

Pocahontas 400 ~ life of Pocahontas and friendship with the US celebrated in Gravesend.

by Esmerelda Weatherwax

Tuesday 21st March; to Gravesend, in the Borough of Gravesham, in the County of Kent, to see the [Pocahontas in England](#) in 2007 and have updated it at intervals since.



I was busy on Tuesday evening but set Wednesday afternoon aside to upload my photographs to this site; the events in Westminster that afternoon put all such ideas out of my mind. But this was a celebration of a brave young woman, of 400 years of Anglo-American friendship and an

occasion of joy in our children, which I think should be seen. There is much bad in the world; this was some of the good.

The ferry across the Thames landed at the pontoon by Historic Vessel Lightship LV21 and St Andrew's Park where the parade was to begin. First there were speeches of welcome, one from the Major of Gravesham Mrs Greta Goatley There were representatives of the Council who welcomed a party from Virginia, including Native Americans and delegates from

Chesterfield VA, Gravesend's twin Town.



Two young girls from local schools led the singing of the National Anthems.



Water from the James River was poured from the LV21 to

symbolically mix that water with the Thames. The flag on the Lightship was designed one side by a pupil of a Gravesend school, and the other by a pupil of a Virginia School.

I had attendend one of the lectures in St Georges Church in the months leading up to this commemoration. While researching Pocahontas in England I knew that they landed in Plymouth. I then found many references to the Party from Virginia in London and the countryside around. That John Rolfe took his wife to Norfolk to meet his family and stay at his childhood home is an oral tradition, but highly likely. But I had only found one reference to the journey between Plymouth and London and that an unlikely one. At that lecture I got talking to a local historian who worked for the council. I pondered why Gravesend was chosen as the place to take the sick and dying woman from the Thames, and not the town of Tilbury on the opposite bank, in Essex. Tilbury was the site of Queens Elizabeth's review of her troops before the defeat of the Spanish Armada. The occasion of the famous 'I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman....' speech. He told me that Tilbury was more of a garrison town, but Gravesend was considered the gateway to London, for many vessels coming up the Thames. There is evidence that having landed at Plymouth for a period the Virginia party then sailed round the south coast to the Thames Estuary and Gravesend. That does make sense, and would be a reason to call there on the way back, especially when there was great need.



10% of the population of Gravesend is Sikh. Squadron Leader Mahinder Singh Pujji was a veteran pilot of the Battle of Britain when he flew from Kent, and also the war in the Far

East. He lived in Gravesend until his death in 2010.





The parade moved off to the sound of 17th century music played on traditional instruments.



Certain local people had been nominated Peacemakers of Gravesend. Each peacemaker feather represented an individual, group or organisation in Gravesend and they had been made in a series of community workshops under the aegis of the Animate Arts Company. There were also many school groups in the parade, led by their teachers with proud family watching on.

Some young boys wore neat training turbans; very small girls sat in pushchairs holding their Pocahontas dollies from the Disney store.



As the parade move up the High Street (literally up – it is quite a steep hill from the river bank) I went to the churchyard to see the parade come in to be met by the Lord Lieutenant of Kent, and the Bishop of Rochester who was to preach at the service of Thanksgiving.



I had been hoping to attend the service but on arrival I found that it was invitation only.





A young man from Chesterfield VA sang a traditional song which included the names of all the tribes of the area. As the church bells could be heard ringing a joyous peal all the way

from the river I wasn't able to fully hear and appreciate his song, which was a shame.



The Peacemakers formed a guard of honour as the Bishop welcomed the delegation.



Sea Cadets carried the flags of both nations and a Pocahontas 400 banner. The delegates and guests went into the church. Proud parents and teachers photographed their children before they returned to school. The rest of us enjoyed the rest of the afternoon of sunshine, albeit with a chilly wind.

On Monday in West London the modern party from Virginia attended a ceremony at Syon House in Brentford near to the spot where the Earl of Northumberland (as the family title then was) provided the Rolfes with accomodation more beneficial to Pocahontas's health. This is the [This is a report](#) from the local newspaper. I have also been given some information about the site of the Belle Sauvage Inn in London where they stayed immediately on arrival. I hope to follow that up soon.