

## A Welsh Jewellery Designer and Portrait Artists very Royal Commission

RELEASE - IMMEDIATE

A jewellery designer and portrait artist from Wales has just returned from America after being commissioned to create a cameo, which was presented to Her Majesty the Queen as part of her recent USA visit.

Gareth Eckley, 43, was asked to create a cameo brooch depicting the Indian princess Pocahontas in time for the Queen's visit. Chief William Miles of the Pamunkey native Indian tribe presented it to the Queen on the steps of the Capitol building in a special ceremony before her speech to members of the American Government in Richmond, Virginia on May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Gareth is one of a very select group of gemstone portrait artists. Great skill, artistry and experience are necessary to create accurate portraits. Gareth Eckley has been a jewellery designer since he left college in 1985. He returned to run his company Portraits in Stone from his farm property in Wales around 5 years ago after living in Canada for the previous 12.

His portrait cameos, which can take the form of a pendant or brooch, cost from £ 2,000 upwards. He added: " Often these portraits can be very personal, of a pet, a grandparent, spouse or most often a child. There is such a strong emotional reaction to receiving a cameo portrait of a loved one.

Gareth was contacted in March to create the cameo. The high profile client, whose name is to remain private, was looking for the best cameo artist in Britain to create this project.

Gareth was flown over to Virginia, where he examined the original cameo at the Jamestown Settlement Museum near Williamsburg. He then returned to the UK to create the Cameo and then 4 weeks later flew back over to Virginia to deliver the Cameo.

Gareth creates an image on the cameo by hand, carving with diamond tools into layered agate. Gradually removing the layered material, he uses the contrast in colour and translucency of the layers of stone to create shading effects that give a stunning level of realism to the finished portrait.

For the Queen he was asked to reproduce the image of Pocahontas to emulate a cameo which was carved by a London jeweller from a piece of blue agate and set into a gold, pearl and diamond brooch. This cameo brooch was presented to Pocahontas by King James I and Queen Anne at the Royal Court in London in 1616.

The cameo later made its way back to Virginia. It was stolen in the American civil war, when it was removed from the original gold setting and lost. It was later recovered and a new setting was made to display the cameo. A direct descendant of Pocahontas, the Reverend Cary Weisiger III, donated the cameo brooch to the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation in the 1950's.

Gareth added: "In Elizabethan times they had quite a classical Roman or Greek style of carving and the image had been made to look quite cherubic. I felt that rather than make a straight reproduction I would alter the cameo to have a more Indian profile. My making the image more authentic was really appreciated by the Virginian Indian tribes."

The Queen was presented with the cameo, which was finished with rare fresh-water pearls fished from the Tennessee, at 3pm after the Chief's of the eight Virginian tribes had blessed it in a ceremony at 1pm.

Her Majesty then visited Jamestown, also in Virginia, along with Prince Phillip and her host Vice President Dick Cheney the following day, May 4th to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the town's founding in a ceremony at a re-created colonial fort.

The town holds its significance as the first area of major western settlement in May 1607, and as the place where Pocahontas acted as mediator between her native father, chief of the Powhatan tribe, and Captain John Smith of the English Settlement, effectively saving the captain's life on at least two occasions.

Pocahontas later married English tobacco planter John Rolfe and moved to Britain before passing away from pneumonia at the age of 22 as she was preparing to sail back to America. She is buried in Gravesend, Kent.

Gareth and his wife Sheila and their two sons combined the trip with a family holiday, and also managed to meet some of Gareth's stateside clients in person, a process which he says was very rewarding.

Asked about the Queen's gift, Gareth added with a smile:

" I did hear that she likes it very much."

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