

Knit your own royal wedding



WITH a cast including the Queen, Prince Philip, Prince Charles, Camilla, Prince Harry and the Archbishop of Canterbury, you can create your very own royal wedding – with wool.

Knitter Fiona Goble has created hilarious patterns for every member of the royal wedding party – including the corgis. Wills is in his RAF uniform and Kate comes complete with a tiara, while the Queen is in fetching royal blue.

The book, complete with patterns, instructions and a fold-out card balcony to display the characters, costs £9.99. But we have 10 copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, answer this question. Which royal hasn't had an invitation to the wedding?

- The Countess of Wessex
- The Duchess of York
- The Duchess of Cornwall

Send your answer on a postcard with your name, address and daytime phone number to Knit Your Own Royal Wedding Competition, Features Department, Gloucestershire Media, 3rd Floor, St James' House, St James' Square, Cheltenham, GL50 3PR. The closing date is Wednesday, April 27.

Rules: Winners will be contacted by telephone. Winners may be required to take part in publicity. No cash alternative is offered. No purchase necessary. Employees of Gloucestershire Media are not eligible to enter. The Editor's decision is final.

Highgrove peek

ROYAL-watchers and garden-lovers will have the chance to step inside the hallowed gates of Prince William's family home next month.

On May 10, the charity Hospitality Action is hosting afternoon tea and a tour of Prince Charles' private gardens to raise funds for its own coffers, and The Prince's Charities Foundation.

The exclusive 90-minute tour will enable guests to view Highgrove's stunning grounds, which the prince has spent almost 30 years cultivating.

One of the most innovative gardens of our time, it promotes organic principles and seasonality and is also home to the National Collection of hostas.

With lunch at Luckham Park, one of England's finest five-star hotels, and afternoon tea in Highgrove's Orchard Room included, the event will appeal to garden-lovers and foodies alike.

Tickets are £100. To book, call Astrid Wears-Taylor on 020 3004 5503.

On the buses in royal style

ONE will be frantically waving one's flag at the Royal Wedding. And I'll feel a little more justified than some after having paid homage to 'The Firm' on a coach tour of Gloucestershire's jewels in the crown.

I joined a group of what was safe to say were 19 pro-monarchists on the launch of Cheltenham-based coach company Marchants' Royal Connections tour – coinciding with the Queen's 85th birthday.

The wheels on the bus took us to just about every corner of the county which had a link with the royals, on the eve of Prince William and Kate Middleton's Big Day.

The aim of the new all-day tour was to draw more visitors into an area which is closely aligned to the House of Windsor.

And Blue Badge tour guide Anne Bartlett knew how to mix mainstream information with off-beat, but insightful anecdotes to keep her patriotic passengers on the edge of their seats.

We heard how Kate had been "mobbed by the media" at Cheltenham racecourse – where our tour started – on her first visit in 2006. She was wearing a coat designed by Katherine Hooker, which was shortened for her first official visit with Prince William, don't you know.

Driver Steve Lewis took us through Cheltenham to get some glimpses of majestic monuments.

Local lad Gustav Holst's praises were sung as we whizzed past his humble terraced birthplace. His composition I Vow To Thee My Country was sung at Princess Diana's wedding in 1981 and her funeral in 1997 and was actually called Thaxted, after where he lived for much of his life.

The Malverns also had a special mention, as Queen Elizabeth I drank the water in public in the 16th century. Queen Victoria refused to travel without it and it's the only bottled



The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall outside Tetbury's Highgrove shop

Kate Middleton being mobbed at Cheltenham racecourse, a waitress serving up dodgy boiled eggs to the Princess Royal and a very sickly king – the royals' secrets are laid bare on a new coach tour of Gloucestershire, as **CAROLINE FISHER** discovered when she hopped on board with the tourists



The Duchess of Cornwall on a visit to Tetbury

water used by our current monarch.

Prestbury grocer John Fogarty, a huge admirer of the Queen Mother, could not go unnoticed and, despite his recent death, the Union flag was still flying on his old thatched shop. By now, we were begging for more of Anne's often irreverent and 'not-in-the-history-book' tales of sovereignty.

She told us it was King George III who really seemed to put Cheltenham on the map. In 1788 he had a nasty bilious attack and his doctor recommended the Cheltenham waters. Staying with Lord Fauconberg at Bayshill House for five weeks, he set a trend for hordes of visitors. Anne said: "Theatres



Highgrove House, home to Prince Charles, the Duchess of Cornwall and family seat of Princes William and Harry

developed, gardens were laid out with bandstands and walks and rides so fashionable people could promenade with their friends.

"Here was an opportunity for new friendships to develop, a chance to flirt, to find an aristocratic husband or wealthy wife, to flaunt new clothes, to frequent tea rooms and bookshops and complain about the extortionate prices." So what's changed? But the best story of the day came from one of the passengers, Esther O'Sullivan, who'd beaten The Queen by celebrating her 84th birthday the day before.

Esther, from Benhall, had served our Queen's great aunt Alice, the then Princess Royal, at Cheltenham's The Queen's hotel in 1954. The royal requested a boiled egg for breakfast. Esther, a young chambermaid, told chef who promptly put a brown egg into the same saucepan with some boiling peas. She said: "I was horrified and told him it would turn green, but he said it wouldn't because it had a brown shell. I took it upstairs, gave the tray to someone else who gave it to another person and



Reporter Caroline Fisher about to jump on board Marchants Coaches' royal tour

then another person to give to the Princess." Esther was enthralled with the whole trip. "I'm a royalist through and through," she enthused. "Kate and Prince William are lovely but I don't think they want all the fuss that's happening – with dignitaries from all over the world coming to their wedding. It's too commercial and overwhelming, it should just be people they love."

We had a coffee break in Cirencester – a favourite shopping haunt of Princess Diana and Princess Anne. Guide Anne said she hoped the tour would capitalise on foreigners' interest in the royals, afford them a little praise and inspire locals to find out more.

"The royal family does a tremendous amount, particularly Prince Charles, and he doesn't get the credit he should, because he supports so many local charities," she said.

Tourists Clive Atkins, from London and his Finnish wife Viola, wanted to see what the forthcoming marriage would bring. Clive said: "Kate and William signify a new generation. They have a lot to learn. I see William as a young David Cameron and Kate is joyful, outgoing and refreshing."

Chandri Gokani, a paediatric nurse from Cheltenham, said the royals were an asset. "I travel a lot and whenever you say you come from England, people say 'how is the Queen doing?' – there's nobody like her in the world," she said. "William and Kate are wonderful – usually royal marriages are match made but this time it's a love marriage.

"We should have more tours like this, this will broaden your horizons."

The tour wended its way through the Stroud Valleys, past Gatcombe Park, up to Minchinhampton Common and to Avening and Nailsworth, well off the tourist trail. We lunched in Tetbury and took in the obligatory Highgrove shop, with all its profits – from satsuma marmalade to honey spoons – going to the Prince's Charities Foundation.

Then it was up hill and down dale through Wootton-under-Edge, North Nibley and Stinchcombe, to the Severn Vale and Berkeley Castle to hear about King Edward II's gruesome death after a red hot poker was inserted

somewhere unmentionable.

Our last stop was Gloucester Cathedral to see the aforesaid King's elaborate tomb, which attracted pilgrims far and wide. The place of worship has held the one and only coronation for a king of England outside London, since William the Conqueror was crowned in Westminster Abbey.

King John's heir, nine year old Prince Henry, was hurriedly crowned in 1216. He transformed the east end of Westminster Abbey into a church to rival France's gothic cathedrals in honour of his hero Edward the Confessor. This area – between the high altar and beginning of the quire – will stage the royal union on Friday.

For details on this tour and guided day tours until October, call Marchants on 01242 257714 or www.marchants-coaches.com Adults are £20, seniors £19 and children £15.

Win £100 of books with Waterstone's

IF you're celebrating Kate and Wills' big day on Friday, it's wise to stock up your bookshelves.

Waterstone's in Cheltenham and Gloucester have all the tomes you need to toast the happy couple.

For those needing to swot up on their Royal etiquette, there's The Royal Wedding for Dummies by Julian Knight (£7.99).

Beautiful keepsakes to commemorate the occasion include William & Kate: Celebrating a Royal Engagement by Robin Nunn (£14.99), or toast the newlyweds with your own Royal Wedding Photograph Mug (£8.99). You can even give the Queen a run for her money with the Racing Royals Twin Pack (£6.99).

We've teamed up with Waterstone's to offer one lucky reader a £100 gift card to spend in-store or online at www.waterstones.com, on royal books or otherwise.

To be in with a chance of winning, answer the following question. At which university did Prince William and Kate Middleton meet?

- Oxford
- Exeter
- St Andrews

Send your answer on a postcard with your name, address and daytime phone number to Waterstone's Competition, Features Dept, Gloucestershire Media, 3rd Floor, St James' House, St James' Square, Cheltenham, GL50 3PR. The closing date is Saturday, April 30. See opposite for terms and conditions.



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