

Royal horror at fire

PRINCESS Michael of Kent yesterday told workers at a piano factory near her Stroud home how she watched in horror as their workplace went up in flames.

She told staff at the Bently Pianos of Woodchester that she and her family were devastated by the inferno which destroyed almost half their production 18 months ago.

"We went straight up to the roof of our home and saw the smoke," said Princess Michael, opening a new £500,000-plus factory on the site of the gutted works.

Mr David Grover, company chairman, showed the Princess the piano making process from start to finish, introducing her to highly skilled staff including chief tuner Mr Stephen Hassall, who has been totally blind since birth.

The 85-year-old firm employs more than 50.



■ Princess Michael of Kent talks with blind piano tuner Stephen Hassall as his guide dog Ulan sits nearby

Princess Michael unveiled a plaque on a 200-year-old mill chimney which survived the fire and then enjoyed the sound of the finished

product — courtesy of talented young pianists Hazel Davies and Daniel Tong, pupils at the Wells Cathedral Music School.

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