

# Tower of London



The Tower of London, officially His Majesty's Royal Palace and Fortress of the Tower of London, is a historic castle on the north bank of the River Thames in central London, England. It lies within the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, which is separated from the eastern edge of the square mile of the City of London by the open space known as Tower Hill. It was founded toward the end of 1066 as part of the Norman Conquest. The White Tower, which gives the entire castle its name, was built by William the Conqueror in 1078 and was a resented symbol of oppression, inflicted upon London by the new Norman ruling class. The castle was also used as a prison from 1100 (Ranulf Flambard) until 1952 (Kray twins),<sup>[3]</sup> although that was not its primary purpose. A grand palace early in its history, it served as a royal residence. As a whole, the Tower is a complex of several buildings set within two concentric rings of defensive walls and a moat. There were several phases of expansion, mainly under kings Richard I, Henry III, and Edward I in the 12th and 13th centuries. The general layout established by the late 13th century remains despite later activity on the site.

## ARCHITECTURE, LAYOUT

### Architecture

he Tower was oriented with its strongest and most impressive defences overlooking Saxon London, which archaeologist alan Vince suggests was deliberate.<sup>[4]</sup> It would have visually

dominated the surrounding area and stood out to traffic on the River Thames.[5] The castle is made up of three "wards", or enclosures. The innermost ward contains the White Tower and is the earliest phase of the castle. Encircling it to the north, east, and west is the inner ward, built during the reign of Richard I (1189–1199). Finally, there is the outer ward which encompasses the castle and was built under Edward I. Although there were several phases of expansion after William the Conqueror founded the Tower of London, the general layout has remained the same since Edward I completed his rebuild in 1285.

br> The castle encloses an area of almost 12 acres (4.9 hectares) with a further 6 acres (2.4 ha) around the Tower of London constituting the Tower Liberties – land under the direct influence of the castle and cleared for military reasons.[6] The precursor of the Liberties was laid out in the 13th century when Henry III ordered that a strip of land adjacent to the castle be kept clear.[7] Despite popular fiction, the Tower of London never had a permanent torture chamber, although the basement of the White Tower housed a rack in later periods.[8] Tower Wharf was built on the bank of the Thames under Edward I and was expanded to its current size during the reign of Richard II (1377–1399).[9]

## White Tower

The White Tower is a keep (also known as a donjon), which was often the strongest structure in a medieval castle, and contained lodgings suitable for the lord – in this case, the king or his representative.[10] According to military historian Allen Brown, "The great tower [White Tower] was also, by virtue of its strength, majesty and lordly accommodation, the donjon par excellence".[11] As one of the largest keeps in the Christian world,[12] the White Tower has been described as "the most complete eleventh-century palace in Europe".[13]

The White Tower, not including its projecting corner towers, measures 36 by 32 metres (118 by 105 ft) at the base, and is 27 m (90 ft) high at the southern battlements. The structure was originally three storeys high, comprising a basement floor, an entrance level, and an upper floor. The entrance, as is usual in Norman keeps, was above ground, in this case on the south face, and accessed via a wooden staircase which could be removed in the event of an attack. It was probably during Henry II's reign (1154–1189) that a forebuilding was added to the south side of the tower to provide extra defences to the entrance, but it has not survived. Each floor was divided into three chambers, the largest in the west, a smaller room in the north-east, and the chapel taking up the entrance and upper floors of the south-east.[14] At the western corners of the building are square towers, while to the north-east a round tower houses a spiral staircase. At the south-east corner there is a larger semi-circular projection which accommodates the apse of the chapel. As the building was intended to be a comfortable

residence as well as a stronghold, latrines were built into the walls, and four fireplaces provided warmth.[13]

The main building material is Kentish ragstone, although some local mudstone was also used. Caen stone was imported from northern France to provide details in the Tower's facing, although little of the original material survives as it was replaced with Portland stone in the 17th and 18th centuries.[15] Reigate stone was also used as ashlar and for carved details.

## INNERMOST WARD

### ward

The innermost ward encloses an area immediately south of the White Tower, stretching to what was once the edge of the River Thames. As was the case at other castles, such as the 11th-century Hen Domen, the innermost ward was probably filled with timber buildings from the Tower's foundation. Exactly when the royal lodgings began to encroach from the White Tower into the innermost ward is uncertain, although it had happened by the 1170s.[15] The lodgings were renovated and elaborated during the 1220s and 1230s, becoming comparable with other palatial residences such as Windsor Castle.[22] Construction of Wakefield and Lanthorn Towers – located at the corners of the innermost ward's wall along the river – began around 1220.[23][nb 1] They probably served as private residences for the queen and king respectively.

The earliest evidence for how the royal chambers were decorated comes from Henry III's reign: the queen's chamber was whitewashed, and painted with flowers and imitation stonework. A great hall existed in the south of the ward, between the two towers.[24] It was similar to, although slightly smaller than, that also built by Henry III at Winchester Castle.[25] Near Wakefield Tower was a postern gate which allowed private access to the king's apartments. The innermost ward was originally surrounded by a protective ditch, which had been filled in by the 1220s. Around this time, a kitchen was built in the ward.[26] Between 1666 and 1676, the innermost ward was transformed and the palace buildings removed.[27] The area around the White Tower was cleared so that anyone approaching would have to cross open ground. The Jewel House was demolished, and the Crown Jewels moved to Martin Tower.[28]

## FOUNDATION AND EARLY HISTORY

### History

Victorious at the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066, the invading Duke of Normandy, William the Conqueror, spent the rest of the year securing his holdings by fortifying key positions. He founded several castles along the way, but took a circuitous route toward

London;[54][55] only when he reached Canterbury did he turn towards England's largest city. As the fortified bridge into London was held by Saxon troops, he decided instead to ravage Southwark before continuing his journey around southern England.[56] A series of Norman victories along the route cut the city's supply lines and in December 1066, isolated and intimidated, its leaders yielded London without a fight.[57][58] Between 1066 and 1087, William established 36 castles,[55] although references in the Domesday Book indicate that many more were founded by his subordinates.[59] The Normans undertook what has been described as "the most extensive and concentrated programme of castle-building in the whole history of feudal Europe".[60] They were multi-purpose buildings, serving as fortifications (used as a base of operations in enemy territory), centres of administration, and residences.[61]