

DAWN BLUNDEN – CAKE ICING FOR THE ROYALS

The charismatic Dawn Blunden gave a very entertaining talk detailing how she started her cake business, Sophisticake in Woodhall Spa, and some of the very special cakes she has created including those for various Royals.

Dawn grew up in Poole, Dorset, before moving to Lincolnshire in 2003, and it was then that she indulged her hobby further by signing up to lessons with Mary Ford, in Bournemouth, where she learnt more about baking as well as the decorative arts of piping and icing. Her story continues:

'My son Darren, a freelance chef who cooks for the Prince on occasion, happened to mention that his mum and aunt ran a small specialist cake business in Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire and we were asked to send some of our rich fruit cake to the palace for His Royal Highness to taste. He enjoyed it and we were later asked to supply 3 different types of cake for sale at his Highgrove gift shop.

Several months later we were asked to attend a meeting at Clarence House in London to discuss the wedding cake for Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles. Having secured the commission in the face of fierce competition from 12 other big names in the field, we were given just 4 weeks' notice to plan, bake and decorate not only the huge wedding cake itself but 2,500 slices of additional cake for special commemorative tins, all the while keeping the whole thing secret.

We began by working out the amounts of ingredients needed and ordering extra tins. The octagonal tin for the top tier had to be specially made. My brother an engineer came to the rescue and made it for us. All the local chickens were working overtime frantically laying the 1080 eggs we needed! We then phoned a trusted friend in Norfolk to use his bakery as we did not bake in our shop. Three days were spent double lining tins, mixing all the ingredients by hand and baking 93 x12 inch (31cm) rich fruit cakes and of course the large octagonal top tier.

All this then had to be transported back to Lincolnshire. 20 bottles of brandy were then used to feed all the cakes. The palace supplied the base board, a beautiful piece of solid oak, bevelled around the edges and measuring 30 inches (76cm) square and 2 inches (5cm) depth. When finished the mammoth cake weighed in at a staggering 17 stone (110kg)!

We spent the last few days prior to the wedding finishing it under lock and key in front of the altar of our village Methodist church. It took approximately 130 hours to coat and decorate. Delicate sugar roses, leeks, daffodils and thistles (to depict England, Scotland and Wales) lay alongside royal iced lattice work and 4 of the Prince's Royal Crests all hand iced in royal icing. The finished pure white cake was stunning.'

Since then Dawn has made more royal celebration cakes including a spray of sugar flowers for HM The Queen's 80th birthday in 2006, while the following year she was tasked with making a 60th birthday cake for the HRH The Duchess of Cornwall. She also created a beautiful replica of the Walled Garden at Highgrove for Prince Charles' 60th birthday.

In 2011 she was commissioned by Visit London to make a 4ft 6in tall, 2ft wide cake replicating the steeple and spire of St Bride's, a famous medieval church in London's Fleet Street, to celebrate

weddings in general and the marriage of Prince William and Catherine Middleton on 29th April that year.

The Sun newspaper commissioned her to make a cake for Prince Charles's 70th birthday, which was shared at an afternoon tea attended by seventy members of the public.

Dawn also creates other unusual custom made cakes to order and these include a Dalek, stiletto shoe, a watering can with garden trowel, plus stunning 'dripping' cakes.

It was a truly inspirational talk about how a relatively small business can succeed in reaching the very top.