



## Tea: Addiction, Exploitation, and Empire

By Roy Moxham

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Tea came late to popularity in England—after its arrival in Portugal, Holland, and France—but it quickly became a national obsession. And business. Tea gardens and tea shops sprang up everywhere in seventeenth-century England. Demand soon spread to the colonies, where the heavy taxation on tea led to smuggling on a massive scale and, in the New World, cost England her American empire. Tea also drove the British to war with China, to guarantee the supply of pekoe, and it prompted colonists to clear jungles in India, Ceylon, and Africa for huge tea plantations. In time the cultivation of tea would subject more than one million laborers to wretched, often inhuman working conditions. Hundreds of thousands of them would die for the commodity that for four centuries propelled Britain's economy and epitomized the reach of its empire. Bringing colorful detail and narrative skill to this history, author Roy Moxham—once a tea planter himself—maps the impact of a monumental and imperial British enterprise. In this book, he offers a fully fascinating, and frequently shocking, tale of England's tea trade—of the lands it claimed, the people it exploited, the profits it garnered, and the cups it filled.

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

Moxham (*The Great Hedge of India*) tells the story of how Britain's thirst for tea meshed with its thirst for empire, with devastating repercussions throughout the world. He points out that after tea first came to England from China in the 1700s, it was in great demand but heavily taxed, which led to an increase in smuggling and eventually played a role in England's loss of the American colonies. He then shows that as tea consumption rose, the East India Company paid for Chinese tea with Indian opium, with consequences that resonate in China to the present day. Then, in the mid-1880s, the East India Company began growing tea in India, which culminated in the importation of slave labor from China, Malaya and Bengal. Flogging, low wages, inadequate food, substandard housing and nonexistent medical care contributed to miserable conditions for these workers. Once tea workers started to unionize and nationalism threatened British domination of the tea industry in India, the British turned to Africa. Moxham concludes his provocative book with a description of the year he spent in 1960 as assistant manager on a tea estate in Nyasaland (now Malawi), where the British planters were still arrogantly confident of their racial superiority and fiercely opposed to Nyasaland's growing independence movement. Moxham's searing history of the commodity that has for centuries been so important for England's economy provides plenty of food for thought to go with that next cup of tea. Illus. not seen by PW.

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From [Booklist](#)

Readers won't find the secret to brewing the perfect cup here. Instead, Moxham explains how a nation's longing for the seemingly innocuous pleasures of a hot cup of tea drew it to commit unspeakable horrors. England took up the tea-drinking habit later than neighboring countries, but no nation took to its tea as did Britain. At first a costly luxury, tea became common in Britain when its traders successfully imported the leaf in vast quantities through commercial dominance of the sea. As trade began, Britain had little of interest to the Chinese, but soon merchants discovered a wildly profitable exchange of British silver for Indian opium for Chinese tea. Chinese efforts to discourage opium smoking led to wars that destabilized the ancient empire, setting the stage for Western dominance. Eventually, Britain likewise exploited India, Ceylon, and Africa to satisfy Britain's lust for tea. A frightening tale, well and relevantly told in a manner that may invite comparison with America's present appetite for oil. *Mark Knoblauch*  
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About the Author

Roy Moxham, formerly a tea planter and gallery owner, is currently Conservator of the University of London Library as well as a teacher and Associate Fellow in the university's Institute of English Studies. Moxham is also the author of *The Great Hedge of India*. He lives in London.

## **Users Review**

**From reader reviews:**

**Arthur Elsberry:**

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**Vicki Escalante:**

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