

WASC 2391

Royal Opening
16-5-2001

An explosive launch

LEA FOUNTAIN reports on the opening of the Royal Gunpowder Mills tourist attraction in Waltham Abbey, where a ten-year dream has become a reality

Pictures by Melissa Page

DESPITE the rain the Royal Gunpowder Mills in Waltham Abbey had a successful opening last Wednesday, with the district's latest tourist attraction receiving royal approval.

HRH The Duke of Gloucester joined local dignitaries, and was given a full tour of the site.

The Queen's cousin said: "I think it's marvellous. You have here a site of immense historic value. It would be difficult to find a site you could compare this to. I hope this will become a thriving place."

The Duke, who arrived in a Vauxhall estate, was in Waltham Abbey for several hours under close guard.

He said: "I think this particular project would not have been possible 20 years ago. But we now realise history has value. It makes people realise that it can just vanish if you are not careful to preserve it."

The Duke also commented on the number of new houses around the site and was interested in how the residents of Waltham Abbey viewed the town's development.

Other visitors to the event also seemed delighted by the opening.

Epping Forest Council chairman John Gilliam, who was attending his first official function having received the chain of office the previous evening, called the site an "impressive facility which is steeped in history", while new Waltham Abbey mayor Liz Webster simply said: "Well done Waltham Abbey."

Baroness Symons said: "We speak a lot



Civic dignitaries: (left to right) Waltham Abbey town council leader Don Spinks, town mayor Liz Webster and Epping Forest Council chairman John Gilliam

(D696-22A)

about partnership - but I think today we have seen some tremendous demonstrations of how it can bring the past alive."

A special mention was made of Waltham Abbey Town Council leader Don Spinks who has been fighting to get the site opened for the last ten years.

Royal Gunpowder Mills chairman Trevor Knapp praised his vision, stamina and determination and said that without Mr Spinks the opening would not have been possible.

Mr Spinks said: "I have been waiting ten years for this day. It really is a proud day for us at the town council."

"Most of it is what we envisaged when we first started. To have seen it all then in our minds and now to be here is wonderful."

He added: "It is bound to benefit Waltham Abbey."

●The Royal Gunpowder Mills is open to the public daily between 10am and 6pm (last entry 5pm), and costs £5.90 for adults and £3.25 for children.



The watercolour painting, by Freda Titford, which was presented to the Duke of Gloucester

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Artistic memory to keep forever

AFTER carrying out the opening ceremony, the Duke was presented with a painting of the site by local artist Freda Titford.

She said: "I was very honoured to have my painting given to the Duke. I did one and I didn't quite

like it so I decided to do it again. With watercolours it has to look really fresh and I thought I could do better if I tried again."

In 1995 Mrs Titford had an exhibition of 50 paintings of scenes around the site.

She feels the popularity of

these (all but four were sold) led to the site choosing her to paint a picture for the Duke.

She said: "I loved going down there and painting. When the weather is good it really is a lovely place. It's so peaceful."



Lord Braybrooke welcomes the Duke to the Royal Gunpowder Mills site

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Presented to Duke 16.5.2001

PRESENTED TO H R H THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER
ON THE OPENING OF THE
ROYAL GUNPOWDER MILLS AT WALTHAM ABBEY
SIXTEENTH OF MAY MCM

SCRIPSIIT F.T.



Freda J. Ford 2001