

History at the Tower

Your short guide to the history of the Tower of London



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Brief History of the Tower

Roman origins

The Tower was built on the south-eastern corner of the wall that the Romans built around Londinium circa AD 200. The line of this wall is still visible within the Tower site on the east of the White Tower, and parts of the wall are visible by the Ravens Shop.

William the Conqueror

After the successful Norman invasion, William the Conqueror set about consolidating his new capital by building three fortifications. The strongest of the three was the Tower, which controlled and protected the eastern entry to the City from the river, as well as serving as a palace.

Work on the White Tower began in around 1078 and probably took twenty-five years to complete. It was one of the first great stone towers to be built in Britain and the tallest tower in the country, dominating the skyline of the capital.

Medieval Tower

During the reigns of Richard I (1189-1199) and Henry III (1216-1272) the Tower defences were strengthened by the addition of a curtain wall surrounding the keep. Henry III's son, Edward I (1272-1307), built a second curtain wall, surrounded by a moat.

By the end of the fourteenth century Richard II (1377-1399) had completed the wharf, separating the outer wall from the river. Apart from later minor changes, Richard's fortress is the one we know today.

The Tudors

During Henry VIII's long reign, the Tower's use changed as the Tudor dynasty grew in self-confidence. Royal palaces were no longer designed as defensive strongholds and the King's favoured residences (Hampton Court, Greenwich, Nonsuch and Whitehall) emphasised the King's wealth and majesty. The final great expenditure on the Tower as a royal residence was for the splendour of Anne Boleyn's coronation.

Although no longer a principal royal residence, the Tower's strength as a defensive stronghold was utilised as a safe home for the London Mint, and a safe place to keep political prisoners in times of peril. The list of Tudor prisoners kept at the Tower is as long as it is famous, including Thomas More, Anne Boleyn, Lady Jane Grey, Walter Raleigh, Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex and Princess Elizabeth herself.

Although often remembered as a site of execution, only seven people were executed inside the Tower. Many more were executed outside the Tower complex on Tower Hill. Only very important prisoners were granted the privacy of an execution safely within the Tower walls.

The Stuarts

The seventeenth century was one of the most tumultuous centuries in Britain's history and events at large were represented within the Tower's walls. Only two years into the reign of the new Stuart King James I (1603-1621), the failed gunpowder plotter, Guy Fawkes, was imprisoned and tortured at the Tower. Although the place of his torture is unknown, his interrogation was known to have taken place in the Queen's House. Following the Civil War, Oliver Cromwell, as Lord Protector, ordered the original crown jewels to be melted down during the 1650s, quite possibly in the mint itself. Upon the restoration, Charles II had the jewels remade, only for a daring theft attempt to be made on them in 1671 by the notorious Thomas "Colonel" Blood. He was captured and, rather remarkably, pardoned by Charles II.

Throughout the late Stuart period the Tower was used as a prison, storehouse for munitions and the Royal Mint, soon to employ its most famous Master, Sir Isaac Newton.

Victorian era

During the Victorian period, leisure time for workers increased greatly and the Tower witnessed a large rise in paying visitors. As the site developed into the tourist attraction we know today, changes were made to the Tower to make it appear more “medieval”. Part of this programme was the rebuilding of the Lanthorn Tower in 1885, after it had been pulled down in the previous century.

The White Tower was also home to important government departments during Victoria’s reign including the Public Records Office and the Board of Ordnance, the department which controlled and issued all supplies for the army and navy.

20th Century

The emphasis has been on conservation rather than rebuilding in the twentieth century, as the Tower developed into one of Britain’s most popular visitor attractions.

Conservation was a special concern during the blitz when many buildings in the Tower were destroyed, including part of an eighteenth-century building used by the Mint, the North Bastion and the Main Guard.

Echoes of the Tower’s former use were evident a year later when Rudolf Hess was imprisoned in the same Queen’s House where Guy Fawkes was interrogated three hundred years earlier. Also, Joseph Jakobs, a German spy, was executed by firing squad in the Outer Ward between the Constable and Martin Towers.

Chronology

From AD50	The walls of the Roman city of Londinium are built by the river on the site the Tower now occupies.
1066	William the Conqueror establishes the Tower to keep hostile Londoners at bay.
1080s	Work on the White Tower is under way.
1101	Ranulf Flambard, the first known prisoner at the Tower, makes a daring escape.
1251	A polar bear joins the Tower menagerie.
1275-79	Edward I builds St Thomas's Tower and the watergate now known as Traitors' Gate
1279	The London Mint moves inside the Tower.
1360	John II 'the Good' of France lives in great splendour as a prisoner.
1381	Simon of Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, is dragged out of the Tower and murdered on Tower Hill during the Peasants' Revolt.
1389	Geoffrey Chaucer, clerk of works, oversees completion of Tower Wharf. Chaucer is better known for having written The Canterbury Tales.
1483	The Princes in the Tower disappear, presumed murdered.
1485	Henry VII founds the body of Yeoman Warders or 'Beefeaters'.
1533	Anne Boleyn's coronation procession begins from her lavish new rooms in the Tower.
1536	Anne Boleyn is beheaded by a swordsman brought especially from France.
1554	Lady Jane Grey, the 'nine days queen', is executed. Princess Elizabeth, later Elizabeth I, is imprisoned in the Tower.
1605	Guy Fawkes is tortured at the Tower following the failed Gunpowder Plot to assassinate James I and blow up Parliament.
1671	Colonel Blood attempts to steal the Crown Jewels.
1696	Isaac Newton is appointed Warden of the Mint
1780	The last hanging takes place on Tower Hill.
1812	The Mint moves out of the Tower to a new factory on Tower Hill
1826	Duke of Wellington becomes Constable of the Tower and appoints Yeoman Warders based on their exemplary military service.
1835	Tower Menagerie closes. The animals are transferred to the new London Zoo.
1841	Crown Jewels are saved from fire.
1850	Koh-i-nûr diamond is presented to Queen Victoria.
1941	Nazi Deputy Fuhrer Rudolph Hess is held at the Tower
1952	East end London gangsters Ronnie and Reggie Kray are held at the Tower.

Key Characters associated with the Tower of London

Edward the Confessor (c.1003-1066)

Reigned 1042-1066



Edward was the penultimate Anglo-Saxon king of England.

He was the son of Æthelred II 'the Unready' and spent much of his early life in exile in Normandy before becoming King in 1042.

Edward's Norman sympathies caused tension among his new subjects resulting in the crisis in 1050 when his father-in-law, Godwin of Wessex, assembled an army against him. Godwin and his sympathisers were banished and Norman barons were appointed at court in their place.

The last 15 years of Edward's reign were relatively peaceful. Edward was not an extravagant king, nor was he a great military leader. This meant that taxes remained low and the country prospered.

Edward was known as 'the Confessor' because he led a deeply religious life. One of his greatest legacies is Westminster Abbey, the foundations of which were laid during his reign.

He died childless on 4th January 1066 leaving several potential claimants vying for the throne.

Harold Godwinson (c. 1022 - 1066)

Reigned 1066



Harold II (or Harold Godwinson) was the last Anglo-Saxon king of England.

In Anglo-Saxon times, there was no strict line of succession. When a king died, the male members of his family: sons, brothers, uncles, nephews, would all be eligible for the throne and the one with the most power and supporters became king.

Shortly before his death, Edward the Confessor named Harold as his successor, although his distant cousin William, Duke of Normandy also had a claim to the throne. This began one of the most bitterly contested successions in history.

Legend has it that in 1064 Harold was shipwrecked off the coast of Normandy. William is believed to have captured him and forced him to swear an oath to support his claim.

When Edward died and Harold assumed power, William mounted a campaign to seize the throne. On 14 October 1066 William and Harold met in battle near Hastings where Harold was defeated and killed.

Duke William II of Normandy (William I of England) (c.1028–1087)

Reigned 1066-87



Also known as William the Conqueror, William the Bastard

William I was the first Norman King of England.

William was a very experienced and ruthless military commander, ruler and administrator who had unified Normandy and inspired fear and respect amongst his contemporaries.

In 1066 he defeated and killed the English king Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings and was crowned king on Christmas Day at Westminster Abbey.

Even after he secured victory William faced much opposition. His first task was to 'pacify' the land and control what William referred to as 'the fickleness of the vast and furious population'. To make certain that his new subjects did not forget who controlled their country William began a programme of castle- building that would last for the rest of his life.

William knew that the key to controlling England was to control London and so he commissioned Bishop Gundulf to supervise works on a great new fortress that would dominate the town and be large enough to serve several functions: as a royal palace, a military garrison for his troops and an administrative centre for the kingdom.

The White Tower itself was probably not started until ten years after the Battle of Hastings. It took around 25 years to complete, and William died long before it was finished.

William III (c.1056 – 1100)

Reigned 1087-1100



Also known as William Rufus

At his death in 1087, William I divided his kingdom and possessions among his three sons: Richard, who acquired England, and Henry, who inherited 5000 pounds of silver.

The manner in which William the Conqueror divided his possessions caused turmoil among his sons and many Norman barons found themselves caught up in the midst of a battle for succession.

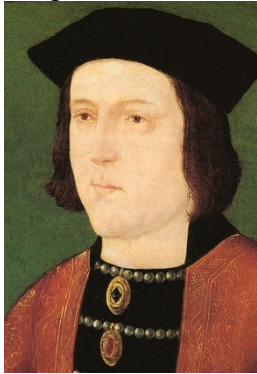
Known as William Rufus because of his ruddy complexion, he was an unpopular king disliked for his lack of piety and his extravagant lifestyle funded by heavy taxes.

It fell to William II to complete his father's great Tower and, in doing so he helped to define its role as a great royal fortress.

He died after being struck by an arrow whilst hunting. Although supposedly an accident, it has been suggested that he was shot deliberately on the orders of his brother Henry.

Edward IV (1442-1483)

Reigned 1461-70 & 1471 - 83



Edward IV was born in troubled times during the Wars of the Roses, in which his family (the Yorkists) fought the Lancastrian family for control of England. He spent his early reign as king fighting battles across the country.

As a king he was expected to marry someone of equal social status. But instead of marrying a European princess, he married Elizabeth Woodville, one of his subjects, and not even from one of the leading families in the land! The marriage was scandalous and unpopular as the Woodville family used their connection to gain power.

The marriage continued to be a problem and in 1483 Dr Ralph Shaa preached that it was an illegal marriage as Edward IV had previously been engaged to someone else. This meant his sons were illegitimate and could not inherit the throne, which went to his brother Richard instead.

Edward IV died when his sons were still boys, and had told his brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, that he wanted him to look after the country until young Edward was old enough to rule in his own right.

Elizabeth Woodville (1437-1492)



Elizabeth Woodville was a beauty in her day, and she married Edward VI secretly in around 1461. The scandal of Edward's secret marriage to a commoner outraged his supporters and created violence and chaos in England.

Edward and Elizabeth had many children, but the only boys were Edward and Richard, who became known as the 'Princes in the Tower' after their mysterious disappearance in 1483.

After Edward IV's death, she tried to protect her sons and get Edward crowned as soon as possible, but her brother-in-law Richard, Duke of Gloucester managed to hold the boys in the Tower and delay young Edward's coronation.

After her sons disappeared, Elizabeth married her eldest daughter to Henry Tudor, strengthening his claim to the throne, which he took after defeating Richard III in battle in 1485.

The Princes in the Tower

Edward V (1470 - last seen 1483) & Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York (1473 - last seen 1483)



The princes in the Tower were Edward and Richard, the sons of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville.

Edward IV had come to the throne after defeating the Lancastrians in the Wars of the Roses. When he died suddenly in 1483, his son Edward was proclaimed king in his place.

As a 12 year-old, he was not old enough to rule as king, so his father chose his own brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester to be the Lord Protector until Edward was old enough to rule on his own.

Edward was rushed to London by his uncle Lord Rivers, as Rivers wanted to become Lord Protector himself. However they were caught by Richard, Duke of York, who escorted his nephew to the Tower of London where he was lodged along with his brother. With the new king safely incarcerated Richard mounted a campaign to prove that the boys were in fact illegitimate and declared himself king.

The princes were last seen alive in June 1483 and it is widely believed that their uncle had them murdered. Support for this claim was unearthed in 1674 when the bodies of two children were discovered during building works at the Tower.

Richard III, Duke of Gloucester (1452-1485)

Reigned 1483-5



There are few kings with such a bad reputation as Richard III. He was painted as a villainous ugly hunchback in William Shakespeare's play about him. But was he really so bad? The Richard III society promotes a very different view of the king.

As a young man he fought in many battles in the Wars of the Roses for his family (the Yorkists). His brother Edward IV later trusted him to run the north of England. Edward also named him as Lord Protector for his young son.

After Edward IV's death he worked to get young Edward and Richard in his care, and placed him in the Tower of London for safety. But for whose safety? Was it for the boys or for Richard himself?

It is the fate of the two princes, and Richard's role in imprisoning the boys, taking the throne and their disappearance, that has coloured our view of him.

His reign did not last long and he was killed during the battle of Bosworth in 1485. He is still in the news today, as his bones were discovered in 2012, and people argue over where he should be buried.

Lady Jane Grey (1537-1554)

Reigned 1553



Lady Jane Grey ruled as Queen of England for just nine days in 1553 as part of an unsuccessful bid to prevent the accession of Mary Tudor.

As great granddaughter to Henry VII, Jane entered Katheryn Parr's household at the age of 10 where she was exposed to a strongly Protestant and academic environment.

When Henry VIII died in 1547 his 9 year old son Edward was crowned king. Edward's brief reign was blighted by nobles using the Regency to strengthen their own positions. When it became clear that Edward was ill, the king's protector, the Duke of Northumberland, hurriedly married his son to Lady Jane Grey. To prevent the throne passing to Edward's half-sister, the Catholic Mary Tudor, the fiercely Protestant Duke persuaded Edward to alter the line of succession to pass to Jane.

When Edward died in July 1553 Jane assumed the throne. After a few days, with overwhelming popular support, Mary Tudor made a triumphal entry into London and Jane was persuaded to relinquish the crown.

Mary imprisoned Jane, her husband and her father in the Tower of London where she was held in No 5 Tower Green and allowed to walk freely 'at convenient times' at the discretion of the Lieutenant of the Tower. Records suggest that Mary was anxious to spare Jane's life but her failure to convert to Catholicism led to her execution for high treason in February 1554.

Elizabeth I (1533-1603)

Reigned 1558-1603



Elizabeth was born in 1533, the daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn.

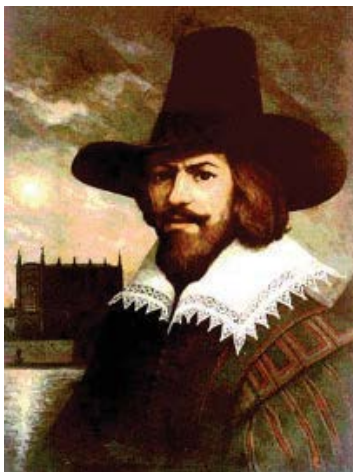
When Elizabeth was just 2 years old when her mother was beheaded for adultery on the orders of the king and she was exiled from court. Her chances of succeeding the throne were further diminished by the birth of her half-brother Edward in 1537.

In 1553 Elizabeth's elder sister, the Catholic Mary Tudor became queen. Elizabeth was viewed by Mary as a direct threat to her throne and was briefly imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1554, for her alleged involvement in a failed Protestant rebellion led by Thomas Wyatt.

In November 1558, Elizabeth succeeded Mary to the throne and made religious reform her priority. The new queen recognised the importance of establishing a clear religious framework and helped to create a Church of England that, although largely Protestant, allowed some of the old Catholic traditions to continue. Despite pursuing a policy of moderation, many of her subjects were upset by this uneasy compromise and paid for their disloyalty with their lives.

Overall, Elizabeth's reign is considered one of triumph and success and is often referred to as a 'Golden Age' of English history.

Guy Fawkes (1570 - 1606)



Guy Fawkes was described by his contemporaries as 'a man highly skilled in matters of war'. He was also a master of deceit, a characteristic which landed him a key role in the conspiracy known today as the Gunpowder Plot.

During a campaign fighting for Spain in Flanders, Fawkes was approached by Thomas Wintour who revealed plans for a rebellion which would see Catholicism restored to England. The plan was to ignite a stock of gunpowder in the vaults beneath the House of Lords whilst the King's Council was in session. Because of his expertise with gunpowder, it would be Fawkes who would be responsible for igniting the touchpaper.

On 4th November 1605, after 18 months of planning, Fawkes awaited his cue beneath the House of Lords. Posing as John Johnson, Fawkes twice diverted officials who had been tipped off that something was afoot. Eventually he was searched and, along with the 35 barrels of gunpowder discovered in the vaults, officials found matches, and touchpaper on his

person.

Guy was escorted to Whitehall to confront James I in person and then to the Tower where he was subjected to various tortures before confessing and being sentenced to a traitor's death.

Colonel Blood (1618 - 1680)

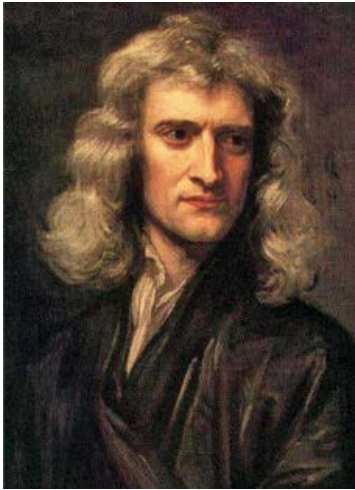


To this day Thomas Blood remains one of England's most notorious and celebrated jewel thieves.

Born in Ireland, Blood came to England in 1642 to fight for Cromwell's army during the Civil War. After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Blood became involved in a number of republican plots before sinking into the murky depths of London's criminal underworld.

In a display of grandeur befitting the restored monarchy, the new king, had a new set of crown jewels commissioned and put on display in the Martin Tower at the Tower of London. For reasons still unknown, Blood hatched a plot to steal these jewels by grooming the jewel keeper and his family over a period of months before attacking him and attempting to smuggle the jewels out beneath his cloak. As he prepared to flee from the scene, the Jewel Keepers son raised the alarm and Blood was arrested. This attempt to steal the jewels led to a comprehensive review of security at the Tower.

Isaac Newton (1646 – 1727)



Isaac Newton was an English physicist and mathematician, and the greatest scientist of his era.

Best known for his works on the composition of light and theory of gravity, in 1696 Isaac Newton was appointed Warden of the Mint, which was then based at the Tower of London.

Newton took his job in the Mint seriously. He calculated the most efficient method to produce coins, and his observations helped the Mint re-coin nearly £2.5 million of silver in three years.

Part of Newton's job was also to track down counterfeiters who made fake coins. The punishment for coin counterfeiting was death, and Newton didn't hesitate to send many criminals to prison and the hangman's noose for their crimes.

In 1699, Isaac Newton was promoted to Master of the Mint, a post he held until his death in 1727.

Carl Hans Lody (1877 – 1914)



Carl Hans Lody was a Junior Lieutenant in the German Naval Reserve. Despite having limited training in espionage he was sent to spy in Britain and Ireland during the First World War.

Before the war, Lody had been married to an American and spoke fluent English. He travelled using an American passport in the name of Charles A. Inglis to avoid detection.

Lody was originally given the task of reporting from southern France, but was sent to Britain in August 1914 and tasked with reporting on the activity of naval bases in the Edinburgh- Leith area.

Lody's only means of communication with his superiors in Germany was by telegrams and letters to neutral countries. He sent a number of telegrams using a simple code, but was finally arrested on 2 October 1914 when one of his encoded messages was intercepted by postal censors. On his person officials found 705 Norwegian kroner, £14 in German gold, a notebook containing lists of ships sunk in the North Sea and a hollowed

out book containing pills.

Lody was taken to London where he was put on trial for war treason and sentenced to death by firing squad. On the day before his execution Lody wrote two letters, one to his guards at the Tower, thanking them for their kindness, and the other to his family informing them of his death.

Read more about the case here: www.mi5.gov.uk/home/mi5-history/mi5s-early-years/carl-hans-lody.html

Fernando Buschman (1890 – 1915)



Born in Brazil, Buschman was one of 11 German spies executed at the Tower between the years 1914 and 1916.

Fernando Buschman was a businessman involved with the import and export of food and had connections in Brazil, London and Hamburg. After the outbreak of the First World War his business began to suffer and he travelled to London to make contact with some of the food merchants that he suspected had ceased to trade with him because of his German interests.

Money was short and in 1915 Buschman began sending telegrams to a contact in Hamburg named Flores Dierks requesting money. Dierks was known by the British security forces as a major organising officer for spies sent to the UK. The last telegram that Buschman sent was to the German military and linked Flores to the German intelligence service. When Buschman was arrested officers searched his rooms and found a notebook entitled 'Impressions of London' filled with comments on the similarities between Paris and London.

Buschman was court marshalled and, although he claimed that he knew nothing of military matters, he couldn't explain his communications with the German military. He was found guilty and sent to the Tower to await his execution.

On the night before his death Buschman played his violin until the early hours before finally kissing the instrument and saying 'Goodbye, I shall not want you anymore'.

He was executed by a firing squad at the Tower on 19th September 1915.

Josef Jakobs (1898 – 1941)



By the 20th century the Tower served primarily as a museum. One role that it did retain was that of an enduring symbol of the monarchy and British Empire – standing defiant in the face of Nazi onslaught.

It was for this reason, in August 1941, that Josef Jakobs became the last person to be executed at the Tower.

Six months earlier Jakobs had been discovered on farmland lying beneath a camouflage parachute. He protested his innocence but was soon discovered to be in possession of a number of incriminating items, including a wireless transmitter, false papers and maps of nearby RAF bases.

At a court martial Jakobs was found guilty of espionage and lodged overnight in the east turret room of the Waterloo Block before being executed by a firing squad. The chair used for his execution can be found in the Royal Armouries' collection.

Rudolph Hess (1894 – 1987)



Hess was the son of a wealthy German merchant and a devoted follower of Adolf Hitler.

In 1941 Hess made a solo flight from Bavaria to Scotland where he crash landed. He was arrested and taken to the Tower.

After 4 days of interrogation Hess was sent to spend the remainder of the war at Mychett Place in Surrey before being sentenced to life imprisonment at the Nuremberg Trials of 1946.

Why Hess came to England is as much of a mystery as how he died. Rudolph Hess became one of the last state prisoners to be held at the Tower.

Ronnie & Reggie Kray

(Ronnie 1933 - 1995, Reggie 1933 - 2000)



Ronnie and Reggie Kray were English gangsters who became the foremost perpetrators of organised crime in the East end of London during the 1950s and 1960s.

As young men in 1952, the brothers were called up for National Service with the Royal Fusiliers. After failing to report they were arrested and turned over to the army who held them at the Tower.

This seemingly minor incident led to a spell at a military prison in Somerset but this did not deter them.

Together with their gang 'The Firm' the twins went on to commit armed robberies, assaults and murders. Despite being much feared their cult status brought with it an element of celebrity.

Plan your visit by period

If you want to focus your visit on a particular period in history, here are our recommendations.

Roman

- Find the eastern line of the old Roman city wall to the east of the White Tower, and the southern line to the south of the Ravens shop

Medieval

- Explore the White Tower and learn how the oldest part of the Tower developed during the medieval period. It was from the Chapel here that the revolt of 1381 dragged Simon Sudbury to Tower Hill to be executed.
- Visit the Bloody Tower where the two Princes may have been kept.
- Look out towards the river from the Cradle Tower. The Wharf in front of you was completed in 1387 by the Clerk of the King's Works, Geoffrey Chaucer.

Tudor

- Contemplate the Execution site where Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard and Lady Jane Grey were executed.
- Visit the White Tower to see Henry VIII's armour and weaponry.
- Investigate the Beauchamp Tower to see prisoner inscriptions from the Tudor period.
- Delve into the history of the Salt Tower where Tudor prisoners, both rich and poor, were held, including the famous Elizabethan priest John Gerard.
- Visit the Bloody Tower and see how a celebrity Tudor prisoner might have lived by exploring Sir Walter Raleigh's lodgings.

Stuart

- The world-famous Crown Jewels largely date from Charles II's reign. Large queues can form outside the Jewel House during peak periods (12 - 3pm) so we would recommend you make this stop early in your visit. Go to the White Tower to see armour and weaponry from the Stuart period.
- See the Torture at the Tower exhibition.
- Walk to Tower Green and find the Queen's house where Guy Fawkes was interrogated after the gunpowder plot.
- Stand at the end of Mint Street where the Royal Mint was based during the seventeenth century. This is where Oliver Cromwell may have melted down the first crown jewels and was the place of work of the Master of the Mint, a position held by Sir Isaac Newton, among others.

Victorian

- Explore the White Tower, home of the Board of Ordnance in the Victorian period.

A Tower tour through time

If you are interested in the general history of the Tower of London then we would recommend you enter the medieval palace on Water Lane, and take a tour of the Wall Walks which takes you through some of the famous events, and unusual institutions from the Tower's history.

- Medieval Palace
- Prisoners
- Medieval fortress
- Martin Tower
- Royal beasts
- Wellington's fortress
- The Tower of London remembers

Frequently asked questions

Why are the ravens kept at the Tower of London?

Legend has it that John Flamsteed, Astronomer Royal, who was based at the Tower, complained about the ravens to King Charles II. Charles was to have the birds removed when he was told the tale that if the ravens ever left the Tower, then the White Tower, the monarchy and the Kingdom itself would crumble to the ground. Rather than remove the ravens, he removed Flamsteed to Greenwich, where the Royal Observatory was built with materials from the Tower itself.

No one can be sure when ravens first became a feature of Tower life, but ravens used to be common in London, especially near the old meat markets and may have roosted in the Tower grounds for many centuries. There are currently six ravens kept at the Tower and their wings are clipped to prevent them from flying away.

Which animals were kept in the menagerie?

The Tower's menagerie stemmed from the medieval practice of Kings giving each other strange and rare animals as gifts. The menagerie was situated just by the modern day entrance to the Tower (west gate) and in its time it housed a thirteenth century polar bear and elephant, an eighteenth century ostrich and seventeenth century lions (King James I allowed free entry if you brought a dog for the lions to feast on!). The Holy Emperor Frederick II gave Henry III three 'leopards' which were most probably lions, and were to become the three lions that still adorn the England football shirt.

The menagerie closed in the 1830s due to the prohibitive expense of keeping so many animals. Some of the animals were re-housed in the new London Zoo in Regent's Park.

When did Kings and Queens stop using the Tower as a palace?

After the dynastic feuds of the Wars of the Roses and the relatively secure Tudor dynasty, Henry VIII built much more luxurious and magnificent palaces to live in, that did not need rigorous defences like less secure Kings before him. Defence was not a primary concern in regards to the King's dwelling, so the Tower fell out of fashion. However, in one sense it continued to be a royal dwelling well into the Stuart period. It had become a tradition that the monarch spend the night before their coronation at the Tower. The next morning they would travel at the head of a great procession through the city and to Westminster. All of the Tudor monarchs observed this tradition, and although the Royal residences had fallen into neglect by 1660, Charles II made a point of starting his royal procession from the Tower on his coronation day, even though he was unable to spend the previous night there.

What happened to the two princes?

Prince Edward (12) and his younger brother, Prince Richard (10), were last seen alive in June of 1483 inside the Tower of London. After this time they disappeared and their fate remains unknown. They may have been murdered upon the order of their uncle and protector, Richard Duke of Gloucester. He considered the Princes to be illegitimate due to their father's pre-contract to marry a woman other than their mother. A month after the last reported sighting of the princes, Richard Duke of Gloucester pronounced himself King Richard III. This fact alone has prompted many to view the Princes' disappearance as premeditated murder. In 1674, the bodies of two boys were found when a twelfth century building was demolished. The identity of the bodies has never satisfactorily been established.

How many people were executed here?

Despite the Tower's bloody reputation, only 10 people are commemorated on the execution memorial on Tower Green. Many more were imprisoned here before being marched out onto Tower Hill for execution. The Tower is probably remembered as a bloody place because of the high profile of the people who were executed on Tower Green. These people included three Queens of England in Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard and Jane Grey.

Others died here, who were not officially executed, including the two princes and the Duke of Clarence. In addition, 11 men were executed for espionage at the Tower during the first and second world wars.

Who are the Beefeaters?

The Beefeater's official title is 'Yeoman Warder'. Their nickname may have derived from being 'Yeomen of the Guard', the King's bodyguards, permitted to eat beef from the King's table from at least 1509 (Henry VIII). Today's Yeoman Warders have all served at least 22 years honourable service in the armed forces.

Are the Crown Jewels real?

Yes! Much of the original crown jewel collection was destroyed by Oliver Cromwell in 1649, but when Charles II came to the throne he had them remade. The 'coronation spoon' is the only piece to survive Cromwell and is 800 years old. The rest of the collection has been added to during subsequent reigns, but the entire collection is real. If you were to visit the Tower at the opening of Parliament, you would notice that some of the jewels would be missing and in its place you would find a notice saying 'in use'!

Where were the prisoners tortured?

No official records exist as to where in the Tower prisoners were tortured. What is certain is that there were not as many cases of torture as is popularly imagined; no more than forty-eight cases received official sanction between 1540 and 1640. There were three main forms of torture, the most common and famous form being the rack. In addition you might be forced into the 'scavenger's daughter', a set of leg, wrist and neck irons, which forced the victim into bone-crushing contortions. Finally there were the manacles, which were clamped around the victim's wrists and then hung high up on a wall. There is a suggestion that the Jesuit priest John Gerard suffered such torment in the base of the White Tower.

Does anyone still live here?

Yes. The Yeoman Warders and their families all live within the Tower in the Casemates, the Old Hospital Block and on Tower Green. Each night they are locked in, which means the Tower has its own resident Doctor and pub of course!

Who owns the Tower?

The Tower of London is owned by HM Queen but run on behalf of the nation by Historic Royal Palaces, an independent charity (that also runs Hampton Court, Hillsborough Castle, Kensington and Kew Palaces, as well as the Banqueting House in Whitehall). HRP receives no funding from the Government or the Crown, so we depend on the support of our visitors, members, donors, volunteers and sponsors.

What was it like to be a prisoner here?

Not as bad as people think! The Tower's role as a prison was only incidental to its main functions as a royal palace and stronghold. This is underlined by the absence of any purpose built accommodation for prisoners. Prisoners were often housed wherever they could be, and for wealthier prisoners this could mean often luxurious accommodation (see Sir Walter Raleigh's quarters in the Bloody Tower). The Tower is best known as a prison for important or politically sensitive prisoners, but even for the least important prisoner, life was better here than in the Fleet or Clink prison, where death by disease was commonplace.

Who built the Tower?

The first part of the Tower to be built (and the most famous) is the White Tower, and this was initiated by William the Conqueror, although he died before its completion. Henry III, king for much of the thirteenth century, built what is now recognisably the inner wall, including the Lanthorn, Wakefield and Bloody Towers. Henry's son, Edward I, built much of the outer wall, transforming the Tower into a 'concentric' castle. Richard II completed the wharf, separating the Tower from the Thames. Although additions and rebuilding works were continued by all subsequent generations and royal dynasties, the Tower's present day appearance essentially dates from Richard II.

Is the Tower haunted?

There have been many reported ghostly sightings down the years. The most famous resident ghost appears to be that of Anne Boleyn. She has occasionally been spotted near the Queen's House, the site of her imprisonment prior to her execution. On the anniversary of her death, she has also been spotted leading a ghostly procession inside the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula, where she is buried. Walter Raleigh has been spotted as recently as 1983, by a Yeoman Warder in the Byward Tower. An unseen and terrifying presence is said to inhabit the Salt Tower after dark, and the ghost of a giant bear was said to appear from inside the Martin Tower in the nineteenth century!