

Hello,

How many times have you heard or read something and asked yourself if it was accurate?

During the summer of 2014 I decided to choose one piece of information and determine if it was true. This search for truth coincided with a growing interest and practice in mindfulness, a method of increasing focus and decreasing distraction – a perfect exercise.

I was lucky enough to learn of a historically salacious rumor. Namely in 1976 when Queen Elizabeth II visited Boston during the bicentennial, the mayor of Boston at the time, Kevin White, paid her back for the tea that was thrown into the harbor during the Boston Tea Party.

Upon first hearing this rumor during a walking tour of Boston I was shocked. The Boston Tea Party is a pivotal event in American History, central to the identity of being American. That the mayor of Boston would somehow make amends for that event flies in the face of common sense.

### Deep in the rabbit hole

1 I started where most folks start when they want an answer, I googled. I found nothing except a reference to a book, a travel guide to Massachusetts<sup>1</sup>. In an email to one of the authors, he replied he had no sources but heard the same rumor from a walking guide in Boston.

2. I then referenced the following online archives, using different search permutations of "tea" "boston" "queen" "tea party", "reimbursement", "payment", "bicentennial" and "1976". None of them yielded any information about a payment. Please see the section below entitled "What did She get, anyways".

- a. There is no mention of this payment in any of the stories about Queen's visit from the Boston Globe archives<sup>2,3,4</sup>
- b. There is no mention of this payment in the New York Times archives<sup>5,6,7</sup>
- c. There is no mention of this payment in the Guardian / Observer archives
- d. There is no mention of any payment in the Lewiston Evening Journal archives, as reported by an Associated Press report<sup>8</sup>

3. I wrote a letter to the Queen, sent on July 30 2014, asking for verification of this rumor. The reply in part "I am afraid I must tell you that there is no mention in our records of the particular gift you refer to having been presented to Her Majesty during her visit to the United States of America in 1976." Please see appendix A.

4. I asked on reddit, a social networking site, (<http://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/>), and as of July 30 2014, have not gotten any comments or replies to my query.

5. I asked the Massachusetts Historical Society via email, and received a reply, "...with the strength of our collection in Colonial American and Massachusetts history, we do not have any material that would negate or prove the above statement to be true." They provided me with resources, which do not have any mention of this payment.

6. I reached out to the Bostonian Society, Old State House, and received a reply. They think it may be false, but lack definitive evidence. They mentioned that both George Washington and Benjamin Franklin wanted to repay the East India Tea Company, but that payment was never made. They have said they look forward to definitive evidence to this question.

7. I asked the Boston Tea Party Museum via a phone call if this was true, and they confirmed over the phone that a ceremonial payment was made but provided no evidence. I have sent them an email, and have not heard back yet.

8. I have reviewed some archived news video (<http://www.hulu.com/watch/80465>) and have seen no mention of this payment.

9. The National Archive Records Administration wrote back to my query, writing in an email "We can find no reference to Kevin White paying the British for tea in the 1976 Boston Bicentennial commission record. These records are about the set up and planning for the various commemorations, which took place throughout the commonwealth in 1976 for the 200 year anniversary of the United States. "

10. I wrote to a very distinguished professor of American History at Tufts University (soon to be CUNY Brooklyn). He replied he couldn't confirm or deny the rumor. He supportively offered some resources.

11. My most interesting piece of evidence was found at the City of Boston Archives. According to the Official Chronicle of Boston<sup>9</sup>, there is a specific mention of gifts presented to the Queen. "...from Governor Dukakis she received a replica of a flag carried by Minutemen from Bedford at Lexington and Concord and from Mayor White a map of colonial Boston etched on a brass plate."<sup>9</sup>. There is no mention of any payment to the queen, ceremonial or real.

12. I asked one of the major walking tour companies, Freedom Trail Foundation, if this rumor was true. They replied via email "We're looking into this as well. We will let you know if we find any developments. I think our tour guides are going to be sad if we find out this rumor isn't true. (We will obviously let them know and make sure they do not continue to spread the rumor if it isn't true). "

13. The National Archives in the UK replied in an email to me "I have tried several keyword searches on our Catalogue, Discovery, but have found nothing of direct, obvious interest to you. If you wished, you could go to the trouble of

commissioning a paid researcher to read through the original file [FCO 73/237](#) in case there is any mention of the payment but there is obviously no guarantee of success, and I would have thought that, in view of the negative results that you have amassed to date, that the chances of success are very slight indeed (please note that the aforementioned file is not online and can only be consulted here at The National Archives, Kew).

### What did She get, anyways?

As near as I can tell, when the queen visited Boston in 1976 she received the following gifts:

- a. A reproduction of Paul Revere's chalice, given by Dr. Robert Gollidge, Vicar of the Old North Church<sup>4</sup>
- b. A bouquet of flowers by a youngster from the North End<sup>4</sup>
- c. While in Boston, she was properly fêted (nice dinners, toasts, plenty of speeches by VIP's, a parade of militia re-enactors, etc...)<sup>4,5</sup>
- d. A replica of a flag carried by Minutemen from Bedford at Lexington and Concord from Governor Dukakis<sup>9</sup>
- e. A map of colonial Boston etched on a brass plate from Mayor White<sup>9</sup>

### Other point

My research focused very narrowly on the following rumor: that in 1976, when Queen Elizabeth II visited Boston to celebrate the bicentennial, the mayor at the time, Kevin White, paid her back for the tea that was thrown into Boston harbor during the Boston Tea Party.

During my research, I learned there is another rumor floating around that the United States has been paying back the British for the tea over the last 200 years. I didn't research that one.

### Conclusion

There is no credible evidence to support the piece of information that Queen Elizabeth II was paid back for the tea that was thrown into Boston Harbor.

My guess is this started as a joke, probably by some lads in Cambridge, and has continued to be shared to this day by tour guides who are either in on the joke, or think it might be actually true.

### Works Cited

1. Michael Blanding and Alexandra Hall. Moon Spotlight Massachusetts (Avalon Travel, 2011). Accessed July 30 2014.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=ixAd-ZNvuQgC&pg=PA23&lpg=PA23&dq=queen+elizabeth+visit+to+boston+1976+tea&source=bl&ots=S\\_x\\_x08cVs&sig=wkynicAfqL-IT7G1dFbdazfkQro&hl=en&sa=X&ei=i\\_u2U7XDCseuyATli4GABg&ved=0CDMQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=queen%20elizabeth%20visit%20to%20boston%201976%20tea&f=false/](http://books.google.com/books?id=ixAd-ZNvuQgC&pg=PA23&lpg=PA23&dq=queen+elizabeth+visit+to+boston+1976+tea&source=bl&ots=S_x_x08cVs&sig=wkynicAfqL-IT7G1dFbdazfkQro&hl=en&sa=X&ei=i_u2U7XDCseuyATli4GABg&ved=0CDMQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=queen%20elizabeth%20visit%20to%20boston%201976%20tea&f=false/).
2. McGory, Mary. "The Perfect Bicentennial Guest". The Boston Globe, July 10 1976. Accessed July 30 2014.  
<https://secure.pqarchiver.com/boston/doc/662116283.html?FMT=AI>
3. Kraft, Joseph. "Queen's visit timed to British gains". The Boston Globe, July 7 1976. Accessed July 30 2014.  
<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/boston/doc/662000476.html?FMT=AI&FMTS=ABS:AI&type=historic&date=Jul+7%2C+1976&author=Kraft%2C+Joseph&pub=Boston+Globe+%281960-1982%29&edition=&startpage=&desc=Queen%27s+visit+timed+to+British+gains>
4. Osgood, Viola. "Royal couple visits Boston today, and Boston is ready". The Boston Globe, July 11 1976. Accessed July 30 2014.  
<https://secure.pqarchiver.com/boston/doc/662252199.html?FMT=AI&FMTS=ABS:AI&type=historic&date=Jul+11%2C+1976&author=Osgood%2C+Viola&pub=Boston+Globe+%281960-1982%29&edition=&startpage=&desc=Royal+couple+visits+Boston+today%2C+and+Boston+is+ready>
5. Editorial. "A Welcome to the Queen". The New York Times, July 9 1976. Accessed July 30 2014.  
<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1976/07/09/75720099.html>
6. Author unknown. "Boston, Where it All Began, Salutes the Queen". The New York Times, July 30 1976. Accessed July 30 2014.  
<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1976/07/12/79665458.html>
7. Apple, R. W. Jr. "A Bicentennial Windfall for Ford". The New York Times, July 8 1976. Accessed July 30 2014.  
<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1976/07/08/75719156.html>
8. Brewer, Peter. "Queen Elizabeth Winds up Bicentennial Visit". The Lewiston Evening Journal, July 12 1976. Accessed July 30 2014.  
<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1913&dat=19760712&id=P18gAAAAIBAJ&sjid=l2UFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2977,1208960>
9. City of Boston. "Royalty Visits Boston". City Record, July 19 1976, Vol. 68, no. 29.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

21st August, 2014

Dear Mr MacKenty,

Thank you for your letter of 25th July addressed to The Queen, from which careful note has been taken of your enquiry.

I am afraid I must tell you that there is no mention in our records of the particular gift you refer to having been presented to Her Majesty during her visit to the United States of America in 1976.

I am sorry to send you a disappointing reply.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Jennie Vine  
Deputy Correspondence Coordinator

Mr Bill MacKenty.

### Usage & Distribution

As I found my sources especially helpful who freely gave their time and expertise to me, please feel free to share this document under the terms which can be found here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

