



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob: Hello, I'm Rob. Welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm joined today by Neil.

Neil: Hi there Rob. Yes, I'm Neil.

Rob: Now Neil, tell me, when you think of skyscrapers – the very tall, thin buildings – which cities do you think of?

Neil: Oh, well, probably New York, Shanghai, and perhaps Dubai...

Rob: Well, London is also the home to a growing number of skyscrapers – with nicknames like the Gherkin, the Walkie Talkie and the Cheese Grater – but not everyone likes them... Do you like them, Neil?

Neil: Well, I like the nicknames – I think they're very fun. And actually, I quite like the buildings too – they're **quirky** – which means unusual, odd, in a nice way.

Rob: Yeah, I agree. But, today we'll be talking about why many people are unhappy about these new skyscrapers, and learning some language about towns and buildings. But first...

Neil: But first, a question, Rob.

Rob: Oh yes, of course! For many years, the tallest building in London was St Paul's Cathedral. But when was it built? Was it completed in:

- a) 1508
- b) 1608
- c) 1708

Neil: Well, I think... I think that it was c) 1708.

Rob: Well, we'll find out if you're right, or wrong, at the end of the programme... Well, let's start our discussion with that very building – St Paul's Cathedral in central London.

Neil: We're going to hear from BBC reporter Jonathan Savage. Which adjective does he use to describe the height of St Paul's, and which word does he use to say that it now seems much smaller than the skyscrapers nearby?

BBC reporter, Jonathan Savage:

*This is St Paul's Cathedral in central London. It's a **modest** 111 metres high, but for nearly 300 years it was the tallest building in this city. Now, it is **dwarfed** by nearby skyscrapers, many of which have **sprung up** in just the last few years. They've got **irreverently** British nicknames like the Gherkin, the Cheese Grater and the Walkie Talkie.*

Neil: So, we heard those three skyscrapers again – but what about St Paul's? He said it was a **modest** 111 metres high. Modest here means not large in size or amount – it means it's only 111 metres.

Rob: That was the adjective. And the other word we asked you to listen out for was **dwarfed**. St Paul's is dwarfed by the nearby skyscrapers. If something dwarfs another thing, it makes it seem small in comparison.

Neil: Yes, and this has happened recently. He says the new buildings have **sprung up** in the last few years. When he says they've sprung up, he means they've suddenly appeared – and it's often used to talk about buildings.

Rob: And he also used a great word to talk about those nicknames – he said they were **irreverently** British nicknames – if something is irreverent, it doesn't show the respect you might expect for official things, and often treats serious subjects in quite a fun, jokey way.

Neil: By calling them irreverently British, he suggests that being irreverent is quite typically British! Now, Rob, you're quite typically British but are you irreverent?

Rob: I think I am. I joke about everything! But, whether these nicknames are respectful or not, as I mentioned, many people are not happy with these tall new buildings. What reasons does Jonathan Savage give?

BBC reporter, Jonathan Savage:

*They are not universally popular. Some say they **obstruct** sightlines of old-fashioned landmarks like this one; that they threaten London's cultural identity; that they're just **plain** ugly. A group of high-profile Londoners, politicians, artisans and academics are now campaigning to halt this **incoming tide**. They say more than 200 more skyscrapers are being thoughtlessly thrown up across London.*

Rob: OK, so, what were their reasons? They said they **obstruct** sightlines – they block the views of some older landmarks.

Neil: They also threaten London's cultural identity – and some think they're just **plain** ugly. Using the word 'plain' in this context emphasises the adjective that follows. Just plain ugly – means: very ugly.

Rob: Indeed, well that's the opinion of this group, but not of all Londoners. Nonetheless, they're working to halt – or to stop – the incoming **tide** of new skyscrapers. An incoming tide is the rise of the sea that happens every day, which makes it come further into the land. A strong image – and a lovely idiom to use when something is happening more and more.

Neil: Yes, earlier we heard the phrasal verb 'spring up'. Which similar phrasal verb was used by the reporter?

BBC reporter, Jonathan Savage:

*They say more than 200 more skyscrapers are being thoughtlessly **thrown up** across London.*

Rob: Thrown up. If something is **thrown up**, it's made quickly and without a lot of care.

Neil: But be careful – to 'throw up' also has a different meaning – which is to vomit or be sick! Rob, have you got **a head for heights**?

Rob: I've certainly got a head for heights and it doesn't make me sick being up high.

Neil: Well, in that case you are unlikely to throw up from the top of one of these buildings!

Rob: Indeed, well, back to the ground level to answer today's question! Earlier I asked you when St Paul's Cathedral was finished. Was it in 1508, 1608 or 1708?

Neil: And I said 1708.

Rob: OK. And you were right. They actually started building it back in 1675.

Neil: Ah yes, not too long after the Great Fire of London in 1666, which is why they had to rebuild it.

Rob: Thank you Neil, and thank you everyone for listening. Do join us again next time for more 6 Minute English. Bye.

Neil: Goodbye.

Vocabulary and definitions

quirky	unusual and odd, but in a good way
modest	quite small or insignificant compared with other things of the same type
dwarfed	made to seem small compared to something else
sprung up	suddenly appeared
irreverently	without showing proper respect
obstruct	stop, block, or make something difficult to do
plain	very; used for emphasising the adjective that follows it
tide	(here) increasing amounts of something
thrown up	built or made quickly and without much care
(to have) a head for heights	a feeling of being comfortable in high places

Read and listen to the story online:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/general/sixminute/2014/09/140918_6min_london_skyline

More on this story:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-25391386>