

Big Ben is the nickname for the great [bell](#) of the [clock](#) at the north end of the [Palace of Westminster](#) and is generally extended to refer to the clock or the [clock tower](#) as well. It is the largest four-faced [chiming](#) clock and the third-tallest free-standing clock tower in the world. It celebrated its 150th [anniversary](#) in May 2009, during which celebratory events took place. The clock first ticked on May the 31th, 1859.

Tower

The present tower was raised as a part of [Charles Barry](#)'s design for a new palace, after the old Palace of Westminster was largely destroyed by fire on the night of October the 16th, 1834. The new Parliament was built in a Neo-gothic style. Although Barry was the chief architect of the Palace, he turned to [Augustus Pugin](#) for the design of the clock tower. The design for the Clock Tower was Pugin's last design before his final descent into madness and death, and Pugin himself wrote, at the time of Barry's last visit to him to collect the drawings: "I never worked so hard in my life for Mr Barry for tomorrow I render all the designs for finishing his bell tower & it is beautiful." The tower is designed in Pugin's celebrated [Gothic Revival](#) style, and is more than 96 metres high (roughly 16 stories).

The bottom 61 metres of the Clock Tower's structure consists of brickwork with sand coloured [Anston](#) limestone [cladding](#). The remainder of the tower's height is a framed spire of [cast iron](#). The tower is founded on a 15-metre (49 ft) square raft, made of 3-metre (9.8 ft) thick concrete, at a depth of 4 metres (13 ft) below ground level. The four clock dials are 55 metres (180 ft) above ground.

Despite being one of the world's most famous tourist attractions, the interior of the tower is not open to overseas visitors, though United Kingdom residents are able to arrange tours (well in advance) through their [Member of Parliament](#). However, the tower has no lift, so those escorted must climb the 334 limestone stairs to the top.

Because of changes in ground conditions since construction, the tower leans slightly to the north-west, by roughly 220 millimetres (8.66 in) at the clock dials. Due to thermal effects it oscillates annually by a few millimetres east and west.

Nickname

The origin of the nickname *Big Ben* is the subject of some debate. The nickname was applied first to the Great Bell; it may have been named after Sir Benjamin Hall, who oversaw the installation of the Great Bell, or after boxing's English Heavyweight Champion Benjamin Caunt. Now *Big Ben* is often used, by extension, to refer to the clock, the tower and the bell collectively, although the nickname is not universally accepted as referring to the clock and tower.

Significance in popular culture

The clock has become a symbol of the [United Kingdom](#) and [London](#), particularly in the visual media. When a television or film-maker wishes to indicate a generic location in Britain, a popular way to do so is to show an image of the Clock Tower, often with a [red double-decker bus](#) or [black cab](#) in the foreground. The sound of the clock chiming has also been used this way in audio media.

The Clock Tower is a focus of [New Year](#) celebrations in the United Kingdom, with radio and TV stations tuning to its chimes to welcome the start of the year. Similarly, on [Remembrance Day](#), the chimes of Big Ben are broadcast to mark the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month and the start of two minutes' silence.

The sound of the chimes are sent in real time from a microphone permanently installed in the tower and connected by line to [Broadcasting House](#).

Londoners who live an appropriate distance from the Clock Tower and Big Ben can, by means of listening to the chimes both live and on the radio or television, hear the bell strike thirteen times on New Year's Eve. This is possible due to what amounts to an offset between live and electronically transmitted chimes since the [speed of sound](#) is a lot slower than the speed of radio waves. Guests are invited to count the chimes aloud as the radio is gradually turned down.

Great Clock of Westminster - known worldwide as 'Big Ben' - is the most famous bell ever cast at Whitechapel. Visitors to the foundry pass through a full size profile of the bell that frames the main entrance as they enter the building.