

# Tudor Tower

Functions of the Tower  
of London during the  
reign of Henry VIII



Notes:

## About these notes

This background information was designed to support lessons or a visit to the Tower of London for teachers of Key Stage 2 History Unit 7 'Why did Henry VIII marry six times?'

## Henry VIII's Tower of London

The Tower of London was already 400 years old when Henry VIII was born. Henry's ancestors, the kings of England, had used the Tower as a castle and as a royal residence, but also for other royal departments. These functions continued into Henry's reign.

## Tower as fortress

Henry VIII spent £3,593 4s 1d repairing the walls and towers of the castle, using 2,937 tons of imported stone from France. He also ordered four Yeoman Warders and as many gunners as necessary to guard the gate while it was open.

Guns, ammunition and other weapons were also stored at the Tower. In 1545 an order was given 'to new build one house wherein all the King's Ordnance and other munitions may be kept'. It included special rooms 'wherein all the King's Majesty's rich weapons of his own person should be kept'.



*Minted! All Henry's coins were produced at the Tower.*

*Above: The imposing White Tower, at the centre of the Tower of London.  
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Anne Boleyn stayed in the Tower's royal palace prior to her coronation and, later, as a prisoner.

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## Royal Mint

The Royal Mint was located in the Tower, and produced all of Henry's coins. In 1542 it 'coined money day and night' to convert the silver from the monasteries into cash. By the end of his reign, Henry frequently called in coins to be replaced by poor quality new ones. It was hard work – one story has it that a particular mint worker fell asleep for 15 days in 1546.

## The king's lodgings

Henry VIII carried out extensive work on the royal lodgings before the coronation of Anne Boleyn in 1533. (None of this work, however, now survives.) The King's Great Watching Chamber and Privy Chamber were refurbished, the Queen's Great Chamber had a new roof and the medieval Great Hall and kitchens were modernised.

Henry and Anne stayed in these renovated apartments before the coronation procession set off along the Thames to Westminster Abbey. The king never used them again, but Anne was to return – as a prisoner in 1536. 'Shall I go into a dungeon?' she asked the Constable of the Tower Sir William Kingston. 'No madam,' he replied, 'you shall go into the lodging you lay in at your coronation.'

## The Tower 'storehouse'

Some of the king's particularly precious or extraordinary possessions were kept safe at the Tower. Official royal documents were stored in the White Tower, the Wardrobe Tower and elsewhere. Much of the jewellery used at royal coronations (though not the crown or coronation regalia) was also kept in the Wardrobe Tower. And King Henry's collection of lions and other exotic animals – the Royal Menagerie – was housed in the Lion Tower.

*The execution site memorial. Positioned just a few yards from where two of Henry's wives were beheaded.*

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(photograph: Nick Guttridge)

## State prison and execution ground

Not originally built as a prison, the Tower more heavily served this purpose after 1534 - during Henry's reign. It was used to house potential rivals to the throne and prisoners associated with the king's marital problems and his break with Rome.

Prior to Henry's reign just one person had been executed inside the Tower. Henry, however, ordered the executions of Anne Boleyn, Lady Margaret Pole, Catherine Howard and her accomplice Lady Rochford to be carried out on Tower Green.

## Related resources

For more on the Tower as a prison and place of execution under Henry VIII see:

- *Imprisonment and execution: The Tower of London under Henry VIII (1509-47)*

