

# London through the ages



The view to the west from the top of St Paul's Cathedral

## 1 Towns and cities

- a) *Why do towns and cities grow up in some places and not in others? Discuss this in a group and talk about where you live and one (other) big city. Think about:*
- trade routes • a good harbour on the coast • a river crossing (bridge, ford<sup>1</sup>) • strong point (castle, fort) • markets

- b) *Read the text. Then write in one sentence what was important for the city of London.*

The name 'London' comes from two old words, 'lun' (spelled 'llyn'), which meant a lake or pool, and 'dun' which meant a strong place or fort on a hill. In earlier times the River Thames was five times as wide as it is today at this point, and not so deep. For the Romans, who were good at building, it was easy to put a bridge across the Thames here because they did not have to work in deep water. (That Roman bridge was very close to the site of the present London Bridge.) Any bridge opens up trade routes. This one meant that people did not have to go further up the Thames to find the next bridge or ford.

At the same time the Thames is a gateway to the south of England. Traders coming by ship could bring things to market here and people from both sides of the Thames could transport the things easily across the bridge.

## 2 The beginning of London

- a) *After you have read three texts below, choose the heading that fits the best.*

**A** Lundewic

**B** Londinium

**C** Lundenburh

**1** After the invasion in 43 AD, the Romans put a bridge across the Thames and built a traders' port on the north bank<sup>2</sup>. However, the Iceni tribe who lived northeast of London under their Queen Boudicca, didn't like the Romans and destroyed<sup>3</sup> this town in 60 AD.

The Romans built it up again and in the second century they made it their capital. Some time about 200 AD the Romans built a wall on the land side of London. It was 3 km long, 6 m high, 2.5 m thick, and had 6 gates. The modern City of London covers roughly the area inside the Roman wall. Later in the same century Saxon pirates came and attacked London, so another wall was added along the Thames.



The Roman wall near the Tower of London

<sup>1</sup>ford [fɔ:d] Furt • <sup>2</sup>bank [bæŋk] Ufer • <sup>3</sup>to destroy [dɪ'strɔɪ] vernichten

**2** After the Romans left Britain in 410 AD more Saxons and other Germanic tribes came. They did not live in the Roman city – maybe they thought there were Roman ghosts there. These East Saxons built their houses a bit further west along the Thames. They had quite a big town around the area that is now Covent Garden. In 604 the leader of the East Saxons became a Christian. They say that he was the first person who built a church where St Paul's Cathedral is now. It was a small church made of wood.

**3** The Vikings attacked East Anglia and may have controlled London. They spent the winter of 871 in the old Roman city. Weren't they afraid of ghosts? The Anglo-Saxon King of Wessex, Alfred the Great, took back the city of London and mended the walls. He made it into a fort or 'burh'. He built lots of other 'burhs' (towns with walls). He may also have built London Bridge again. London became an important trading centre, but the capital of England was still Winchester.

b) Look at a good map of modern London and see if you can find where the wall was. Look for the names of the six Roman gates: Ludgate, Newgate, Aldersgate, Cripplegate, Bishopsgate and Aldgate (and Moorgate, from the Middle Ages). There is a street called 'London Wall', too.

### 3 London or Westminster?

The British Prime Minister lives at Number 10 Downing Street, in London. So why does it say 'City of Westminster' on the street sign?

Read the text below to find out: What is the difference between the City of London and the City of Westminster?



Before the Normans came to England, King Edward built a big new church west of London. In time this became known as Westminster Abbey. Edward also built a palace for himself there. In those days the king made the laws: The 'government' of the country was where the king was.

On Christmas Day 1066 William of Normandy was crowned<sup>4</sup> in Westminster Abbey. In 1078 he ordered his people to build a fort inside the city walls of London. It became the 'White Tower', the first part of the much bigger 'Tower of London'. William built this and other forts to keep the Londoners under control, and to fight off Viking pirates, who were coming up the Thames.



The White Tower

William's son, William Rufus, built a new palace at Westminster and lived there. You can still see part of it, Westminster Hall, today. In 1200 the king moved to Westminster. London grew in two parts, with trade in the City of London and government at Westminster. All through the Middle Ages trade grew, until London became the most important North Sea port. Elizabethan merchants<sup>5</sup> traded with Russia, the Middle East and North and South America. People came from all over England and Wales and from other countries to live and work in London. There were farms all around the City growing food for them. (Covent Garden really was a market garden for growing vegetables.)

<sup>4</sup>was crowned [wəz 'kraʊnd] wurde gekrönt • <sup>5</sup>merchant ['mɜːtʃənt] Kaufmann, Händler

Many people wanted to live in villages outside the city because they were afraid of disease – it spread<sup>6</sup> fast where people lived close together. In the 14th century the plague<sup>7</sup> (the ‘Black Death’) had killed half the people of London. That is one reason why  
 70 the new theatres of Elizabethan times were outside the City walls to the north, or on the south side of the Thames. Also, it meant that they could not be controlled by the City.

To the west, Westminster was still quite small. Over the centuries more and more people came to live in London, and built houses. Most of these were of wood. In the 17th century two terrible things happened. The first was the plague again in 1665: It  
 75 was a horrible disease and thousands of people died every week. The second terrible event was the Great Fire in September 1666. It destroyed about 60% of the City, including 88 churches. It gave the great scientist and architect<sup>8</sup> Sir Christopher Wren<sup>9</sup> the chance to build 51 beautiful new churches, and also St Paul’s as we know it today. He had plans for new, wide roads, too. However, lots of people owned small pieces of  
 80 land and wanted to build on them again, so even today the streets of the City of London mostly follow the same plan as in the Middle Ages. But they built the buildings with stone and brick, not wood.

The merchants stayed in the City, but great lords built their grand houses between there and Westminster, on the river. Now, it looks like one big city. But the City of  
 85 London is still the business centre, Parliament meets in the Palace of Westminster, and the monarch lives in Buckingham Palace, in the City of Westminster.

#### 4 London Bridge

Which of these two is London Bridge? Match the facts to the photos.



1. In 1209 a King John built the first stone bridge here. It had houses and a church on it!
2. In 1967 some Americans bought London Bridge and moved it to a lake in Arizona.
3. It is the only Thames bridge that opens for ships.
4. King John’s bridge stood for over 600 years until a new stone bridge opened in 1831.
5. This new bridge opened in 1972.
6. It takes a minute to open.
7. The Danes pulled down the old Roman bridge here.
8. It opens to let big ships through to the Pool of London.

to spread [sprɛd] sich verbreiten • 7plague [pleɪɡ] Pest • 8architect [ˈɑːkɪtekt] Architekt/-in • 9Wren [ren]



## 5 What to see in London

There are lots of things to see and do in London, and many of them are free. Look at tourist brochures or travel pages on the Internet and find four places that you would like to visit. Here are some ideas:

- The Tower of London
- The Museum of London
- Tower Bridge Exhibition
- London Transport Museum
- The British Music Experience at the O<sub>2</sub> Arena: 60 years of music!
- 18 Folgate Street: This is an 18th century house which seems to have a family still living in it, with fires and candles. You just don't see the people.
- The Musical Museum: a collection of automatic instruments (musical boxes, etc.), near the Kew Bridge Steam Museum, which shows steam engines.
- Wembley Stadium
- Buckingham Palace
- The Museum of Childhood
- The London Eye



The Monument to the Great Fire (311 steps to the top!)



Built in 2003 and already one of London's most famous buildings: the 'Gherkin' (*Gurke*) skyscraper in the City

## 6 Underground London

By the end of the 17th century London was the largest city in the world. It was also the centre of the British Empire. Queen Victoria (1819-1901) became Queen in 1837 at the age of 18. She and her husband, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, supported<sup>10</sup> industry and education. Prince Albert organized the Great Exhibition, which took place in 1851 in Hyde Park. It showed wonders from around the world and all the best products of British industry.

The exhibition was a huge success; the money that was made was enough to start the big museums in South Kensington: the Natural History Museum (nature, from rocks to dinosaurs), the Science Museum (how and why things work) and the Victoria and Albert Museum (arts and crafts from around the world).

But not everything in London was new and wonderful. Immigrants came to London from Ireland, Eastern Europe, China and other parts of the world. Although the city reached out to take in the villages around it, poorer people had to live close together and living conditions were bad. Everyone had coal fires, so the air was dirty. The waste water<sup>11</sup> from all the houses went into the Thames, and there was a lot of disease. In 1858 things were so bad that they called London the 'Great Stink'!

Parliament gave the engineer Joseph Bazalgette the job of cleaning up the city. He

built over 2100 km of pipes and tunnels to carry the waste water away and treat<sup>12</sup> it.

At about the same time all the new railway companies built their lines to London. That's why London has so many big stations. Engineers were also building the underground railway system – there are all kinds of tunnels under London!

Most poor immigrants settled in the East End of London. Lots of bombs fell on this area was in the Second World War. After the war, high blocks of flats rose up to provide homes for people who had lost their houses.

Since then the City of London has got more and more tall buildings. When they dig down to build them, they find out more about old London and the people who lived there. In 2007 they pulled down a 26-floor tower block from the 1960s. Under it they found a Roman well<sup>13</sup> and found over 1100 Roman objects in the wet earth under it, even a wooden door!

In other parts of London there are the London Eye and the Millennium Dome (now called the 'O<sub>2</sub> Arena'), the Millennium Bridge and the new Wembley Stadium. In 2012 London will again, after many years, play host to the summer Olympic Games. As always, old and new buildings will stand side by side, and under the ground is everything that makes the city work – and objects from the past that we don't even know about.

- a) Find out about one of the books by Charles Dickens or one of the Sherlock Holmes stories by Conan Doyle. Many of them take place in 19th century London. What picture of the city do they give?
- b) Imagine what London was like when the air was dirty. There were often thick fogs which held the smoke. Write a short story that takes place in a poor part of London in the fog.

<sup>10</sup>to support [sə'pɔ:t] fördern • <sup>11</sup>waste water ['weist wɔ:tə] Abwasser • <sup>12</sup>to treat [tri:t] klären • <sup>13</sup>well [wel] Brunnen

## Lösungen und Lösungsvorschläge

1

a) *Individuelle Antworten*

b) *Example:* London grew up where traders could come by ship from other countries. There was a bridge over the Thames so that people from north and south could get to the market easily.

2

a)

**Text 1:** 'Londinium', which was the Roman name for London, is the right heading for this text.

**Text 2:** 'Londenwic', the Saxon town near what is now Covent Garden, is the right heading for Text 2.

**Text 3:** The third text talks about 'burhs' and how King Alfred the Great made 'Londenburh' into a Saxon fort.

b) It is easiest to start at the Tower of London, which was built near the Roman Wall. North of the Tower is **Aldgate**, then the line of the wall follows Houndsditch, which leads to a street called **Bishopsgate** and continues along London Wall. The next gate is **Moorgate**, from the Middle Ages. London Wall then goes on to the west, where **Cripplegate** and **Aldersgate** were quite close to each other. Cripplegate is not easy to find, but some maps may have the church of St Giles Cripplegate. Its full name is 'St Giles without Cripplegate' which means that it stood outside the gate. Aldersgate Street marks the position of that gate. The line of the wall then turns southwest until it reaches **Newgate**, where it turns to the south, going towards the river. **Ludgate Hill** is the road that leads from the west to St Paul's.

3

The text explains that the City of London was the trading centre, but Westminster was the centre of the king's government. Now the two cities of London and Westminster have grown together and there is no space between them. However, government and the monarch are still in Westminster and business and trade are still in the City.

4

The photo on the left shows **London Bridge**.

1. In 1209 King John built the first stone bridge here. It had houses and a church on it!
2. In 1967 some Americans bought London Bridge and moved it to a lake in Arizona.
4. King John's bridge stood for over 600 years until a new stone bridge opened in 1831.
5. This new bridge opened in 1972.
7. The Danes pulled down the old Roman bridge here.

The photo on the right is of **Tower Bridge**.

3. It is the only Thames bridge that opens for ships.
6. It takes a minute to open.
8. It opens to let big ships through to the Pool of London.

5

*Individuelle Antworten*

6

a) In many of the novels of Charles Dickens and other writers of his time you get a picture of a dark, dirty city with lots of very poor people. There were lots of thieves and other bad people, too. All the transport, including the buses, used horses, so the streets were very dirty and smelled bad. Because of the coal fires, the air was bad too, and there was often thick fog. Pictures and films of Sherlock Holmes often show him in thick fog, too.

b) *Individuelle Antworten*