many luxury yachts and other pleasure craft. The whole area has been tastefully redeveloped without losing the feel of its past history.

Returning to our coach we were taken (because of the reduction of entry points for road traffic) on a circuitous route around the City to the Bank of England. Entering by a side entrance in Bartholomew Lane — the public is not allowed to use the front entrance — we were greeted by the sight of liveried porters and the grand interior of this city institution which had its foundation by Royal Charter in 1694.

Whilst waiting for the very articulate and knowledgeable young lady who was to give us a slide show and a question and answer session, we passed through into the Bank of England Museum which was opened by H.M. The Queen in late 1988. The museum gives a comprehensive

history of the Bank together with information on the role it plays in today's highly intricate world financial affairs and shows why the City of London has become one of the greatest financial centres in the world.

The slide show brought out numerous facts about the Bank — for instance, did you know that the storage space in the three floors, which are below ground, is greater than the whole of the space in the nearby Nat West Tower? Or that the walls at street level are eight feet thick with no windows? That the adage "As safe as the Bank of England" owes its origin to the fact that every night from 1780 until 1973 a military guard protected the Bank? These and many other fascinating facts together with the showing of examples of the materials used in the manufacture of bank notes were encompassed in the fifty-minute slide show and talk.

It was then possible to make a further visit to the museum, with a longer period to digest the wealth of information shown in the many displays and to be able to recall some of the information given to us at the slide show by means of banks of computers. The time for our return to Dover came all too soon, for to do justice to the information available in the museum would require a far longer time than was available to us. This museum is well worth a visit and is open each weekday to the public free of charge.

On our return journey we were treated to a tour of South London, following the Thames to Greenwich where glimpses of the structure of the Millennium Dome were visible. This was a highly interesting trip, helped by beautiful weather and of course Joan Liggett's usual high standard of arrangements.