

# THE EARL & COUNTESS OF WESSEX VISIT

The Earl and Countess of Wessex enjoyed the warmth, colour and splendour of North Wales in late July during a short series of special visits to Rhyl, Old Colwyn and Llandudno. *Special reports by Andrew Boyd, Tom Simone & David Waddington. Photographs at Rhyl by Terry Williams.*

A celebration of life in Rhyl was presented to the visibly impressed Earl and Countess of Wessex during the first part of their whistle-stop tour. After weeks of heavy rain, Prince Edward and Sophie Wessex were blessed with scorching sunshine as they made Botanical Gardens the first part of their tour of North Wales.

The attractive gardens were packed with local dignitaries, school children, community organisations and intrigued Rhyl residents of all ages. Flanked by Lord Lieutenant Trefor Jones, the couple were quickly joking about the weather with residents.

The Prince told one well-wisher: "You should certainly be able to enjoy yourself sitting out in the garden today. It is great to see somewhere that brings people together like this."

The Countess, who is expecting her second child, wore a suitably bright and colourful dress for the summer weather, and spent a lot of time with young children. Her attention was caught by little Harry Owen, aged four, who had dressed up as a knight for the occasion.

Moving at a gentle pace, the Royals listened to the Rhyl Silver Band, watched toddlers perform a song in Welsh and learnt about the roles of the National Autistic Society Cymru and Denbighshire Youth Services.

They also met children from Ysgol Emmanuel and Duke of Edinburgh award students from Blessed Edward Jones High School, and later accepted a selection of children's books by local author Alan Cliff, from his famous Jack the Station Cat series.

The Royals also heard about the work of Denbighshire County Council and the Rhyl South West Central Residents Association,



who had helped to make the Botanical Gardens such an attractive place. It was the residents association who had invited the Royals to the gardens, having helped revamp the cafe and other parts of the site since forming four years ago. Later, the Prince and Countess planted a tree near the gardens' bowling green and unveiled a plaque in the cafe marking their visit.

## OLD COLWYN

The Royal visitors next visited Old Colwyn, where Prince Edward and Sophie, first walked around Wynn gardens - in warm sunshine! - and then met representatives from various local groups

Cliff Prout, who has recently received an MBE for his tireless community fundraising, was responsible for orchestrating the event

and it was he who guided the royal couple around the gardens and introduced them to the assembled groups of people.

First up where the politicians, including David Jones and Darren Millar, with whom Prince Edward shared a joke and handshake. Sophie, looking resplendent in red, also spent some time talking to Rowena Thomas-Breese about her guide dog, in which she took a keen interest.

The countess, the patron of the girl guides, also showed her support to the local guiding group. Ann Marie Leadbeater, the new girl guides district commissioner for Llandudno, said: "She recognised the uniform I was wearing, and she was impressed that we have over 200 members in Llandudno district."

Prince Edward marked the visit by planting a walnut tree, but only after Cliff gave a short speech. >>

Sophie also lent her support to the Colwyn Bay Urdd working party, who are trying to raise £30,000, and accepted a T-shirt from fundraiser Debbie Davies for her four-year-old. Cllr Brian Cossey summed up: "This was the first royal visit to Old Colwyn since Queen Victoria. They were relaxed, interested, and Old Colwyn did itself proud."



**Above** Eviebronwen White (aged 3) from Prestatyn with the Countess of Wessex.



**Above** Rhyl author Alan Cliff presents the Royal couple with some of his children's books about 'Jack the Station Cat.'



**Above** The Rhyl Silver Band.



## VENUE CYMRU

The royal couple received a musical greeting when they visited Llandudno's Venue Cymru development during their North Wales tour. After arriving at the recently completed theatre and conference facility, the royals were presented with a host of musical acts from local schools, drama groups and dance schools.

As a showcase of the new arena, a sample of the different events that can be held in the space were presented to the Prince and Sophie; including performances from Pearl Shaw dance school and Llandudno Youth Music Theatre.

Also featured in the arena was a selection of cars to demonstrate how lifestyle shows can be put on in the large space. Sophie was thrilled after spying a brand new Audi sports car among the display models. "I normally get a bunch of flowers, but this will do!" she joked.

Ysgol Bodafon and Ysgol Craig Y Don primary schools then performed a selection of songs for the visiting couple. They were both impressed with the performance and were keen to ask questions about the Welsh song 'Aderyn Melyn'.

Prince Edward carried on his light-hearted demeanour during the unveiling of a commemorative plaque, exclaiming, "I shall now attempt to unveil this plaque as slick and professional as possible. It is always a nerve wracking thing to do when I open it, to find out if I turned up on the right day." ■