

July 2010

Her Majesty the Queen presented some Whitechapel Handbells to Canadian native tribes during her recent visit to Canada.

At our last bell practice one of the ringers brought to my attention a very tiny piece of newspaper – maybe 3” square. Her husband had found it in a recent edition of the Times. It was headed ‘Queen’s 300-year link’ and was about two sets of handbells that our Queen had presented as a bond of friendship to native tribes while she was in Toronto. This is a transcript.

‘The Queen renewed a 300-year bond of friendship with a group of indigenous people when she joined worshippers at a cathedral service in Toronto. Four chiefs representing the Six Nations people from the Mohawk Valley in New York State visited the court of Queen Anne in 1710 and helped in the construction of two chapels. Representatives from both chapels were presented with handbells by the Queen yesterday.’

I contacted Alan Hughes at the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London and this is what he told me!

“The Whitechapel Bell Foundry was recently commissioned to make the two sets of musical handbells which were presented to the Chapels Royal of the Mohawk in Canada by H M The Queen at a service in St James’ Cathedral, Toronto on Sunday 4th July.

Two identical sets were ordered by the Palace, each being a diatonic set of 8 bells in 15C, and complete in a fitted carrying case. The largest bell in each set bears the following inscription:



H M CHAPEL ROYAL OF THE MOHAWK

**SACHEMS’ AUDIENCE WITH QUEEN ANNE
1710 – 2010**

Behind this inscription on these gifts of handbells made to the Mohawk lies a fascinating episode in our history, as we have been intrigued to discover.....

In 1710, a political and diplomatic visit to London was made by four “Indian Kings”. These “Kings” were the sachems, or tribal leaders, of the Iroquoian Confederacy. During their visit, they were transported in royal carriages through the streets of London and were received by Queen Anne for an Audience at St. James’s Palace. The visit caused a sensation in London, where the sachems were hosted at banquets, the opera and theatre. Such was the interest that Queen Anne commissioned portraits of them by the Dutch painter John Verelst.

In their discussions, the Mohawk emissaries requested military aid. The 1677 "Silver Covenant Chain of Friendship" treaty and the military alliance were re-affirmed. This treaty is still in existence and is considered to be of great importance. Missionary help was also requested and there are two Chapels Royal in the Territory, one at Grand River and one at Bay of Quinte.

Each of these Chapels has now received the gift of a set of handbells, which were played for the first time by ringers from St James Cathedral during the service in Toronto in the presence of the Queen and representatives from the Royal Chapels. One set was rung in changes, the other to a verse of the hymn Holy, Holy, Holy.

When completed, the bells were collected from the Foundry by the Sergeant of the Chapel Royal, St James's and the Queen's Private Secretary in Canada who were given a tour of the foundry, and the bells then left for Canada with the Royal Party.

We feel very honoured to have been part of this three hundredth anniversary of the Mohawk visit to London, and that our instruments will now ring on to continue to celebrate the Silver Covenant Chain of Friendship. However, we would point out that the mention in the press that the bells are silver is in error, they are actually made of our usual high purity bell metal!"

I was so pleased and proud of our heritage that I felt I must tell you all.

Wendy Rowland