

# Factsheet

## Prisoners of The Tower 1100 - 1941

## Great Escapes from The Tower Of London

The Tower was notorious as a prison but not even its high walls and superior defences could prevent some audacious escapes...

- **Bishop Ranulf Flambard – 1100**

The first person to be imprisoned within the Tower's walls was ironically the first person to escape. Bishop Ranulf Flambard was imprisoned by Henry I in 1100. After a fairly comfortable and luxurious stay at the White Tower, Flambard held a party for his guards and succeeded at getting them all drunk enough not to notice his absence. Using a long piece of rope, the Bishop lowered himself down the exterior wall of the tower. Despite the rope being several feet too short, he jumped down and fled for a boat waiting by the river.

- **Father John Gerard - 1587**

Jesuit priest Father John Gerard was imprisoned in the Salt Tower in April 1587. While residing in the Tower, he kept correspondence with a number of people, by sending seemingly harmless letters with secret information written with invisible orange juice. One of the men he sent letters to was a fellow Tower prisoner, John Arden, who was detained in the Cradle Tower opposite the Salt Tower. They were able to convince the guard to let them meet in order to celebrate Mass together in the Cradle Tower. In their meetings, Gerard was able to form a plan. On October 5 1587, in collaboration with people outside, Gerard and Arden were able to descend the Cradle Tower, swing across the moat and catch a boat that was waiting for them. Father Gerard later wrote an account of his incarceration in and escape from the Tower.

- **Lord Nithsdale - 1716**

In 1716, William Maxwell, Earl of Nithsdale, escaped from the Tower and his impending execution with the help of his brave young wife and two of her

female friends. Lord Nithsdale was captured and imprisoned during the first Jacobite Rising and was confined to the Lieutenant's Lodgings. Visiting her husband on the eve of his execution (unknown to Lady Nithsdale a reprieve had actually been signed that evening), Lady Nithsdale and her friends brought a disguise of women's clothing and were able to sneak him out without being noticed. Lord Nithsdale escaped to Rome in the disguise of a servant to a Venetian ambassador and his wife soon met him there after returning back to Dumfriesshire for their possessions. They lived there in Rome for thirty-three years. This has been described as one of the most audacious escapes ever made from the Tower.