

Factsheet

Traditions at the Tower of London

The Tower of London is living history in the heart of the Capital. Its traditional ceremonies, many enacted in the same way for centuries, give substance to this description. They are not empty rituals, but often have very real functions in keeping traditions alive and honouring the Tower as a royal institution. Some ceremonies occur daily, others are seen more infrequently, some are private but many others are open to the public and well worth seeing.

- Dating back some 700 years, one of the oldest traditions at the Tower is the Ceremony of the Keys. Every evening just before 10pm, the Chief Yeoman Warder, with military escort, locks the outer gates of the Tower. As he tries to return to the inner ward, however, he is challenged at the Bloody Tower by a sentry. Having identified the keys as those of the sovereign and been saluted by the Tower Guard, the Chief then gives them to the Governor for the night.
- The Ceremony of the Lilies and Roses takes place every year when the Provosts of Eton College and Kings College, Cambridge lay their college emblems (lilies and roses respectively) on the spot where Henry VI, founder of both institutions, is said to have been murdered on 21 May 1471.
- According to one enduring tradition, there is buried treasure at the Tower of London! Sir John Barkstead, goldsmith and Lieutenant of the Tower under Cromwell, was thought to have hidden a large amount of money (some say £20,000 in gold coins) somewhere in the Tower before his arrest and execution at the Restoration of Charles II. The diarist Samuel Pepys took part in several searches for the gold, as have a number of enthusiastic Governors, but 'Barkstead's Treasure' remains hidden to this day.
- The area surrounding the Tower is known as the 'Tower Liberties' - this is under the jurisdiction of the Tower of London and independent of the City. In the fourteenth century the location of the boundary markers was firmly impressed on the minds of the local boys who were given a severe thrashing on the spot. These days the ceremony is not quite so painful and the Beating

of the Bounds takes place on Ascension Day every three years when local children, armed with willow wands, beat the boundary stones.

- Every large Royal Navy ship that visits the port of London delivers a barrel of rum to the Governor 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.
- Ravens have been associated with the Tower for over 900 years and tradition has it that if they should ever leave then the White Tower will fall and a great disaster befall the kingdom. Charles II took this tradition so seriously that he decreed that at least six ravens should always be kept at the Tower to prevent disaster.
- At State Parades, on Easter, Whitsun and the Sunday before Christmas, Yeoman Warders in state dress escort the Governor from the Queen's House to a service in the Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula and back again. The parade takes place fifteen minutes before the service. Anyone can watch the parade, however, members of the public require prior written consent to attend the service.