

Meeting of WPS December 8th 2017 At Martin Gibbs' House

After drinks and mince pies supplied by the Committee, The Chairman Mark Leclercq reported that the Committee of six members had met since the October AGM and are working on an evolving programme. The room was filled to capacity with 27 people which was cosy. Some people had to be told that there was no room for them.

Claire Goddard introduced Jessica Mulley who has been a Clerk of the House of Commons for 25 years. She advises MPs on practice and sits in the chamber on Wednesdays. She advises governments on democracy and runs a bookshop.

Jessica delivered a brilliant talk with energy and humour. She told us that she is one of three clerks who wear gowns and sit in front of the Speaker. There are sixty clerks altogether and their role is to advise the Speaker and members on how to make things happen within the rules of the House and within Parliamentary Law. The clerks are strictly politically impartial. They know the procedures thoroughly and ensure that the Commons supports Democracy. They are custodians of the way parliament works and they also manage the estate. They spend time and effort on emerging democracies, colonial guilt being a driving force. They work with partners such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

They have worked in Sierra Leone and have set up a committee in Georgia. They set up a system to look at laws after their enactment in Trinidad and found a direct impact on improved exports. Self-interest is served as we learn from other countries' use of scarce resources. A programme establishes a centre of excellence so that it can be consulted to understand how things work at Westminster.

There is a focus on Brexit, to build procedures that will support whatever happens.

There was a lively interplay with the audience giving questions and receiving illuminating answers. Jessica talked about involvement in Afghanistan and in Iraq. It was necessary to withdraw from Iraq as a level of stability is needed in order to develop Parliamentary Democracy.

Heartfelt thanks were given to Martin for lending his house and to Jessica for her wonderful talk.

Ann Vaughan-Williams