

# The Gold Standard for Public Records Requests

March 6, 2014 [www.PersonalRevengeAct.com](http://www.PersonalRevengeAct.com)

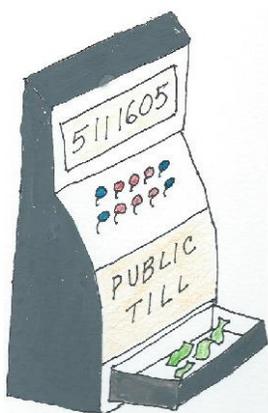
The first column out of the chute is about good news. Transparency in government is good, especially about “How are you spending our money?” But practically anything can be used for good or evil or stupidity. A handgun can protect your family against a home invasion. The same handgun can be used to kill a teenager for playing his music too loud. The same handgun can be used to blow your brains out while proving that it is unloaded.

Scratch any veneer and you find that it is people who make things happen, people in all their wide ranging glory and ignominy. The veneer of the Washington State Public Records Act will be lifted in following columns to see what we find.

But for now we start with Heather Brooke, UW 1992, who majored in journalism with a minor in sex-advice. Add in beer and it is a perfect undergraduate degree plan.

While at UW, she investigated the spending habits of Washington State legislators. She found only boring, no porn on the public dime. Her conclusion was the legislators were honest on their billed expenditures because those bills were readily available to the public.

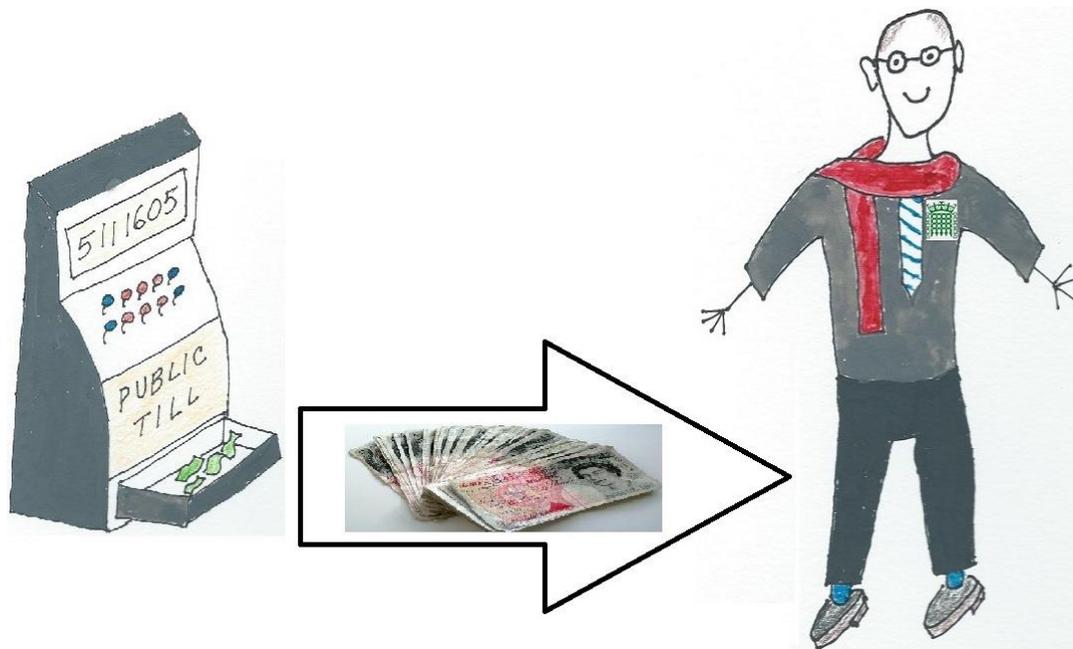
Her life’s journey took her from Washington to South Carolina to England. When in England, she used the new Freedom of Information Act there to ask about the billed expenditures of the House of Commons Members of Parliament (MPs). Oops! Here is where she started:



**PRIVILEGED**



This is what she found:

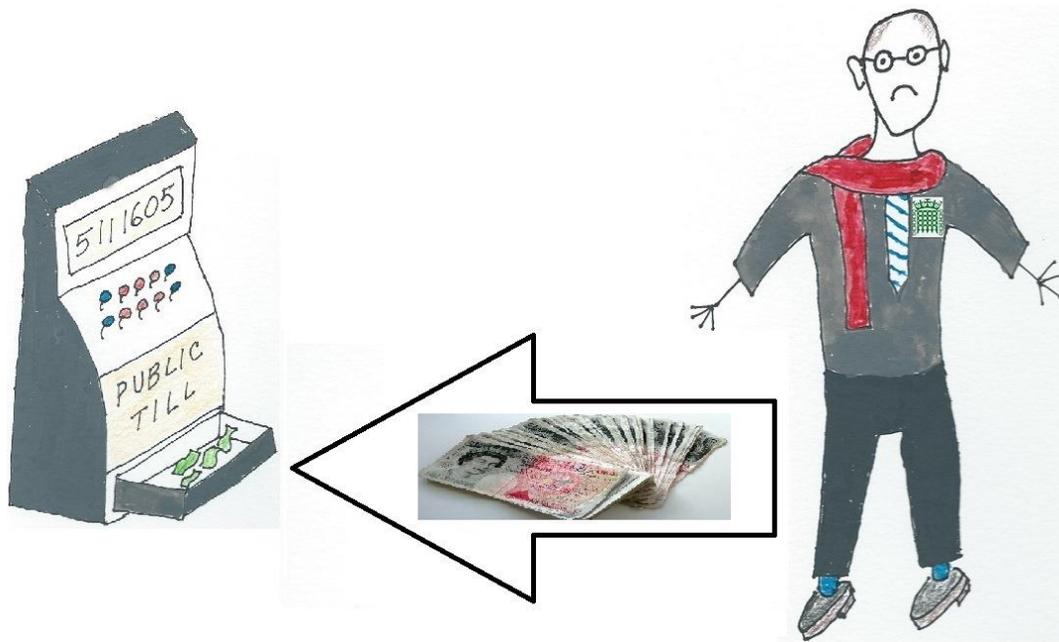


This was a five year journey finding that the MPs used public funds for things such as large screen televisions, moat refurbishing, second homes, etc. This was not to the degree of Yanukovich's compound in the Ukraine, but still, not something necessary to the proper operation of government.

The High Court of England ruled for Brooke, saying "we have no doubt that the public interest is at stake. We are not here dealing with idle gossip, or public curiosity about what in truth are trivialities. The expenditure of public money through the payment of MPs' salaries and allowances is a matter of direct and reasonable interest to taxpayers."

So the High Court of England basically asked "How are you spending our money?" They also noted that they don't do trivialities. Keep this in mind for later.

Here is what Heather Brooke accomplished:



The British equivalent of *All the President's Men* is *On Expenses*, a BBC account in 2010. The full story is well told in the listed links.

The work that Heather did benefited the community, especially the public purse. She did not use the FOI for personal retaliation or to intimidate away a citation. She does not earn money filing multiple FOI requests ending in a personal payout. Can we say the same thing about Washington State?

Heather now earns a living as Professor of Journalism at City University London's Department of Journalism. She is the author of *Your Right to Know* (2006), *The Silent State* (2010), *The Revolution Will Be Digitised* (2011), and *Assange Agonistes* (2011).

You can buy her books at Amazon, see the link that follows. *The Silent State* is a spellbinding read. If you did not get to see *On Expenses*, buy the book, or all of them.

Heather keeps everyone involved on governmental transparency with her website <http://heatherbrooke.org/>.

As far as the MPs go? Some are still "on the fiddle" and five of them went from Old Bailey to the gaol last year over fraudulent expense reports. I guess they didn't read Heather's book.

## Some Heather Brooke Article links

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heather Brooke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heather_Brooke)

<http://www.theguardian.com/profile/heather-brooke>

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/may/15/mps-expenses-heather-brooke-foi>

<http://www.seattlepi.com/local/article/Former-UW-student-shakes-up-British-government-888589.php#page-3>

[http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2009210952\\_apeubritainexposingexpenses.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2009210952_apeubritainexposingexpenses.html)

<http://www.amazon.com/Heather-Brooke/e/B001JS9YEK>