

Exploring the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben

by Mary Howell, Valy Christie, Mina Holland

(b)LO(g)NDONER:

Welcome Professor Wren! Thank you for joining us today. To start with, can you tell us a bit about the history of the Houses of Parliament?

Historian:

Hello! I am very happy to be here. One of the most identifiable landmarks in the world is the Houses of Parliament, sometimes referred to as Palace of Westminster. Originally constructed in the 11th century as a royal residence for the monarch, it evolved over time into the seat of the British government. Much of the original construction was destroyed by fire in 1834. The current building was primarily constructed in the 19th century. Architect Charles Barry oversaw the new design, while Augustus Pugin helped to create the building's Gothic Revival architectural style. This collaboration resulted in the stunning and recognizable structure we see today.

(b)LO(g)NDONER:

Very interesting! What about the Houses themselves—how many are there, and what are their roles?

Historian:

The UK's Houses of Parliament are made up of two chambers: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Elected Members of Parliament debate and vote on bills in the House of Commons, and the prime minister is the leader of the majority party. Legislation is reviewed and amended by the appointed members of the House of Lords, which includes bishops and life peers. Big Ben, the famous bell housed within the Elizabeth Tower, is located in the Palace of Westminster, where these two houses meet.

(b)LO(g)NDONER:

Amazing information! Can the public visit these historic sites?

Historian:

The Houses of Parliament in London are open for tours. Visitors can explore the historic building, discover its significance in UK politics, and see important locations like the House of Commons, House of Lords, Westminster Hall, and the Central Lobby with the help of the Palace of Westminster's guided and self-guided tours. Although there are special opportunities to attend committee sessions or debates when Parliament is in session, tours are usually offered when Parliament is not in session. Tickets can be purchased in advance, and special events for tourists or educational groups are frequently held during certain seasons. Before scheduling a visit, make sure to inquire about any special availability or access restrictions!

(b)LO(g)NDONER:

This is fascinating! Now, what about Big Ben? Many people are unaware that “Big Ben” is actually the name of the bell rather than the clock tower.

Historian:

Although many people incorrectly use the term "Big Ben" to refer to the entire clock tower, Big Ben is the nickname for the large bell housed within the Elizabeth Tower at the Palace of Westminster in London. One of the most recognizable images of London and the United Kingdom, the bell was cast in 1858 and weighs roughly 13.5 tons. Originally called the Clock Tower, the structure was renamed in 2012 to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee. The time is marked by Big Ben's chimes, which are heard all over London and are well-known throughout the world. The clock tower itself is renowned for its intricately designed clock faces, each measuring about 7 meters—or 22 feet—in diameter.)

(b)LO(g)NDONER:

Thank you for sharing all this wonderful information! I'm sure our readers will love learning about these historic landmarks.

Historian:

It was my pleasure! I hope that everyone will have the opportunity to visit Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. Seeing them in person and delving into their history is an unforgettable experience!