

Factsheet

The Ceremony of the Constable's Dues

Every large Royal Navy ship that visits the port of London delivers a barrel of rum to the Constable of the Tower on Tower Green in a ceremony known as the Constable's Dues. This happens around once a year and is a reminder of the once more extensive perquisites enjoyed by past Constables.

- There are documented accounts of the dues paid to the Constable of the Tower from the fourteenth century onwards. However, the custom is thought to pre-date even this period.
- Every ship that came upstream to the City had to moor at Tower Wharf to unload a portion of its cargo for the Constable and thus enjoy the protection of the Tower of London guns. In the past such bounty would have included oysters, mussels, cockles, rushes and wine.
- This tradition is still upheld in the Ceremony of the Constable's Dues. When the Royal Navy moors one of its ships alongside the Tower, the Captain of that vessel delivers a barrel of rum to the Constable as a symbol of these ancient rights. Accompanied by an escort of Yeoman Warders in State Dress and a Corps of Drums, the Captain and his escort of Naval ratings march through the Tower of London to Tower Green where the ceremony takes place. A colourful custom, it is re-enacted each year and the participants then retire to Queen's House afterwards to sample the contents.
- Formerly, in the absence of the Sovereign at the Tower of London, the Constable would have been amongst the most powerful men in the city. As well as being one of the most honourable positions in the Crown's service, it was also one of the most profitable. Perks of the job included any horses, oxen, pigs or sheep that fell off London Bridge. For every foot of livestock that stumbled into the Tower moat, the Constable received a penny and any cart that fell in became his property.
- The Constable was entitled to demand 6s 8d a year from the owners of all boats fishing for sprat between the Tower and the sea; 1s a year from all

ships carrying herring to London; and 2d from each pilgrim who came to London by sea to worship at the shrine of St. James.