



DOWN THE PAN

MPs' views on the monarchy often make the news, but you can learn a lot about them – perhaps more than you need to know – by studying their attitudes to that 'other' kind of throne:

John Reid (Lab) – When it comes to loo seats, most of us would have the former Home Secretary down as an unpainted pine man. In fact, an expense claim reveals that he prefers a glittery black number.

John Prescott (Lab) – 'Two Jags' ran the risk of being renamed 'Two Loo Seats' after invoicing the Fees Office for repairs to broken items of that nature in December 2004 and September 2006.

Peter Luff (Con) – The champion lavatory seat claimant outdid John Prescott by getting the taxpayer to cough up for three seats in the space of two years. Perhaps this was related to overuse of the three kettles he purchased during the same period. Maybe he was just taking the piss.

Mark Hoban (Con) – The Fareham MP was flushed out when he charged the taxpayer £35 for a loo-roll holder and £18 for a toilet brush, useful items when doing parliamentary business.

Christine Russell (Lab) – Ms. Russell got £60 from the Fees Office in 2007 for the replacement of a broken loo seat. "I have never claimed for anything that is considered to be personal", she remarked controversially.

Derek Conway (Con) – Unlike Sir Peter Viggers, Mr Conway's waterfowl-related claim seems positively reasonable. The Fees Office awarded him 83p for a Toilet Duck.

Gordon Brown (Lab) – 'Wee' Gordon was reimbursed to the tune of £88.13 for getting the plumbers in to unblock a loo in his Fife home in 2007. Looks like he negotiated prudent good value for the average emergency call-out fee.

I THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER ASK!

Can you match the MP to the item and its cost, below? For 2 bonus points, can you identify which items were rejected by the Fees Office?

£98.58	Bang & Olufsen 40" LCD TV	Cheryl Gillian (Con)
£388.80	Moat clearing	Sir Gerald Kaufman (Lab)
£8,865	Dog food	David Heathcoat-Amory (Con)
£185.89	Horse manure	Quentin Davies (Lab)
£10,033.33	60 halogen lightbulbs	Sir Gerald Kaufman (Lab)
£1,100	Second-hand rug	Patrick McLoughlin (Con)
£1,645	Removal of wasps' nest	Keith Simpson (Con)
£135.12	Window frames	Lynn Jones (Lab)
£4.47	Floating duck house	Douglas Hogg (Con)
£2,200	Replacing 25 lightbulbs	David Willetts (Con)
£1,461.83	Swimming pool heater	Michael Ancram (Con)
£158.63	Wallpaper	Sir Peter Viggers (Con)

answers overleaf





OUR COLLEAGUES OVER THERE

Anyone who wants to feel better about British MPs just has to consider their equivalents in Brussels. Members of the European Parliament have tried to suppress details of their expenses claims – in March 2009 70% of them voted to keep them secret – but the truth will (sometimes) out. The extent to which MEPs are able and often inclined to milk the system was revealed in a top secret report written by EU Internal Audit Official Robert Gilpin in 2006. The document's findings might never have come to light – even MEPs were only allowed to read it in a locked and guarded room – had not Chris Davies MEP (*Lib Dem*) revealed its existence to the world in 2008. Fortunately, someone has since been responsible enough to leak the report to the press.

Comedy of Errors

The Gilpin report is based on a sample of 167 of 4,686 payments made in October 2004. One shudders to think what he may have missed and how much worse things may have become since. The lowlights include the following:

- Payments were found to have been made to assistants not accredited to the European Parliament and to companies whose accounts showed a conspicuous lack of other activity.
- Payments designated as 'secretarial work' were made to a crèche whose manager turned out to be a politician from the political party of the MEP in question.
- Bonuses worth more than one and a half times annual salary were paid to assistants. Some rocket scientists have speculated that this was to enable members to use up their full annual allowance.
- Some relatives, sorry assistants, doubled their earnings by pocketing pay-offs from outgoing MEPs at the same time as salaries from new ones.

- One MEP claimed to have paid the full staff allowance (then £182,000) to one individual. The report thought it not implausible that this was a relative.
- Direct payments were made into the bank accounts of national political parties.

Eat Your Way to a Million

The Taxpayers' Alliance has since painted a vivid picture of how an MEP on the fiddle could pocket over £1.1 million in the course of a five-year term of office (that's pocket, not just claim). The breakdown, which assumed that the Euro representative in question was actually making some legitimate use of his or her allowances in addition to salting some away, included dipping into the following:

- £259 daily subsistence allowance (not bad if you stay with a friend and eat at bog standard bistros). You just have to turn up and sign in to demonstrate that you have 'attended'.
- Up to £90,000 annual travel allowance (members are assumed to purchase open economy tickets and get an additional sum based on distance travelled. No receipts required).
- £217,800 over five years if main home was also designated as a constituency office (no receipts required).
- Nearly £230,000 staff/office expenses (until recently family members could be employed with impunity). UK MEPs were found to be the worst offenders.
- When an MEP leaves office a 'transition' payment of £41,573 is built into their package.
- They could also look forward to a pension pot worth approximately 350K at the end of a 5-year term.

Other freebies include:

- Up to 60 mud baths, or hydro-massages, or hydrotherapy or acupuncture sessions per annum, if recommended by a doctor's note.
- Dental surgery worth £150 per gold crown.
- Contact lenses, batteries for hearing aids and bandages for varicose veins (presumably an occupational hazard from carrying all that loot).
- Language and IT courses are thrown in up to a cost of £5,885.





PART TWO.
**GREED: A BRIEF
 HISTORY**

Of course, venality in public office is nothing new. It has a long and venerable history – it may indeed lay claim to really being the ‘World’s Oldest Profession’. Way back in the 16th century, Pieter Bruegel the Elder described exquisite punishments for the money-hungry who populated his society (above). Sadly, such recourses are rarely available to us today. In this section we provide an abbreviated survey of the wide range of ways pockets can be lined at others’ expense.



BECAUSE I'M WORTH IT

For years, one way of getting (non-taxable) extras has been widely exploited by celebrity performers, whose management will provide a list of 'contract riders' to entertainment promoters. The formula is simple: provide these extras or the star(s) will not turn up. Confronted by the inevitable, the unlucky promoter starts desperately calling up favours (usually repaid in the form of front-row tickets).

While Australian opera singer **Dame Nellie Melba** demanded her eponymous peaches and ice cream (among other larynx lubricants) to be available on tap just off stage over a century ago, the performer who established the Gold Standard in contract riders was another 'Voice' – **Frank Sinatra**. In addition to the now bog standard 'six banqueting tables' and 'private dressing room + en suite', the crooner required a list of 'incidentals', the first page of which alone would make most people blanche (*see opposite*). The list went on for pages.

Sinatra's wasn't the only big throat that needed careful attention. Stadium opera star and famed *gourmand* **Luciano Pavarotti** required that an entire fully-stocked kitchen ("the set-up should be like at home") was made available so that he could relax while knocking up some of his favourite pasta dishes before hitting the stage (the rider adding that "there must be no distinct smells anywhere near the Artist". It also demanded a "golf cart").

Among all the tales of rock 'n' roll excess, the **Rolling Stones** probably remain the front runners, setting a template for bad-boy expense abuse on their seminal US 1969 and 1972 outings. Decades later, things ain't changed, much. Despite helpfully informing the promoters that they needn't worry: "We bring our own snooker table", the rider for a recent Stones tour insisted on specific flower arrangements involving "medium white Casablanca lilly (*sic*) and weeping eucalyptus arrangements" for Mr. Richards' and Mr.



- Color TV (with second input for in-house video feed)
- Upright piano
- Private line with dedicated line, direct dial out
- 1 Bottle each:
 - Absolut or Stoli
 - Jack Daniels
 - Chivas Regal
 - Courvoisier
 - Beefeater Gin
 - White Wine – premium
 - Red Wine – premium
 - Bottled Spring Water
 - Perrier – large
- Soda
 - Diet Coke – twenty four (24)
 - Regular Coke – twelve (12)
 - Club Soda
 - Assorted Mixers
- 1 Fruit Platter of sliced fresh fruit (incl. watermelon when available)
- 1 Cheese Tray (incl. Brie) with assorted crackers
- 1 Dijon Mustard
- Sandwiches (Two(2)ofeach)
 - Egg Salad
 - Chicken Salad
 - Sliced Turkey
- Twenty-four (24) chilled jumbo shrimp
- 3 cans Campbell's Chicken & Rice Soup
- 12 Rolls Cherry Lifesavers
- 12 Boxes Ludens Cough Drops – Cherry, Honey, etc.
- 1 Bag Miniature Tootsie Rolls

Wood's rooms, and constant access to satellite TV coverage of any cricket match in the world for Mr. Jagger.

But this is all far cry from the golden days when the likes of the **Grateful Dead**, **The Who** or **Led Zeppelin** were happy to settle for a few heaps of locally-sourced narcotics, a busload of groupies and the opportunity to trash an hotel – all expenses paid, of course.