Theme: “The history of the Tower of London”

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The Tower of London

The History of the Tower of London

Fortress, Palace and Prison

**T**his short history of the Tower of London charts the different stages of its development. Throughout its history, the Tower has attracted a number of important functions and its role as armoury, royal palace, prison and fortress is explained, as well as its modern role as tourist attraction and

home to a thriving community.

**The development of the Tower**

The Tower of London was begun in the reign of William the Conqueror (1066-1087) and remained unchanged for over a century. Then, between 1190 and 1285, the White Tower was encircled by two towered curtain walls and a great moat. The only important enlargement of the Tower after that time was the building of the Wharf in the 14th century. Today the medieval defences remain relatively unchanged.

**The Normans**

WestmCastle building was an essential part of the Norman Conquest: when Duke William of Normandy invaded England in 1066 his first action after landing at Pevensey on 28 September had been to improvise a castle, and when he moved to Hastings two days later he built another. Over the next few years William and his supporters were engaged in building hundreds more, first to conquer, then subdue and finally to colonise the whole of England.

By the end of the Anglo-Saxon period London had become the most powerful city in England, with a rich port, a nearby royal palace and an important cathedral. It was via London that King Harold II (1066) and his army sped south to meet William, and to London which the defeated rabble of the English army returned from the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Securing the City was therefore of the utmost importance to William. His contemporary biographer William of Poitiers tells us that after receiving the submission of the English magnates at Little Berkhampstead, William sent an advance guard into London to construct a castle and prepare for his triumphal entry. He also tells us that, after his coronation in inster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066, the new King withdrew to Barking (in Essex) ‘while certain fortifications were completed in the city against the restlessness of the vast and fierce populace for he realised that it was of the

first importance to overawe the Londoners.  
These fortifications may have included Baynard’s Castle built in the south-west angle of the City (near Blackfriars) and the castle of Monfichet (near Ludgate Circus) and almost certainly the future Tower of London. Initially the Tower had consisted of a modest enclosure built into the south-east corner of the Roman City walls, but by the late 1070s, with the initial completion of the White Tower, it had become the most fearsome of all. Nothing had been seen like it in England before. It was built by Norman masons and English (Anglo-Saxon) labour drafted in from the countryside, perhaps to the design of Gundulf, Bishop of Rochester. It was intended to protect the river route from Danish attack, but also and more importantly to dominate the City physically and visually. It is difficult to appreciate today what an enormous impression the tower and other Norman buildings, such as St Paul’s Cathedral (as rebuilt after 1086) or the nearby Westminster Hall (rebuilt after 1087) must have made on the native Londoners.

The White Tower was protected to the east and south by the old Roman city walls (a full height fragment can be seen just by Tower Hill Underground station), while the north and west sides were protected by ditches as much as 7.50m (25ft) wide and 3.40m (11ft) deep and an earthwork with a wooden wall on top. In the 12th century a ‘fore-building’ (now demolished) was added to the south front of the White Tower to protect the entrance. The Wardrobe Tower, a fragment of which can be seen at the south-east corner of the building, was another early addition or rebuilding. From very early on the enclosure contained a number of timber buildings for residential and service use. It is not clear whether these included a royal residence but William the Conqueror’s immediate successors probably made use of the White Tower itself.

It is important for us today to remember that the functions of the Tower from the 1070s until the late 19th century were established by its Norman founders. The Tower was never primarily intended to protect London from external invasion, although, of course, it could have done so if necessary. Nor was it ever intended to be the principal residence of the kings and queens of England, though many did in fact spend periods of time there. Its primary function was always to provide a base for royal power in the City of London and a stronghold to which the Royal Family could retreat in times of civil disorder.

**The Medieval Tower:**  
**A refuge and a base for royal power**

When Richard the Lionheart (1189-99) came to the throne he departed on a crusade to the Holy Land leaving his Chancellor, William Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, in charge of the kingdom. Longchamp soon embarked on an enlargement and strengthening of the Tower of London, the first of a series of building campaigns which by about 1350 had created the basic form of the great fortress that we know today. The justification for the vast expenditure and effort this involved was the political instability of the kingdom and the Crown’s continuing need for an impregnable fortress in the City of London.

Longchamp’s works doubled the area covered by the fortress by digging a new and deeper ditch to the north and east and building sections of curtain wall, reinforced by a new tower (now known as the Bell Tower) at the south-west corner. The ditch was intended to flood naturally from the river, although this was not a success. These new defences were soon put to the test when the King’s brother, John, taking advantage of Richard’s captivity in Germany, challenged Longchamp’s authority and besieged him at the Tower. Lack of provisions forced Longchamp to surrender but the Tower’s defences had proved that they could resist attack.

The reign of the next king John (1199-1216) saw little new building work at the Tower, but the King made good use of the accommodation there. Like Longchamp, John had to cope with frequent opposition throughout his reign. Only a year after signing an agreement with his barons in 1215 (the Magna Carta) they were once more at loggerheads and Prince Louis of France had launched an invasion of England with the support of some of John’s leading barons. In the midst of his defence of the kingdom, John died of dysentery and his son, Henry III, was crowned.

With England at war with France, the start of King Henry’s long reign (1216-72) could have hardly been less auspicious, but within seven months of his accession the French had been defeated at the battle of Lincoln and the business of securing the kingdom could begin. Reinforcement of the royal castles played a major role in this, and his work at the Tower of London was more extensive than anywhere other than at Windsor Castle. Henry III was only ten years old in 1216, but his regents began a major extension of the royal accommodation in the enclosure which formed the Inmost Ward as we know it today. The great hall and kitchen, dating from the previous century, were improved and two towers built on the waterfront, the Wakefield Tower as the King’s lodgings and the Lanthorn Tower (rebuilt in the 19th century), probably intended as the queen’s lodgings. A new wall was also built enclosing the west side of the Inmost Ward.

By the mid 1230s, Henry III had run into trouble with his barons and opposition flared up in both 1236 and in 1238. On both occasions the King fled to the Tower of London. But as he sheltered in the castle in March 1238 the weakness of the Tower must have been brought home to him; the defences to the eastern, western and northern sides consisted only of an empty moat, stretches of patched-up and strengthened Roman wall and a few lengths of wall built by Longchamp in the previous century. That year, therefore, saw the launch of Henry’s most ambitious building programme at the Tower, the construction of a great new curtain wall round the east, north and west sides of the castle at a cost of over Ј5,000. The new wall doubled the area covered by the fortress, enclosing the neighbouring church of St Peter ad Vincula. It was surrounded by a moat, this time successfully flooded by a Flemish engineer, John Le Fosser. The wall was reinforced by nine new towers, the strongest at the corners (the Salt, Martin and Devereux). Of these all but two (the Flint and Brick) are much as originally built. This massive extension to the Tower was viewed with extreme suspicion and hostility by the people of London, who rightly recognised it as a further assertion of royal authority. A contemporary writer reports their delight when a section of newly-built wall and a gateway on the site of the Beauchamp Tower collapsed, events they attributed to their own guardian saint, Thomas а Becket. Archaeological excavation between 1995 and 1997 revealed the remains of one of these collasped buildings.

In 1272 King Edward I (1272-1307) came to the throne determined to complete the defensive works begun by his father and extend them as a means of further emphasising royal authority over London. Between 1275 and 1285 the King spent over Ј21,000 on the fortress creating England’s largest and strongest concentric castle (a castle with one line of defences within another). The work included building the existing Beauchamp Tower, but the main effort was concentrated on filling in Henry III’s moat and creating an additional curtain wall on the western, northern and eastern side, and surrounding it by a new moat. This wall enclosed the existing curtain wall built by Henry III and was pierced by two new entrances, one from the land on the west, passing through the Middle and Byward towers, and another under St Thomas’s Tower, from the river. New royal lodgings were included in the upper part of St Thomas’s Tower. Almost all these buildings survive in some form today.

Despite all this work Edward was a very rare visitor to his fortress; he was, in fact, only able to enjoy his new lodgings there for a few days. There is no doubt though that if he had been a weaker king, and had to put up with disorders in London of the kind experienced by his father and grandfather, the Tower would have come into its own as an even more effective and efficient base for royal authority.

King Edward’s new works were, however, put to the test by his son Edward II (1307-27), whose reign saw a resurgence of discontent among the barons on a scale not seen since the reign of his grandfather. Once again the Tower played a crucial role in the attempt to maintain royal authority and as a royal refuge. Edward II did little more than improve the walls put up by his father, but he was a regular resident during his turbulent reign and he moved his own lodgings from the Wakefield Tower and St Thomas’s Tower to the area round the present Lanthorn Tower. The old royal lodgings were now used for his courtiers and for the storage of official papers by the King’s Wardrobe (a department of government which dealt with royal supplies). The use of the Tower for functions other than military and residential had been started by Edward I who put up a large new building to house the Royal Mint and began to use the castle as a place for storing records. As early as the reign of Henry III the castle had already been in regular use as a prison: Hubert de Burgh, Chief Justiciar of England was incarcerated in 1232 and the Welsh Prince Gruffydd was imprisoned there between 1241 and 1244, when he fell to his death in a bid to escape. The Tower also served as a treasury (the Crown Jewels were moved from Westminster Abbey to the Tower in 1303) and as a showplace for the King’s animals.  
After the unstable reign of Edward II came that of Edward III (1327-77). Edward III’s works at the Tower were fairly minor, but he did put up a new gatehouse between the Lanthorn Tower and the Salt Tower, together with the Cradle Tower and its postern (a small subsidiary entrance), a further postern behind the Byward Tower and another at the Develin Tower. He was also responsible for rebuilding the upper parts of the Bloody Tower and creating the vault over the gate passage, but his most substantial achievement was to extend the Tower Wharf eastwards as far as St Thomas’s Tower. This was completed in its present form by his successor Richard II (1377-99).

**The Tower in Tudor Times:**  
**A royal prison**

The first Tudor monarch, Henry VII (1485-1509) was responsible for building the last permanent royal residential buildings at the Tower. He extended his own lodgings around the Lanthorn Tower adding a new private chamber, a library, a long gallery, and also laid out a garden. These buildings were to form the nucleus of a much larger scheme begun by his son Henry VIII (1509-47) who put up a large range of timber-framed lodgings at the time of the coronation of his second wife, Anne Boleyn. The building of these lodgings, used only once, marked the end of the history of royal residence at the Tower.

The reigns of the Tudor kings and queens were comparatively stable in terms of civil disorder. However, from the 1530s onwards the unrest caused by the Reformation (when Henry VIII broke with the Church in Rome) gave the Tower an expanded role as the home for a large number of religious and political prisoners.

The first important Tudor prisoners were Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher of Rochester, both of whom were executed in 1535 for refusing to acknowledge Henry VIII as head of the English Church. They were soon followed by a still more famous prisoner and victim, the King’s second wife Anne Boleyn, executed along with her brother and four others a little under a year later. July 1540 saw the execution of Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex and former Chief Minister of the King - in which capacity he had modernised the Tower’s defences and, ironically enough, sent many others to their deaths on the same spot. Two years later, Catherine Howard, the second of Henry VIII’s six wives to be beheaded, met her death outside the Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula which Henry had rebuilt a few years before.

The reign of Edward VI (1547-53) saw no end to the political executions which had begun in his father’s reign; the young King’s protector the Duke of Somerset and his confederates met their death at the Tower in 1552, falsely accused of treason. During Edward’s reign the English Church became more Protestant, but the King’s early death in 1553 left the country with a Catholic heir, Mary I (1553-8). During her brief reign many important Protestants and political rivals were either imprisoned or executed at the Tower. The most famous victim was Lady Jane Grey, and the most famous prisoner the Queen’s sister Princess Elizabeth (the future Elizabeth I). Religious controversy did not end with Mary’s death in 1558; Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) spent much of her reign warding off the threat from Catholic Europe, and important recusants (people who refused to attend Church of England services) and others who might have opposed her rule were locked up in the Tower. Never had it been so full of prisoners, or such illustrious ones: bishops, archbishops, knights, barons, earls and dukes all spent months and some of them years languishing in the towers of the Tower of London.

Little was done to the Tower’s defences in these years. The Royal Mint was modified and extended, new storehouses were built for royal military supplies. In the reign of James I (1603-25) the Lieutenant’s house - built in the 1540s and today called the Queen’s House - was extended and modified; the king’s lions were rehoused in better dens made for them in the west gate barbican.

**The Restoration and After:**  
**The Tower and the Office of Ordnance**

After a long period of peace at home, the reign of Charles I saw civil war break out again in 1642, between King and Parliament. As during the Wars of the Roses and previous conflicts, the Tower was recognised as one of the most important of the King’s assets. Londoners, in particular, were frightened that the Tower would be used by him to dominate the City. In 1643, after a political rather than a military struggle, control of the Tower was seized from the King by the parliamentarians and remained in their hands throughout the Civil War (1642-9). The loss of the Tower, and of London as a whole, was a crucial factor in the defeat of Charles I by Parliament. It was during this period that a permanent garrison was installed in the Tower for the first time, by Oliver Cromwell, soon to be Lord Protector but then a prominent parliamentary commander.

Today’s small military guard, seen outside the Queen’s House and the Waterloo Barracks, is an echo of Cromwell’s innovation.

The monarchy was restored in 1660 and the reign of the new king, Charles II (1660-85), saw further changes in the functions of the Tower. Its role as a state prison declined, and the Office of Ordnance (which provided military supplies and equipment) took over responsibility for most of the castle, making it their headquarters. During this period another long-standing tradition of the Tower began - the public display of the Crown Jewels. They were moved from their old home to a new site in what is now called the Martin Tower, and put on show by their keeper Talbot Edwards.

Schemes for strengthening the Tower’s defences, some elaborate and up to date, were also proposed so that in the event of violent opposition, which was always a possibility during the 1660s and 1670s, Charles would not be caught out as his father had been earlier in the century. In the end, none of these came to much, and the Restoration period saw only a minor strengthening of the Tower. Yet the well equipped garrison which Charles II and his successors maintained was often used to quell disturbances in the City; James II (1685-8) certainly took steps to use the Tower’s forces against the opposition which eventually caused him to flee into exile.

Under the control of the Office of Ordnance the Tower was filled with a series of munitions stores and workshops for the army and navy. The most impressive and elegant of these was the Grand Storehouse begun in 1688 on the site where the Waterloo Barracks now stand. It was initially a weapons store but as the 17th century drew to a close it became more of a museum of arms and armour. More utilitarian buildings gradually took over the entire area previously covered by the medieval royal lodgings to the south of the White Tower; by 1800, after a series of fires and rebuildings, the whole of this area had become a mass of large brick Ordnance buildings. All these, however, have been swept away, and the only surviving storehouse put up by the Ordnance is the New Armouries, standing against the eastern inner curtain wall between the Salt and Broad Arrow towers.

While the Ordnance was busy building storehouses, offices and workshops, the army was expanding accommodation for the Tower garrison. Their largest building was the Irish Barracks (now demolished), sited behind the New Armouries building in the Outer Ward.

**The Tower in the 19th Century:**  
**From fortress to ancient monument**

Between 1800 and 1900 the Tower of London took on the appearance which to a large extent it retains today. Early in the century many of the historic institutions which had been based within its walls began to move out. The first to go was the Mint which moved to new buildings to the north east of the castle in 1812, where it remained until 1968, when it moved to its present location near Cardiff. The Royal Menagerie left the Lion Tower in 1834 to become the nucleus of what is now London Zoo, and the Record Office (responsible for storing documents of state), moved to Chancery Lane during the 1850s, vacating parts of the medieval royal lodgings and the White Tower. Finally, after the War Office assumed responsibility for the manufacture and storage of weapons in 1855, large areas of the fortress were vacated by the old Office of Ordnance.

However, before these changes took place the Tower had once again - but for the last time - performed its traditional role in asserting the authority of the state over the people of London. The Chartist movement of the 1840s (which sought major political reform) prompted a final refortification of the Tower between 1848 and 1852, and further work was carried out in 1862. To protect the approaches to the Tower new loop-holes and gun emplacements were built and an enormous brick and stone bastion (destroyed by a bomb during the Second World War) constructed on the north side of the fortress. Following the burning down of the Grand Storehouse in 1841, the present Waterloo Barracks was put up to accommodate 1,000 soldiers, and the Brick, Flint and Bowyer towers to its north were altered or rebuilt to service it; the Royal Fusiliers’ building was erected at the same time to be the officers’ mess. The mob never stormed the castle but the fear of it left the outer defences of the Tower much as they are today.

The vacation of large parts of the Tower by the offices which had formerly occupied it and an increasing interest in the history and archaeology of the Tower led, after 1850, to a programme of ‘re-medievalisation’. By then the late 17th and 18th-century Ordnance buildings and barracks, together with a series of private inns and taverns, such as the Stone Kitchen and the Golden Chain, had obscured most of the medieval fortress. The first clearances of these buildings began in the late 1840s, but the real work began in 1852, when the architect Anthony Salvin, already known for his work on medieval buildings, re-exposed the Beauchamp Tower and restored it to a medieval appearance. Salvin’s work was much admired and attracted the attention of Prince Albert (husband of Queen Victoria), who recommended that he be made responsible for a complete restoration of the castle. This led to a programme of work which involved the Salt Tower, the White Tower, St Thomas’s Tower, the Bloody Tower and the construction of two new houses on Tower Green.

In the 1870s Salvin was replaced by John Taylor, a less talented and sensitive architect. His efforts concentrated on the southern parts of the Tower, notably the Cradle and Develin towers and on the demolition of the 18th-century Ordnance Office and storehouse on the site of the Lanthorn Tower, which he rebuilt. He also built the stretches of wall linking the Lanthorn Tower to the Salt and Wakefield towers. But by the 1890s, restoration of this type was going out of fashion and this was the last piece of re-medievalisation to be undertaken. The work of this period had succeeded in opening up the site and re-exposing its defences, but fell far short of restoring its true medieval appearance.

The second half of the 19th century saw a great increase in the number of visitors to the Tower, although sightseers had been admitted as early as 1660. In 1841 the first official guidebook was issued and ten years later a purpose-built ticket office was erected at the western entrance. By the end of Queen Victoria’s reign in 1901, half a million people were visiting the Tower each year.

# The 20th Century

The First World War (1914-18) left the Tower largely untouched; the only bomb to fall on the fortress landed in the Moat. However, the war brought the Tower of London back into use as a prison for the first time since the early 19th century and between 1914-16 eleven spies were held and subsequently executed in the Tower. The last execution in the Tower took place in 1941 during the Second World War (1939-45). Bomb damage to the Tower during the Second World War was much greater: a number of buildings were severely damaged or destroyed including the mid-19th century North Bastion, which received a direct hit on 5 October 1940, and the Hospital Block which was partly destroyed during an air raid in the same year. Incendiaries also destroyed the Main Guard, a late 19th-century building to the south-west of the White Tower. During the Second World War the Tower was closed to the public. The Moat, which had been drained and filled in 1843, was used as allotments for vegetable growing and the Crown Jewels were removed from the Tower and taken to a place of safety, the location of which has never been disclosed. Today the Tower of London is one of the world’s major tourist attractions and 2.5 million visitors a year come to discover its long and eventful history, its buildings, ceremonies and traditions.

There is more of London's history in the Tower than anywhere else. Most of the publik displays are in White Tower,begining on the entrance floor with the Hunting and Sporting Gallery. Here may be seen a great variety of specialized weapons developed for for use in the hunt. The croun Jevels had for many years been kept in the Wakefild Tower but sinse 1967 have been houzed in a specially construkted strongroom below the Waterloo Barracs. Here is probably the world's largest and most valuable collection of jevels and gold plate.The yeoman warders or "Beefiters" as they are often called are found at the Tower of London. Wearing dark-blue tunics with red braid (a uniform given to them in 1958), they are probably some of the most photographet men in Britain -- thousands of tourists visit the Tower every year.

The Beefeaters, all ex-army men, are used mainly as guides. They are also involved in the security of this historic building.

Ravents have lived in the Tower from its very btginning over 900 years ago and only so long as they are here will the White Towe stand...

In Her Majesty's Royal Place and Fortress of the Tower of London they are said to hold the Crown itself and should they ever leave the Tower, the Crown and England will fall. But they have never left, and from the reign of King Charless II 300 years ago and, they have been under Royal protection.

There are four territories within the Tower, each of which is ruled over by a pair of adult ravents in each area, thought they might stay to theyr neighour's patch from time to time.

No other historic monument in English can boast such as unbroken continiuty with the nation's heritage. The Tower's great sense of history lives on in its traditions and particulary in the ceremonies which are still performed here virtually unchanged after several centuries.