

Factsheet

Prisoners at the Tower

Despite its reputation for torture and treachery there are no dungeons at the Tower of London and its doubtful there ever really were. The Tower of London was rather more exclusive than that, with prisoners from the higher levels of society entitled to be held here.

- Only seven people were ever executed on Tower Green (although there were executions in the rifle range during WWI and WWII): William, Lord Hastings (1483), Queen Anne Boleyn (1536), Margaret, Countess of Salisbury (1541), Queen Katherine Howard (1542), Jane, Viscountess Rochford (1542), Lady Jane Grey (1554) and Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex (1601).
- Only prisoners of high rank were beheaded at the Tower, everyone else was hanged, drawn and quartered on Tyburn. Execution was not always quick - the Duke of Monmouth received five blows of the axe.
- The first prisoner was Ranulf Flambard in 1100, who as Bishop of Durham, was found guilty of extortion. He escaped from the White Tower by shinning down a rope that was smuggled into his cell in a wine casket.
- The longest serving prisoner was Sir William de la Pole. A distant relative of the King, he was incarcerated at the Tower for 37 years (1502-1539) for allegedly plotting against Henry VII.
- Sir Walter Raleigh spent thirteen years imprisoned at the Tower but was able to live in relative comfort in the Bloody Tower with his wife and two children. For some of the time he even grew tobacco on Tower Green, just outside his apartment.
- Many prisoners at the Tower made productive use of their enforced incarceration. For instance, Sir Walter Raleigh wrote *The History of the World* (published in 1614) during his imprisonment at the Tower and Hugh Draper of Bristol (locked up as a suspected sorcerer in 1561), carved the incredibly intricate astronomical clock that can be seen to this day on the walls of his cell in the Salt Tower.

- Prisoners at the Tower were expected to pay their way. Fees, payable to the Constable or Lieutenant of the Tower, for the Asuite of his irons (i.e. being shackled in the Tower), ranged from twenty pounds a year for a duke to five pounds a year for a knight. This, however, did not even cover food and accommodation, for which prisoners of the rank of knight and above were required to pay generously.
- The wealthy might even have enjoyed their stay here. The Duchess of Somerset, for example, imprisoned at the Tower in 1551, lunched on mutton stewed with potage, boiled beef and mutton, roast veal, roast capon and two rabbits. For dinner she again ate mutton with potage (obviously a favourite dish) along with sliced beef, roast mutton, two rabbits and a dozen larks, all washed down with either beer or wine at a weekly cost of 77 shillings.
- Guy Fawkes, famous for his part in the Gunpowder Plot, was brought to the Tower to be interrogated by a council of the King's Ministers. However, he was not executed here. When he confessed he was hung, drawn and quartered in the Old Palace Yard at Westminster.
- The last prisoner held at the Tower of London was Rudolph Hess, Deputy Führer of Nazi Germany, who was held in the Queen's House from 17-21 May, 1941.