



# UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

From the Archives of Museums on the Green

## Saluting the Queen

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It was a steamy morning in July of '76. Major Andrew Wessling, commander of the Falmouth militia, knew that this day would test the mettle of his young followers. He ran over a mental checklist of supplies: muskets, powder horns, canteens, banners. All correct and in order. He hoped everyone would remember the proper protocols to be observed in the presence of royalty—for today the Falmouth militia would be reviewed by Her Majesty, the Queen.



The United States was celebrating its Bicentennial in 1976, and the world had changed a lot in two hundred years. Britain, once an enemy, was now an ally. Queen Elizabeth was making a state visit to her former colonies, just to show that there were no hard feelings about the breakup. Wessling's group, unlike their counterparts of 1776, were excited to pay their respects to the Queen.



In 1973, the town's Bicentennial planning committee, chaired by Dudley Hallett, had commissioned a "Falmouth Company of Minute and Militia." They were lucky in their choice of a leader. Andrew Wessling had served in the U.S. Army from 1942-1962, retiring as a lieutenant colonel. He then took up a second career as an administrator at WHOI. But how could he resist the minuteman's call? Soon after he took charge of the militia, he was shepherding a gaggle of eager recruits, many of them teenagers.

We don't have a complete roster, but judging by their equipment lists, there must have been at least two dozen members. The "powder monkey" was all of 12 years old. He was assigned to carry 1 pike, 1 canteen, 1 powder horn, and 1 first aid kit. (That last item is a handwritten addition, perhaps an afterthought in response to an accident.) Members under 16 carried pikes rather than muskets. Everyone else needed to obtain a firearms permit and a firearms ID card—a requirement that would have mystified the men of 1776.



The company's schedule for the Bicentennial year was packed with appearances in Falmouth, Bourne, Sandwich, Concord, Reading, Chatham, and Dennis. The royal review on July 11 was a relatively late addition. In Washington, D.C., a flurry of memos had been flying back and forth, among current and future famous names such as Kissinger, Scowcroft, Cheney, and Rumsfeld. They debated where the Queen should visit. How much security would she need—especially considering two recent attempts on the life of President Ford? There were sticky details to work out. British planners had somehow gotten the idea that Vice President Rockefeller's New York estate was available as an overnight shelter for the Queen. This was apparently news to Rockefeller. Furthermore, the Queen's absolute refusal to ride in helicopters limited her travel options.



Philadelphia, Washington, and New York were locked into the itinerary long before Boston was chosen as the Queen's final stop. The British team considered it the diceiest location of the entire trip, because of its large Irish-American population. Passions were running high over recent outbreaks of violence in Northern Ireland. Elizabeth's goodwill tour might end on a sour note, if protestors in Boston treated her rudely.

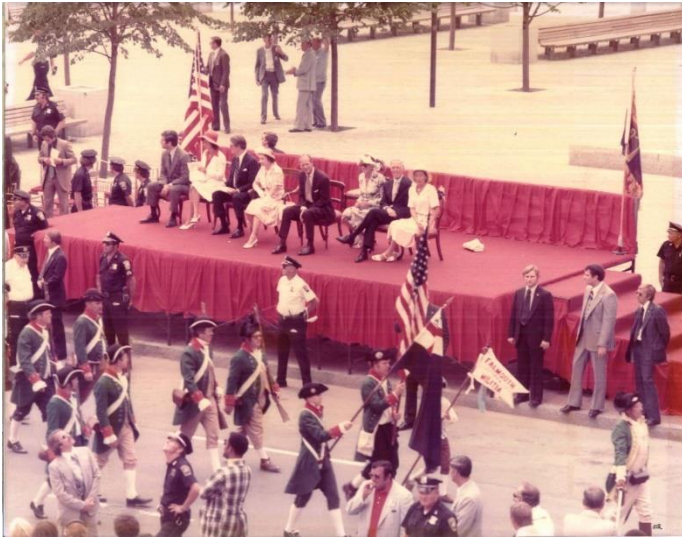


Her arrival was not auspicious. The royal yacht *Britannia* scraped the dock at Charlestown Navy Yard. The Queen and Prince Philip were then whisked to a Sunday service at the Old North Church, where Philip delivered a gospel reading. They proceeded to the Old State House. Elizabeth stood on the balcony from which the Declaration of Independence had been read. She observed, "If Paul Revere, Samuel Adams, and other patriots could have known that one day a British monarch would stand on the balcony of the Old State House . . . and be greeted in such kind and generous words . . . well, I think they would have been extremely surprised!" Following a luncheon in City Hall, the Queen's party ascended a dais in the outdoor plaza, and watched as 98 militia units, mostly from Massachusetts, paraded past.



With the royal couple sat Governor Michael Dukakis, Boston Mayor Kevin White, and their wives. Both men harbored presidential ambitions, and both hoped that the Queen's visit would help to restore the city's reputation, which had been tarnished by resistance to court-ordered busing. Local tour guides would later spread a rumor that Mayor White used this occasion to repay Elizabeth for the tea thrown into Boston Harbor in 1773. Buckingham Palace denied it.

No Irish-American disturbances were recorded, aside from a handful of signs and some yelling of impolite things behind City Hall, far from the Queen's ears. Before the review began, Elizabeth walked about and spoke to a few of the militiamen lined up for the parade. She asked a Taunton captain if he was enjoying the Bicentennial. "Yes, ma'am," he replied. He later told a *New York Times* reporter that his name was Thomas McGlynn. He was half Irish and half Albanian, and he thought the Queen was "a lovely creature."



After an exhausting day, Elizabeth got back on her yacht. There, she knighted John Moreton, who had helped to organize her trip. He is believed to be the first person ever knighted in U.S. territory. Then the Queen departed for Canada, where, as the head of state, she was slated to open the Olympic Games in Montreal.

The Falmouth militia went home to stage a spectacle of their own: a battle re-enactment on Surf Drive beach. On that occasion, Wessling issued a proclamation denouncing “the savage despoiler and Tyrant, King George.” Never mind that he had just rendered a courteous gesture to George III’s descendant. Victors

could afford to be magnanimous, after all. When Wessling’s militia passed before Her Majesty, they may have turned their eyes left and dipped their company’s banner in salute. But they always held the American flag high and proud.

#### **SOURCES:**

Papers of the Falmouth Bicentennial Committee, in the archives of Museums on the Green.

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[“Queen Elizabeth’s Visit \(July 1976\),” Ford Library Collection.](#)

New York Times, July 12, 1976, “Boston, Where It Began, Salutes the English Queen,” and “Organizer Knighted.”

[North End Regional Review, October 14, 2014, “Looking Back: The Queen’s Visit in 1976.”](#)

[“Queen Elizabeth II Visit, Boston, MA, USA” at Waymarking.com.](#)

[“Was Queen Elizabeth Repaid for the Tea that Was Thrown into Boston Harbor during the Tea Party?” by Bill MacKenty, September 21, 2014.](#)