

Factsheet

Ceremony of The Keys

The Ceremony of the Keys is the traditional locking up of the Tower and has taken place every night without fail for at least 700 years. The importance of securing this fortress for the night is still very relevant because although the monarch no longer resides at this royal Palace, her Crown Jewels do!

- The Tower has served many functions over the centuries - Royal Palace, Royal Mint and home to the Crown Regalia - all of which made security a high priority. Thus, it was necessary to secure the building from dusk until dawn. Originally the Gentleman Porter would use an armed escort of soldiers to make his way through the grounds locking all possible entrances. These days the Chief Yeoman Warder is responsible.
- When the Duke of Wellington became Constable of the Tower in 1826 he altered the start time because it allowed the garrison some free time out on the town.
- The ceremony lasts just seven minutes. At precisely 21.53 the Chief Yeoman Warder, carrying the Keys of the Tower in one hand and a brass lantern in the other, collects his escort from the main body of the guard on duty within the Tower and proceeds to the entrance to secure the heavy wooden gates.
- The earliest known reference to the ceremony is contained in *Regulations for the Officers and Servants Civil and Military* which was issued by Mary Tudor on 12th October 1555.
- It is thought the ceremony is at least 700 years old and has certainly occurred every night without fail for many years. During the Second World War several bombs fell on the Tower. In September 1941 it is recorded that following a direct hit the ceremony was delayed by half an hour but it still went ahead.
- The lantern that the Chief Yeoman Warder carries to light his way was presented to the Tower as a token of friendship by the Honourable Artillery Company on 12th May 1919
- Nobody is sure when the public were first allowed to watch the ceremony but

these days it is allowed almost every night. **However no one is admitted without a date stamped ticket.**

- To attend you should apply to the Ceremony of the Keys Office, HM Tower of London, London EC3N 4AB. All requests must include a SAE and full names and addresses of those wishing to attend. Since the ceremony is often booked up well in advance it is advisable to offer at least three different dates and allow plenty of time to apply.