



AS IT IS

Big Ben Will Have New Face for New Year

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Big Ben's famous clock will appear in time for it to do its most important yearly activity: marking the start of the New Year for thousands of people on London's streets and millions more watching on television.

The clock tower of Britain's Houses of Parliament has been hidden in a repair project for over three years. Hundreds of workers are involved in the effort to fix the structure built in 1859.

Nick Sturge, project manager for Sir Robert McAlpine's special projects, said removing the scaffolding was an important step in the \$107 million project.

Scaffolding is a movable structure on which workers stand or sit while working high above the ground.

"By New Year people will start to see a big difference; they'll start to get their tower back," he said. "The **roofs** will be fully visible along with the four clock faces."

Big Ben is an internationally-known **symbol** of London and Britain's parliamentary democracy. It is also one of the most photographed places in the city.

The repair work includes replacing parts of the clock faces using handmade glass, Sturge said. The **dials'** hands, numbers and other details have been repainted bright blue rather than the black long familiar to Londoners.

Sturge said an early painting of Big Ben showed a color that was confirmed by a paint study to be Prussian blue.

Sturge said, "When you stand on the street it's a really nice nod to the past," meaning a recognition of the building's history.

The symbols of the four parts of the United Kingdom - the thistle, shamrock, leek and rose - have also been repainted in the colors from the first design of the tower. The building was called the Clock Tower until 2012 when officials re-named it the Elizabeth Tower in honor of Britain's Queen.

The tower's Great Bell, or Big Ben, marks the turning of the year with twelve strikes. That will be powered by an electric motor January 1.

Alex Jeffrey, one of three clockmakers at the Palace of Westminster, said the clock had been transported to Cumbria, in northwestern England, to be taken apart and put back together. It was a big job.

"To give you an example, one of the hands weighs about 305 kilograms," he said. The clock's minute hand, he added, is about 4.3 meters long.

The one dial showing the time when the scaffolding comes down is electric-driven. But starting in the spring, the gravity-powered clock will operate all four dials as first designed

"It is famously **accurate**," Jeffrey said. "The Great Clock is designed extremely well and it's accurate to one second to the first strike of each hour."

I'm John Russell.

Paul Sandle and Lucy Marks reported on this story for Reuters. John Russell adapted it for Learning English. Katy Weaver was the editor.

Words in This Story

roof - *n.* the cover or top of a building, vehicle, etc.

symbol - *n.* an action, object, event, etc., that expresses or represents a particular idea or quality — often + of

dial - *n.* the part of a clock or watch that has the numbers on it

accurate -- *adj.* free from mistakes or errors
