



Clifford Possum and the painting of his dreamtime ancestors he delivered to the Queen.

Man of few words in royal chat

LONDON: Aboriginal painter Clifford Possum emerged from the gates of Buckingham Palace hot, tired, but satisfied.

Yes, he had met the Queen, his gushing London gallery contact Ms Rebecca Hossack said, and yes, he had had quite a chat with her, too.

What was she like? "She's good," said the man of few words as he took off his top hat and undid the tie of his morning suit.

It is not much fun getting dressed up in formal gear in 30 degree heat. But as a concession to comfort Clifford was allowed to wear his white sneakers, hand-painted with possum symbols.

"I know it's not exactly protocol, but we couldn't get him anything else in time because it was too hot

and he has very big feet," apologised Ms Hossack.

It had been a long day in heatwave conditions, 19,000kms from his home in Alice Springs, but Clifford had been a man with a mission — to deliver a painting of his dreamtime ancestors to the Queen.

Clifford, regarded as one of the finest Aboriginal artists from the Western Desert, became the first Australian Aborigine to meet the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

Royal protocol, and security men, stopped him from personally handing over the painting which will be hanging inside the palace in a few days.

But after a word in the royal ear from Lord Harewood, one of Clifford's English fans, he was entertained in the Royal Chambers by the Queen's private secretary, Sir Wil-

liam Heseltine, and her ladies in waiting.

Then, as the Queen appeared before 8000 people attending her annual garden party, Clifford was placed first in line to speak with her.

"And Princess Anne was just dying to meet him," said a breathless Ms Hossack, who is showing Clifford's paintings at her London gallery.

"She came up and shook his hand and told him what a pleasure it was to meet him."

And what did Clifford think of Princess Anne?

"She's good too," he said.

Next week Clifford will return to Alice Springs where he lives with his wife Emily and two children.

Is he enjoying England so far?

"It's alright," he says.

— Fiona McIntosh