

Greenlaw gives Prince Charles a royal welcome

Prince of Wales officially opens refurbished Town Hall

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THE first signature in Greenlaw Town Hall's new visitors' book will be hard to beat - that of HRH the Prince of Wales, Duke of Rothesay, who signed it during a visit to the recently refurbished building.

An hour long visit stretched to one and a half hours, as Prince Charles took time to speak to everyone inside the hall as well as the many people waiting outside, and this royal visitor will be welcome back to the village any time after showing such a keen interest in the hall and all that it means to local people.

As he arrived at Greenlaw Town Hall Prince Charles was escorted by the Lord Lieutenant of Berwickshire, Major Alexander Trotter and stopped to greet many of the wellwishers who had come out to welcome him to Greenlaw, and as he reached the primary school children there was much cheering and flag waving going on much to his delight.

One of the first people to be introduced to Prince Charles was 79 year old Douglas Smith, the last mason to be initiated at Greenlaw Town Hall. He showed His Royal Highness around the extraordinary masons room at the top of the building, right up in the dome. The room was first used in 1937 but by 1959 as the condition of the building deteriorated and the roof started to leak, the masons found alternative accommodation elsewhere in the village.

However, in homage to a time gone by, the masons refurbished the dome room as it had been over 50 years ago, ready for the royal visit and official re-opening of Greenlaw Town Hall.

A Greenlaw resident all his life, Douglas said after meeting Prince Charles: "It's a very important day for Greenlaw. They have brought this hall back to life and it's the start of a new era.

"It's impressive that someone so important should come and re-open the hall.

"I have lived here all my life and it's great to see it coming back into life.

"The local community will be quite pleased and amazed to see how it's come on and I hope the hall will be used by the community. I couldn't have asked for a better person to re-open it."

An air of informality and chat took over as Prince Charles went into Greenlaw Town Hall's main room, which once housed a swimming pool, was used by an antique business and housed Polish soldiers during the World War II, amongst its chequered history.

For over 20 years a stalwart



Greenlaw Primary School children gave Prince Charles a right royal welcome, with cheers and Union Jack flags, when he arrived at Greenlaw Town Hall to officially re-open the building after a £2 million restoration project.

Picture by: Kimberley Powell

group of local residents have fought hard to restore Greenlaw Town Hall to its former glory and for the original trustees, Alistair Appleton, James Simpson, Lady McEwen, Sue McLean and Jeff Payne, seeing the restored hall full of people was a sight they often wondered it they would ever see.

"We were trying to keep the building from falling down," said Sue McLean, who along with her fellow trustees was delighted they had reached the point of hosting a royal visit in the hall.

Attempts to raise the funds for the restoration work to begin with were often frustrated but they soldiered on and their breakthrough came two years ago when the hall featured on the BBC television programme 'Restoration Village'. Although it did not win it raised the hall's profile and brought together a group of landowners - Will Ramsay, Major General Charles Ramsay, Henry Trotter,

Catherine Trotter, Leonard Harper Gow, Dermot Jenkinson and the Earl of Haddington - each estate donating £10,000. Scottish Historic Buildings Trust came on board and soon the £2 million restoration project was underway.

As well as meeting those with close connections with the hall, Prince Charles was also introduced to Greenlaw Festival Committee, and both the current Greenlaw Maid Kirstin Canning and this year's maid elect Hannah Hay told him about their festival week celebrations. Greenlaw Youth Project members told him of their involvement in helping with clearing up the site outside the hall, and a wide range of people from the president of Greenlaw SWRI to the First Responders all had more than just a moment chatting to His Royal Highness, giving him an insight into village life.

Wherever he goes, Prince Charles is always keen to see

how his Prince's Scottish Youth Business Trust is helping youngsters get a foothold in business and in Greenlaw, as he talked to local businesses that had successfully applied for help from the PSYBT he found out for himself just how helpful that initial grant can be to a fledgling business.

Twenty two years ago Billy Smillie applied to the PSYBT for a £3000 loan, one of the first in the Borders, and since that time his business, Border Embroideries has gone from strength to strength. They now supply school uniforms to 600 schools all over Scotland and have three shops.

Never forgetting how important that initial helping hand was to his business, Billy is now on the local PSYBT panel and after meeting Prince Charles he said: "I told him that I'd received a loan 22 years ago and he was pleased that I'm on the panel - it's good to be able to put something back."

Once Prince Charles had finally left the hall, and visited the offices of Equibuddy, one of a number of offices housed in the wings of the early 19th century building, he stopped in the foyer to sign the visitors' book.

As he re-emerged out onto the steps of the hall he paused to unveil a plaque, which will be a lasting reminder of his visit to Greenlaw Town Hall in 2011, then Greenlaw Primary School children burst into song, singing 'The Greenlaw Song' written by the grandfather of one of the pupils.

Afterwards, headteacher Mrs Waite said: "I'm very proud of the children. What an experience for them. They have done a lot of practising of the song."

More handshaking and chatting continued as Prince Charles made his way back to the car - his visit an undoubted success as far as the 500 inhabitants of Greenlaw were concerned.