

Princess Kate
with the Scouts

ROYAL CHRISTMAS CAROLS WITH THE SCOUTS!

A GROUP of 30 Scouts had the hottest ticket in town, when they were invited to rub shoulders with the royals at a special Christmas carol concert at Westminster Abbey.

Well, not rub shoulders, exactly... but they did each get a high five from Princess Kate! It was the least they deserved, too, as they were given an important job as part of the service – lighting candles for guests to create a magical atmosphere inside the famous building.

Kate had met the group before, when she, her husband Prince William and their children volunteered with Scouts over the coronation weekend back in June – and the Princess remembered them at once.

Eleven-year-old Ottie, who has been with the Beavers, Cubs and Scouts for five years, told *First News*: “Kate came and spoke to us and was like: ‘Thank you for lighting the candles’. It was exciting and scary to talk to a royal!”

The grand old Abbey, which hosts royal weddings and

coronations, was “beautiful”, Ottie added. “There were wreaths on every pillar, Christmas trees and a Nativity scene in the middle.”

The concert itself combined the nation’s favourite carols with readings by Prince William and stars like DJ Roman Kemp and *Harry Potter* and *Paddington* actor Jim Broadbent.

Sameer, 12, told us: “The music was nice. This is like the beginning of my Christmas!” He said he had been feeling “a bit nervous but really excited” about the candle lighting. Of course, it all went perfectly.

Ottie and Sameer are looking forward to sitting down with their families and trying to spot themselves when the concert is shown on ITV on Christmas Eve.

It’s easy to see why they think other kids should join the Scouts. “You get to have loads of new opportunities, like today!” explained Ottie. Sameer agreed: “You learn life skills – and you get to have fun at the same time!”

Israel’s PM tells Hamas to surrender



Civilians in Khan Younis

THE prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, has told Hamas fighters to surrender as the war in Gaza continues.

Israel is fighting Hamas, the group that controls Gaza. It is classed as a terrorist group by the UK. As *First News* went to press, Israeli tanks were inching closer to the centre of the city of Khan Younis, where Israel says Hamas leaders are hiding.

Mr Netanyahu says dozens of Hamas fighters in Gaza are “laying down their weapons and handing themselves over”. He’s told the rest of them to do the same.

He said: “It is the beginning of the end of Hamas. I say to the Hamas terrorists: it’s over. Don’t die for Yahya Sinwar [the leader of Hamas]. Surrender now.”

Hamas has denied that its fighters are surrendering, and warned that none of the 138 prisoners it’s still holding in Gaza will leave alive unless Israel agrees to its terms for a prisoner exchange.

The UN is struggling to deliver aid (like food, water or medicine) to civilians in Gaza due to the fighting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres called it a “humanitarian catastrophe” and warned: “Without shelter or the essentials to survive, I expect public order to break down soon due to the desperate conditions.”

However, Qatar, a country that is talking to both Israel and Hamas, says another ceasefire (a pause in the fighting, like there was in November) is looking unlikely.

Report finds rise in child poverty in the UK

LEVELS of child poverty increased more in the UK than in any country in the EU between 2014 and 2021, UNICEF data has revealed.

The ‘Report Card’, called *Child Poverty in the Midst of Wealth*, looks at the financial help that governments in different countries offer families with kids. It found that more than one in five children in some of the world’s richest countries are living in poverty, with a sharp rise seen in several well-off nations like the UK, France and Switzerland.

UNICEF recorded a 20% rise in child poverty

rates here in the UK, putting us bottom of a table ranking 39 countries.

Jon Sparkes, from UNICEF UK, said: “While some countries in this group have taken steps to increase support, in the UK we’ve seen a reduction in spending on child and family benefits, and more children growing up in poverty as a result.”

The report praised Poland, Slovenia, Lithuania and Latvia for their reductions in child poverty. It urged the UK to learn from them and make ending child poverty a priority.

Poverty is where a person doesn’t have the money or resources for a certain standard of living. It can affect children’s health, wellbeing and development.

Oh, Christmas glee for the Sycamore Gap tree!



It could become the ‘sick-no-more’ tree!

IT’S pretty close to a Christmas miracle – the famous Sycamore Gap tree, cruelly cut down, might be coming back to life!

The National Trust says there are “positive signs” that seeds and cuttings from the fallen tree can be used to grow new trees, and they’re hoping the original trunk could begin to regrow, too.

The Sycamore Gap tree stood for around 200 years in a small valley in the Northumberland National Park, next to Hadrian’s Wall, until it was felled in September. Four people have been arrested suspected of criminal damage while police continue their investigation.

Staff from the National Trust sprang into action, collecting material from the tree that they’ve been carefully working on at a special tree nursery.

Andy Jasper, from the National Trust, says: “Over the next year, we’ll be doing all we can to nurture the seeds and cuttings, in the hope that some will grow into strong, sturdy saplings, providing a new future for this much-loved tree.

“We’re also hoping that the trunk of the original tree will regrow,” he added, “but it could take up to three years before we know if this is possible. As with many things in landscape restoration, we need to be patient and take the time to let nature do its thing.”



Here comes Santa Jaws!

A TINY Scottish town was swept up in a wave of excitement when residents were told a great white shark was swimming off its shores!

Locals in Fortrose, a coastal spot in the Scottish Highlands, were sent Google alerts about the deadly ocean predator.

However, it was all just a ‘fin-nocent’ mistake – the alert had been sent to the wrong town! The alert was actually for a beach on the other side of the world, in another town called Fortrose, in New Zealand!