

School resource

Functions of the Tower of London

What is the most important function of the Tower of London?

Print and laminate these cards and cut them up to form a set of nine cards. They are easily stored together with a treasury tag if you hole punch them.

Activity

Divide the class into groups of 4-8 students. Hand out one pack of functions per group. Use the cards to put the functions of the Tower in order of which you think is most important, and why.

Think about:

- Why have you chosen this particular function?
- Have you chosen which is important now, over time, or for a particular period in time (like the Tudors)

Discussion points and background info

Prison

The Tower wasn't built as a prison, and there are no dungeons. Many different rooms and areas within the Tower have been used as prison accommodation. Once it was used as a prison, it was actually a high-status prison and some rooms would have been quite comfortable (see Walter Raleigh's lodgings in the Bloody Tower). Execution within the walls of the Tower was a privilege. Torture was illegal and rare - one notable exception is Guy Fawkes whose shaky signature after torture compares badly to his confident signature beforehand.

Home

Yeoman Warders and their families (and pets) live here today. Look for homes when you leave (Georgian houses by the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula, Casemates from north wall walk and from Mint Street). People in the past lived here too, as they did their jobs in the mint, menagerie, prison, armoury, records office, etc.

Palace

The Tower of London was built with nice accommodation in the White Tower, and medieval palace area for medieval kings and their courts. Medieval monarchs were itinerant; they moved from palace to palace so they could be seen by their subjects, and had no permanent home but many palaces about the country. The luxurious apartments built for Anne Boleyn at her coronation were the last palace lodgings built as the role of palace declined over time.

Mint

The majority of the coins of the realm were made here at the Tower of London for over 500 years. The Tower was a suitable mint because it was a secure area for gold and silver. The Mint left the Tower as the narrow street (Mint Street) where the Mint was based was not big enough for a modern factory in 1812.

Menagerie (zoo)

The royal menagerie had its roots in ostentatious gift-giving between monarchs. Animals were symbols of nations: lions were the badge of English kings. Prized animals were rare and ferocious. They were housed in the Lion Tower, which no longer exists but is by the entrance to the Tower: a real spectacle as you entered. Animals were not cared for well, and several high-profile incidents involving animals harming the public led to the relocation of the animals and the formation of London Zoo.

Armoury

The Tower was also a factory for making armour and ordnance (weapons such as cannon- many of which can be seen around the Tower). They were made here because the Tower was a secure location. Work would be dangerous, with forges for metalwork, and work with explosives such as gunpowder. There were always tensions between the armoury and other institutions especially in time of war as arguments broke out over who needed the precious space within the Tower more. The Royal Armouries are still based here (and in Leeds) today. The roots of the Tower as a military garrison are reflected in it still being the home of the Royal Fusiliers Regiment.

Record office

The Tower once functioned as the storehouse of all the main administrative records in the country. From legal and financial documents and legal documents which formed the basis of English law. Why are these records so important? The Public Records Office is now the National Archives in Kew. At one point, many of the documents were stored in the White Tower above the gunpowder stores, which could have been very dangerous indeed!

Tourist site

Why do people visit the Tower of London? The Tower gets over 2.5 million visitors a year. What makes the tower a 'must-see'? The Crown Jewels? The White Tower?

Other

The Tower has also functioned as an observatory, an execution place, a garrison, an art installation ('Poppies: Blood swept lands and seas of red' in 2014), the home of the Crown Jewels and the ravens.

Mini-plenary

Ask the groups to feedback on their top function.

- Why have they chosen this particular function?
- Have they chosen which is important now, over time, or for a particular period in time (like the Tudors).

Take a class vote on which they think is the most important function. Announce the winner.

- Did anyone change their mind, what was the argument that changed your opinion?

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Classroom Activity