

# A Brief History of London

London in **prehistoric times** was merely a collection of scattered rural settlements. Spearheads and weapons from the Bronze and Iron Ages have been found around the Thames, and a recent archaeological dig near Vauxhall discovered evidence of a possible wooden bridge across the Thames around 3,000 years ago!



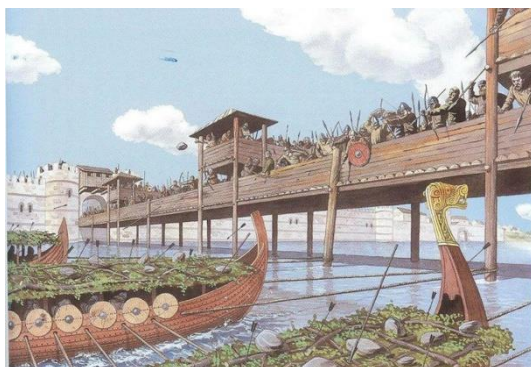
**The Romans** were responsible for the city we know today as London. They invaded Britain in AD43, and soon afterwards founded the city of **Londinium**. It is thought that the original city was small - about the size of Hyde Park! In AD60 Queen Boudica (also known as Boadicia) of the Iceni tribe (Celts) rose up against the Romans, who fled. The city was burnt to the ground. However, the Romans eventually regained control and rebuilt London, this time adding a Forum (market) and Basilica (a business centre), and slowly building a wall around the city to protect it from further invasion.

## The Square Mile

The area inside the defensive wall is now known as “**The Square Mile**”, or “**The City**”, and is the financial centre of the UK. There is much evidence remaining in the City of the Roman city of Londinium, and often when new buildings are built and excavations are made, exciting archaeological finds are made!



## Anglo-Saxons



The Romans left at the beginning of the 5th Century as the Roman Empire crumbled, leaving London largely deserted. Britain was invaded by the **Angles**, the **Saxons** and the **Jutes** (who came from Holland, Germany and Denmark). These **Anglo-Saxons** were farmers and tended to live outside big towns. We know very little about what happened to London in this period. By the beginning of the 7th Century, the city had become important enough to justify the building of a cathedral, St Paul's. There is still a cathedral (but not the same one) on the same spot.

Once again, we know very little about London for a few hundred years, although during the 9th and 10th Centuries there were many attacks by the **Vikings**.

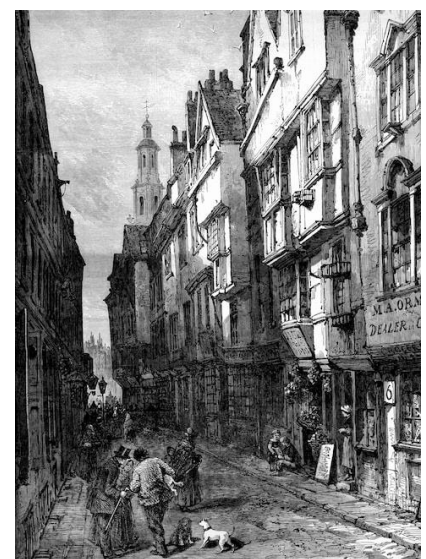


## Medieval London (1066 - 1485)

Soon afterwards, the **Normans** invaded from France and William I (**William the Conqueror**) took control. He quickly began to build a stronghold to guard London - **the Tower of London**. The Tower has been used as a castle and a palace, a zoo and a weapons store, a mint (where coins are made) and a prison.

## A crowded and smelly city!

The city grew up within the original Roman walls, which were repaired and built up. Houses were made of **wood** and **plaster** and **crowded together** very tightly, with the upper floors leaning out over the streets, which were either cobbled or dirt. Rubbish was thrown out of the windows onto the streets below!





## Lord Mayor of London

In the early 13th Century, **King John** showed how important London had become by granting the city the right to elect a Lord Mayor every year. The most famous of the early mayors is **Dick Whittington**, who was Lord Mayor four times between 1397 and 1420.

If you go to the Square Mile today, you will find lots of evidence of Medieval London in the street names, which tell of the trades and shops which were established in those times. Pudding Lane, Bread Street and Milk Street are obvious examples. The tailor shops were based in Threadneedle Street, and you can find Ropemakers Square, Silk Street, and Poultry too.

There are a number of streets with "gate" in their name, such as Bishopsgate, Moorgate, etc. These were the original gates in the defensive wall, where people could enter or leave the city.

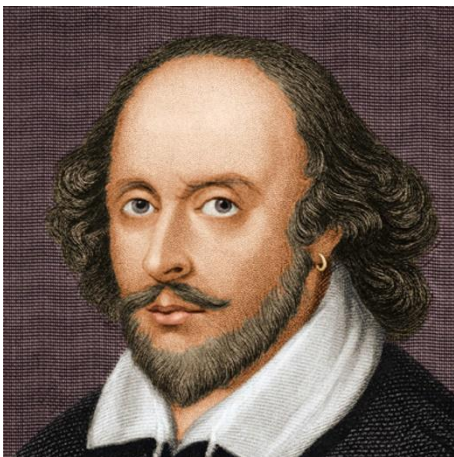
## Tudor London (1485 - 1603)

London was the centre of trade and government under the **Tudor monarchs**. We know that there were about 200,000 people living in London by 1600. There were three main areas of population: within the old City walls, in the nearby town of Westminster, and on the south side of the river, in Southwark. Most of London as we know it today was still fields. The **Tudors** established a number of **palaces** in London and the area around, and also made deer **parks** so that they could indulge in their favourite occupation of **hunting**. You can still see deer in Richmond Park, in south London.



## Shipbuilding and Exploration

The river Thames was very important in Tudor times as Britain's navy was expanded. Dockyards were built and ships were sent to explore the world - the Americas and India, for example.



## Shakespeare and The Globe

The first theatres were built in London during this time. The most famous is of course **The Globe**, in which **Shakespeare** owned a share. His plays were performed there. The original theatre was burnt down in 1613 and immediately rebuilt, but closed by the Puritans in 1642. In the 1990s a new Globe Theatre was built, as close to the original as possible, and thrives with constant productions of Shakespeare's plays.



# 17th Century

The 17th Century was an unsettled time for Britain, and particularly London.

## The Gunpowder Plot, 1605

The **Gunpowder Plot** of 1605, in earlier centuries often called the Gunpowder Treason Plot, was a failed assassination attempt against King James I by a group of provincial English Catholics led by Robert Catesby.



## Civil War

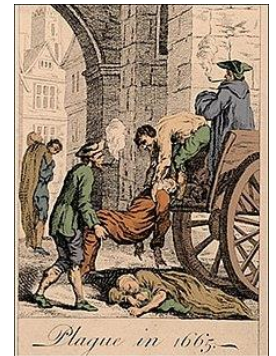
In the 1640s **civil war** raged in England, with **Charles I** and his army battling against **Parliament**, led by Oliver Cromwell and based in London. The King lost and was beheaded in London in 1649. The reign of Parliament did not last long, however, and Charles II was crowned in Westminster Abbey in 1660.

## The Great Plague, 1665

In 1665, rats on board trading ships brought **bubonic plague** into the city of London. Because people lived in very close quarters and hygiene standards were very low, it spread very quickly. If you caught it, the chances of surviving were very slim.

If someone in your household was infected, a red cross was painted on your door and it was boarded up so that everyone inside was isolated for 40 days. Over the year that the plague rampaged, 100,000 people died.

The wealthy fled the city, while the bodies piled up in the streets and empty houses were looted.



## The Great Fire of London, 1666

A small fire, accidentally started in Pudding Lane in the City of London in **September of 1666**, was the cause of an enormous **fire**, which lasted four days and wiped out 80% of London. Amazingly, very few people lost their lives, but buildings which had been crammed very close together and were made of wood were easily destroyed. After the fire, all new buildings were made of stone and brick.

If you visit the City of London now you can see a tall monument called **The Monument** to the Great Fire. It is positioned so that if it fell over in the right direction it would point to the exact place where the fire started.

# 18th Century London

Britain was a very powerful nation in the 18th Century and London, with its **trading** capabilities, was the centre of its power. Goods were brought into London from all over the world. During this century, London also became an important **financial centre**. Much of the business of the day was done in coffee houses in the Square Mile especially in Exchange Alley, the site of **London's stock exchange**.



# 19th Century London



## Queen Victoria

**Queen Victoria** was crowned in 1837 and died in 1901. During her reign London expanded enormously as industry came to Britain and railways were built linking much of Britain to the capital. London was the centre of world trade and had a large, powerful Empire.

**Many of the buildings in London today were built in Victorian times.** The most famous is probably the **Houses of Parliament**, built in 1834 after a fire destroyed the original buildings. Many people live in houses built during Queen Victoria's reign. The population of London exploded and the boundaries of the City spread outward.



## The Tube

London had the first underground railway (« The Tube ») which opened in **1863!**



## The Poor

It was not fun to be poor in Victorian times! If you were lucky, you might have gone to a "Ragged School" rather than a Poor House!

# 20th Century London

London continued to grow both in population and spread during the 20th Century. Between 1919 and 1939, built-up London doubled in size as the suburbs were extended.

Shopping had always been good in London, but big department stores were built in the early part of the Century (Harrods and Selfridges): these were the first of their kind!



## The Blitz

There was a lot of damage to London during the **Second World War**, with some of the worst damage being done to the City, around (and including) St Paul's Cathedral. You can often tell where a bomb landed by the fact that there is a modern building surrounded by older (usually Victorian) buildings. During the Blitz, many people took shelter in the underground railway stations.

It wasn't much fun to live in London during the Blitz, and many children (known as Evacuees) were evacuated from London with just a small suitcase and a name-tag around their necks, to go and

stay with strangers in the country. Many did not see their families for the duration of the war, and found it very strange to go back to the city.

## The New Century

Londoners marked the end of the century by building The Millennium Wheel, or "**London Eye**", a huge Ferris wheel overhanging the river Thames which gives far-reaching views of London. It is now one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city. A huge exhibition centre, the "**Millennium Dome**" (now **the O2**) was also built.



# A Timeline of London History

## Roman London

- 50 The **Romans** found a town at London
- 61 Boudica, a **Celtic queen** burns London
- c. 180 **Stone walls** are built around London
- c. 250 London is a flourishing town with a population of around 45,000
- 407 The Roman army leaves Britain
- c.460 London is abandoned

## Saxon London

- c. 600 The **Saxons** create a new town at **Covent Garden**
- 604 A Bishop of London is appointed
- c. 650 Saxon London is a flourishing town with a population of around 10,000. It also has a mint.
- 842 The **Danes** loot London
- 851 The Danes burn London
- 994 The Danes attack London but they are beaten off
- 1065 **Westminster Abbey** is consecrated

## Medieval London

- 1066 **William I** is crowned king of England at Westminster
- 1078-1100 A stone tower is built to guard London
- 1096 The first Jews arrive in London
- 1176 A stone bridge across the Thames replaces a wooden one
- 1189 About 30 Jews are killed in London
- 1264 About 500 Jews are killed in London
- 1348 The population of London is about 50,000
- 1348-49 The Black Death strikes

## Renaissance London

- 1550 The population of London is about 120,000
- 1571 The Royal Exchange is built
- 1600 The population of London is about 250,000
- 1603 **Plague** strikes London
- 1633 **Plague** strikes again
- 1635 Hyde Park is opened to the public
- 1665 **Plague** strikes London for the last time
- 1666 The **Great Fire** of London destroys about 13,200 houses
- 1685 **Oil lamps** are used to light the streets of London
- 1699 Billingsgate is made a fish market

## 18th Century London

- 1700 The population of London is about 600,000
- 1703 **Buckingham Palace** is built
- 1711 **St Pauls Cathedral** is completed
- 1720 Westminster Hospital is founded
- 1724 Guys Hospital is founded
- 1734 The Bank of England moves to Threadneedle Street
- 1740 London hospital is founded
- 1749 Westminster Bridge is built
- 1757 **Houses on London Bridge are demolished**
- 1760-66 **London town walls are demolished**
- 1761 A Board of Commissioners is formed to pave and clean the streets of London
- 1770 Blackfriars Bridge is built

## 19th Century London

- 1801 London has a population of about 950,000. During the 19th century the population booms and many villages are 'swallowed up' and become areas of the city.
- 1807 **Gas is used to light Pall Mall**
- 1831 **Cholera** strikes London
- 1837 Euston Station is built
- 1839 **Trafalgar Square** is created
- 1848-49 Kings Cross Station is built
- 1866 **Cholera** strikes London again but in the late 19th century public health greatly improves
- 1871 **The Albert Hall** is built
- 1881 The **Natural History Museum** is founded

## 20th Century London

- 1903 The first council houses in London are built
- 1923 **Wembley Stadium** is built
- 1933 Chiswick Bridge is built
- 1940-41 **Bombs** kill about 20,000 people in London
- 1944 About 3,000 people in London are killed by missiles
- 1945 Waterloo Bridge is built
- 1951 The Royal Festival Hall is built
- 1950s **West Indian Immigrants** arrive in London
- 1960s, 1970s Decline of London docks
- 1966 **Post Office Tower** is opened to the public

## 21st Century London

- 2000 The **London Eye** is opened to the public
- 2012 **The Shard** is unveiled

## Historical Events that Shaped London

### **Why did William the Conqueror build the Tower of London?**

The tower was first built in 1078 by the Norman emperor, William the Conqueror, who invaded Anglo-Saxon Britain in 1066. The original structure, known as the White Tower, was meant **to demonstrate the strength of his rule** to the British people.

William's White Tower served as the royal residence for much of its 900-year existence but by the 16th century, the Tower of London became known more for its function as a prison. To this day visitors can see etchings on the walls left by political prisoners dating back to the Tudor era.

### **The Great Fire of London burned nearly 70% of the city in 1666**

Only a year after the last bout of plague, the Great Fire of London further devastated the city – though it beneficially wiped out much of the plague-infected rat and flea population.

London experienced many fires throughout its history, but the 1666 fire is most well-known for the level of destruction it wrought – the fire destroyed just under 70 per cent of London buildings, including the original St Paul's Cathedral.

While much of London's rebuild maintained the capital's original layout, residential neighbourhoods shifted as the wealthy moved out of the densely populated city centre.

The rebuild also made London look much different than it had before. Perhaps to avoid another large-scale fire, wooden structures were replaced with less flammable brick, permanently altering the city's fabric and aesthetic.

### **In 1863, London introduced the world's first underground railway**

Few Londoners could imagine getting around the city without the complicated network of trains weaving their way deep beneath the streets. The Underground, known by locals as 'the Tube', is such a London institution that its map design is featured heavily on tourist memorabilia.

The Tube revolutionised how cities planned public transit systems, spawning imitations in other major metropolises like Paris and New York.

### **Bombing raids during WWI and WWII drastically changed London's landscape**

While wartime bombings affected London in both world wars, the '**Blitz**' that truly altered the cityscape refers to heavy bombing by German forces that started in September 1940 and lasted for 57 days.

The bombings left parts of London in ruins, and when WWII ended in 1945 much of the city had to be rebuilt. To help aid with the loss of Londoners' homes, council housing was built throughout the city, and major cultural projects like Southbank's Royal Festival Hall breathed life back into post-war London. The severe devastation was also tinged with a silver lining when Roman ruins were found underneath the rubble. These ruins can now be seen around Central London and at the London Mithraeum.

### **In 1948, the Empire Windrush brought British citizens from the Caribbean to London, prompting a new conversation about 'Britishness'**

After WWII, the British government passed the **British Nationality Act of 1948**, creating the status of 'Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies', which granted citizenship to all British subjects.

Invited by the British government to fulfil a post-war labour shortage, newly-dubbed citizens from the Caribbean boarded the HMT Empire Windrush in Jamaica and landed on the shores of the UK in 1948. Full of hope, Caribbean migrants did not expect that their arrival in the 'motherland' would expose them to racially motivated discrimination and violence.

After racial tensions reached a head with the **Notting Hill race riots of 1958**, the Caribbean community created safe spaces to express Caribbean culture and tradition. Today, Carnival celebrations have become one of London's most anticipated events of the summer.

## Questions

Who founded the city of Londinium? When was it founded?

What are the names given to the area within the defensive wall built by the Romans?

Who invaded Britain in addition to the Angles and the Saxons ?

Who invaded England in 1066?

What were medieval houses made of?

Which royal dynasty established a number of palaces in London and made deer parks?

What is the name of Shakespeare's theatre in London?

Which King was beheaded in London in 1649?

What happened in September 1666?

Which Queen had the longest reign before Elizabeth II?

What is an alternative name for the underground railway in London?

What's the name of the river in London? How is it pronounced?