



ROYAL VISIT: Prince Charles shares a joke with Michael Palin on his visit to St Pancras Almshouses. And right, taking a walk round the houses.

Pictures by Nigel Sutton



Prince Charles discovers life in almshouses

Susanna Wilkey

THE Prince of Wales paid a special visit to the St Pancras Almshouses to mark the 150th anniversary of the Victorian institution and prompted many to recall its long history.

Home to 50 people, both singletons and couples, the Almshouses on Southampton Road were established in 1850 to "save respectable characters from the workhouse".

A group of local philanthropists were called together by Dr Donald Fraser, the senior churchwarden of St Pancras parish church, because he was dismayed that elderly couples living in workhouses were forced to live apart.

The group subsequently founded the St Pancras Almshouses and the first buildings were established in 1859 in South End Green in what was then virtually countryside.

Resident Samantha King, who has lived in an almshouse for two years with her husband John, said: "We got married in St Pancras registry office in 1966 and we had lived in Camden our whole lives and our children grew up here.

"They wanted local people like us to stay in the area and it is a lovely

place. When I was a little girl I used to walk past here but I did not know what it was. The prince said our flat was lovely and he liked our black and white theme."

Residents now have to be aged at least 55, must have lived in Camden for ten years or more and be in housing need of some kind.

Prince Charles, who is patron of The Almshouses Association, visited the residents to chat to them about their experience of the almshouses and to present the Patron's Awards.

He said: "It has been a great joy to meet so many of the residents here and to listen to their views and aspirations for the almshouses.

"I have been patron of the almshouses for quite some time. All the organisations I am patron of do such wonderful work in this country and I and members of my family are immensely proud to have some association with them."

Chairman of the trustees Richard Lindley said: "It is always nerve-racking something of this kind. It is a once in a lifetime chance for us and an everyday event for His Royal Highness.

"We were very excited and the resi-

dents really wanted to meet him. He was very friendly and great at putting people at ease.

"We are very proud to be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the almshouses and our role is still the same as it was when these were set up which is to provide a home for people who need it."

Trustee Jean Stone showed the Prince the vegetable patch in the gardens of the almshouses.

She said: "The prince was charming. He is really pleasant and you forget you are talking to a prince – you are just chatting.

"I am a great believer that you learn gardening as you go along and it is great here – now we are growing rhubarb, tomatoes and beans."

This is not the first time the almshouses have received a royal visitor. The Prince's grandmother Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother met residents and admired the gardens of the Victorian building twice, the second time in her 100th year.

The almshouses are about to undergo a major improvement scheme to make them fit for the next 30 years.

susanna.wilkey@hamhigh.co.uk

Help to save endangered buildings from the bulldozers

A CAMPAIGN to find the nation's top 10 endangered buildings has been launched by The Victorian Society.

It is calling on people across Camden to nominate Victorian or Edwardian buildings at risk in their local area.

Buildings which have been nominated in previous years include pubs, swimming baths, stately homes, former workhouses, churches and chapels and a large number of threatened Victorian schools.

Director of the Victorian

Society Ian Dungavell said: "The economic situation has made things harder than ever for the owners of historic buildings, and many development plans have stalled.

"It's very important that we identify which buildings may

now be at risk of neglect. The cost of weather-proofing a building and protecting it from vandals is not huge, but it makes a massive difference.

"Without it, many buildings may be beyond repair by the time the money starts flowing again.

"Everyone will live near or regularly walk past wonderful examples of Victorian and Edwardian architecture. If you think something worth saving is now at risk then we want to hear about it."

Buildings do not have to be

listed to be nominated but need to have been built between 1837 and 1914.

To nominate visit www.victorian-society.org.uk, email community@victoriansociety.org.uk or write to 1 Priory Gardens, London, W4 1TT.