

Tow law girl reports on royal visit to Japan

By Gabriella White

Royal Reporter in Tokyo

A YOUNG lady from Tow Law who is living and working in Japan was able to report on the recent visit by HRH The Duke of Cambridge after contacting the gazette for help.

Gabriella White, a former pupil of Wolsingham School, a Durham University languages graduate, who spent her work experience with the Weardale Gazette, never forgets her favourite, local newspaper when she 'smells' a story! Here she writes exclusively for the Gazette after we were able to help her obtain the necessary information from Buckingham Palace itself to enable her to complete this report:

Thursday 26th February

Prince William landed on Japanese soil for the first time in history, as part of his Far East tour to promote British innovation and creativity and strengthen relations between the East and West. Prince William was escorted from Haneda airport by cruise boat: his first glimpse of Japan was that of Tokyo's Rainbow Bridge in Odaiba, crossing the city's scenic Tokyo Bay, where the 2020 Olympics will take place.

The Duke of Cambridge was greeted by rather familiar British weather, whilst, accompanied by Tokyo's Metropolitan Government Governor Mr Yoichi Masuzoe. Government officials prudently held umbrellas over them, as they cruised the bay, royal fans from Japan waving British flags in the pouring rain. Following closely behind was Her Majesty's Ambassador for Japan, Tim Hitchens, ready to escort Prince William on his tour of the Far East.

Prince William's Japan tour kick-started with the one thing that Japan and Britain probably have most in common: a cup of tea. But this was no ordinary cup of tea. This extraordinary cup of tea was prepared by Japan's key 'grand tea master', who served Prince William a cup of *usucha*, one of the thinner blends of powdered green tea. The renowned master goes by the name of Lemoto SEN Soshitsu XVI, a leader of the Urasenke chado tradition, whose ancestors are responsible for developing Japan's official way of tea. The ceremony was held at the historic Hama Rikyu Gardens, where The Duke's forefather Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, also first set foot in Japan in 1869. The ceremony marked a meeting between nations to mark unity, harmony and respect over a cup of tea and traditional refreshments.

The tea ceremony at the 350-year-old teahouse took place behind the classic shoji sliding doors, ever maintaining Japan's private, perplexing culture as the press gazed intently at their shadows and wondered what was being said. As the door slid open for a brief moment to reveal the scene to the media, we could see the Duke silently sipping his tea with intent eyes as he held the golden Korean serving bowl with two hands: the handful of Japanese VIP guests mutely observed him, as HRH broke the silence with a worried "I don't want to drop it".

Tea was served up at a height for HRH as he was revealed to sit on a western-style stool for comfort,

unlike the usual traditional Japanese style sitting on the floor's tatami mats. The prince did however take his shoes off for the ceremony.

Friday 27th February

The Prince attended a more solemn event on his second day at Yokohama's Commonwealth War Cemetery in Hodogaya. Prince William remembered Princess Diana as he retraced her steps: he went on to lay a chrysanthemum wreath, before walking amongst the graves as his mother had, precisely 20 years ago.

Prince William was entertained by geishas just like a Japanese man of leisure would be: the venue of choice for this was a 19th century-style theatre. He was also shown samurai costumes, though controversially declined wearing the warrior's wig, saying his brother Prince Harry, would never let him live it down. "No, honestly", he reiterated, photographers laughing. He was persuaded to wear the samurai's costume though. "I feel ready for action", he said. Later, sumo wrestler celebrities arrived in Aston Martins for the prince's amusement.

Saturday 28th February

Prince William spent the morning touring NHK, Japan's world-renowned public broadcasting channel. The news team demonstrated the studio's earthquake alarm procedures to the Prince.

In recent times, the channel has been known for its limitation in how it broadcasts the truths of radiation levels from the country's disaster zone in Fukushima prefecture ever since March 2011, following the country's most destructive earthquake to date. Moreover, just last year, the country's news anchor Hori Jun was forced to resign from NHK over the controversy of revealing the truth of radiation level statistics and consequently the radiation damage in the Pacific Ocean, the people of Japan and the world.

The presenter was told not to question let alone challenge 'official data'. Not long after, PM Shinzo Abe passed a law in which public officials and private citizens who leak 'special state secrets' could face prison terms of up to 10 years, while journalists who seek to obtain the classified information could get up to five years imprisonment. The controversial censorship led Japan's news anchor Hori to launch the news station 8-Bit. The channel marks a new wave of Japanese media who broadcast real case studies and interviews with the Fukushima victims, still living the crisis of its repercussions today. Hori's channel 8-bit runs on one sole principle: freedom of speech for journalists in the face of the government.

Following the NHK tour, Prince William débuted the Britain's 'Innovation is GREAT' campaign in Tokyo's swishest neighbourhood, Daikanyama. A two-week exhibition has been set up in celebration of the Prince's arrival at the country's chain bookstore Tsutaya. The plaited T-style building was designed by British architect Mark Dytham.

The exhibition gives a rare opportunity to showcase a variety

of innovative British products, ranging from those yet to be launched in Japan to some of the well-knowns. The products include a bespoke active wheelchair with shock-absorbing wheels with integral suspension, a revolutionary prosthetic foot/ankle system with microprocessor-controlled speed and terrain response, an electronic musical instrument for a new generation of musicians, and a cute and full-scaled humanoid robot kit.

To finish off, the cosy couloirs are lined with a step-by-step history of the British trench coat, with Japanese models parading in them; another aisle showcases a British catwalk trail starring vintage posters of Kate Moss and prose on what it is like to live in London.

The prince was invited by Aston Martin's CEO Andy Palmer to try out the bespoke Rapide S model parked outside, tailor-made for the event. As he stepped outside to accheering crowds, William emphatically gestured for the crowd to get out of the way. "Step aside please", he said sternly, swinging both arms in the air with an anticipated speedy take-off in the car. Laughing and joking all the way to the driver's seat, the bodyguards and surrounding press roaring with laughter, the prince got into the car and playfully revved the engine for several minutes, like a boy racer, tongue in cheek, until clouds of smoke fanned the cheering public. Sitting in the driver's seat was Andy Palmer, with whom the Duke spent a long time discussing the bespoke customized model and all its features.

Marking Prince William's last event in Tokyo before heading up north to Fukushima for Japan's most sober matters, this was Tokyo's last opportunity to capture the Prince up close. The crowd went a little manic at this point of the tour, reminiscent of a newfangled Beatle mania, which startled the Prince so much that he withdrew from the crowds upon approaching them to shake hands, bombarded by selfie-sticks and various tripods. Security struggled to cope. The prince departed Tokyo by shinkansen bullet train mid-afternoon, accompanying the train driver in the cockpit out of technological interest. As I interviewed

Daikanyama's employees of Tsutaya bookstore, their faces lit up, eyes sparkling as they reminisced their various encounters: [translated from Japanese].

"I was struck by how tall he was" said one bookstore clerk, smiling ecstatically, whilst another said "I just froze when I finally saw him up close in person. I couldn't believe how tall and charismatic he was. It was one of the most memorable experiences of my life." His eyes lit up as he continued "He just talked to me so naturally. He's cool. I'm starstruck." Another employee's eyes filled with tears as she smiled "I was touched by the kindness in his eyes. His height, blonde hair and good looks were overwhelming. I didn't know what to say." A Ministry of Justice Official, said: "I am very happy that Prince William has come to our country."

William has the same star quality Diana had and carries the legacy forward with the same idolization and adoration with which his mother was so well received.

Meanwhile, some say the Duke of Cambridge's Japan tour was strategically planned by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in an attempt to smooth out ill-feelings regarding his pro-nuclear tactics. They were pictured at dinner together that evening at a traditional ryokan inn in Koriyama, Fukushima Prefecture. Prince William and HM's Ambassador Tim Hitchens wore the yukata, a casual kimono for dinner. The meal was designed to show that food grown in Fukushima is safe despite concerns about radiation. Local citizens in the loop, however, remain adamant that the government is just trying to keep a lid on the real truth; that radiation levels are dangerously high. In fact, just hours before the Prince landed at Haneda airport on Thursday 26th, media leaked that another radiation leak in the area had been unveiled last week, deliberately unreported by TEPCO for over a year. The leak is over 70 times the normal national level. Whatever Abe's tactics in utilizing international relations as a media stunt, one thing is clear: with his wit, charm and quintessentially British humour, ever reminiscent of his father, the Prince of Wales, Prince William has left quite the impression on both Japanese officials and the Japanese public alike.

Just like his mother, Prince William has the gift of great



compassion, when spending time with the victims of the Fukushima earthquake: he asked everyone in detail where they were when it happened and said that "everyone in Britain knew where they were" when they heard the tragic news that haunting day 11/3/2011. The Prince then rang the Chime of Hope in remembrance of the victims.

Finally, he told a couple who lost their children in the tsunami that he, too, had lost a loved one, his mother, Princess Diana, in a 1997 traffic accident. The last Royal Visit to Japan was in 2008 by Prince Charles and his wife the Duchess of Cornwall. Moreover, Prince William's first visit to Japan has undoubtedly fortified the Japanese love of Britain's "cool" or as the Japanese put it 'kakkoi' western culture, which came about ever since the 1960s and has remained strong in Japan's younger generations ever since.



Prince William prepares to take a look at the new Aston Martin. Below the Prince enjoying the crowds.

