London's Big Ben

The Houses of Parliament's iconic clock tower is one of London's most famous landmarks. Don't leave London without visiting Big Ben!

The [**Houses of Parliament**](http://www.visitlondon.com/attractions/detail/401836) and Elizabeth Tower, commonly called Big Ben, are among London's most iconic landmarks. Technically, Big Ben is the name given to the massive **bell** inside the clock tower, which weighs more than 13 tons (13,760 kg).  The clock tower looks spectacular at night when the four clock faces are illuminated.

 Big Ben Facts

* Each dial is seven metres in diameter
* The minute hands are 4.2 metres long and weigh about 100kg (including counterweights)
* The numbers are approximately 60cm long
* There are 312 pieces of glass in each clock dial
* A special light above the clock faces is illuminated when parliament is in session
* Big Ben's timekeeping is strictly regulated by a stack of coins placed on the huge pendulum.
* Big Ben has rarely stopped. Even after a bomb destroyed the Commons chamber during the Second World War, the clock tower survived and Big Ben continued to strike the hours.
* The chimes of Big Ben were first broadcast by the BBC on 31 December 1923, a tradition that continues to this day.
* The latin words under the clockface read DOMINE SALVAM FAC REGINAM NOSTRAM VICTORIAM PRIMAM, which means *O Lord, keep safe our Queen Victoria the First*
* In June 2012 the House of Commons announced that the clock tower was to be renamed the Elizabeth Tower in honour of Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee.

The History of Big Ben

The Palace of Westminster was destroyed by fire in 1834. In 1844, it was decided the new buildings for the Houses of Parliament should include a tower and a clock.

A massive bell was required and the first attempt (made by John Warner & Sons at Stockton-on-Tees) cracked irreparably. The metal was melted down and the bell recast in Whitechapel in 1858. Big Ben first rang across Westminster on 31 May 1859. A short time later, in September 1859, Big Ben cracked. A lighter hammer was fitted and the bell rotated to present an undamaged section to the hammer. This is the bell as we hear it today.

London's Favourite Landmark: Why Ben?

The origin of the name Big Ben is not known, although two different theories exist.

* The first is that is was named after Sir Benjamin Hall, the first commissioner of works, a large man who was known affectionately in the house as "Big Ben".
* The second theory is that it was named after a heavyweight boxing champion at that time, Benjamin Caunt. Also known as "Big Ben", this nickname was commonly bestowed in society to anything that was the heaviest in its class.

Globe Theatre

The Globe was built in 1599 using [timber](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lumber) from an earlier theatre, [The Theatre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Theatre), which had been built by Richard Burbage's father, [James Burbage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Burbage), in [Shoreditch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shoreditch) in 1576. The first performance for which a firm record remains was [Jonson's](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Jonson) [*Every Man out of His Humour*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Every_Man_out_of_His_Humour)—with its first scene welcoming the "gracious and kind spectators"—at the end of the year.

On 29 June 1613 the Globe Theatre went up in flames during a performance of [*Henry VIII*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_VIII_%28play%29). A theatrical cannon, set off during the performance, misfired, igniting the wooden beams and thatching. According to one of the few surviving documents of the event, no one was hurt except a man whose burning breeches were put out with a bottle of ale. It was rebuilt in the following year.

Like all the other theatres in London, the Globe was closed down by the [Puritans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puritan) in 1642. It was pulled down in 1644, or slightly later—the commonly cited document dating the act to 15 April 1644 has been identified as a probable forgery—to make room for [tenements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenement).

A modern reconstruction of the theatre, named "[Shakespeare's Globe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_Globe)", opened in 1997, with a production of [*Henry V*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_V_%28play%29). It is an academic approximation of the original design, based on available evidence of the 1599 and 1614 buildings and is located approximately 750 feet (230 m) from the site of the original theatre.

Answer the following questions.

1. What is the name of the bell inside the Clock Tower?
2. What does it mean when a special light above the clock faces is illuminated?
3. How wide is each dial?
4. When were the chimes of Big Ben first broadcast?
5. What was to be the new name of the Clock Tower?
6. What do the Latin words under the clockface mean?
7. In which cases was the nickname “Big Ben” most commonly used?
8. When was the Globe Threatre built?
9. How was the Globe Theatre destroyed in 1613?
10. Is the new theatre identical to the original one?