



GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET

WESTMINSTER ABBEY & PARLIAMENT SQUARE Conservation Area

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City of Westminster

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND CITY DEVELOPMENT
DEVELOPMENT PLANNING SERVICES MAY 2004

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Designation: First designated in 1969 as part of the larger Government Precinct Conservation Area. Redesignated in 1987 as the Westminster Abbey and Parliament Square Conservation Area.

Historical Background: The origins of the area that is now the political and religious heart of Britain can be traced back to the end of the tenth century, when there was a small monastery on Thorney Island, near the site of the current Abbey. The abbey church of St. Peter was built by Edward the Confessor as the monastery grew and was consecrated on 28 December 1065. A year later, William the Conqueror was crowned there, and since that time Westminster Abbey has been the coronation place of all sovereigns. Nothing now remains of the original church, after it was demolished in 1245 and re-built by Henry III in a grander style. By 1269 the east end, the transepts, the first four bays of the nave and the Chapter House had been finished. Little progress was then made until 1503-6, when the vaulting was completed. Work also began at this time on the rebuilding of the Lady Chapel. The two square pinnacled towers at the western end, designed by Hawksmoor, were completed in 1745. Sir George Gilbert Scott carried out "restoration" works in the late nineteenth century.

To the immediate north of the Abbey is the church of St. Margaret, the parish church of the House of Commons since 1614. Originally dating from the 12th century, the church was rebuilt between 1480 and 1523 by Robert Stowell, mastermason to the Abbey. To the south of the Abbey is the Abbey Garden, and to the west of that, arranged around Dean's Yard, are the medieval monastic buildings (now occupied by Westminster School) founded in 1560 by Elizabeth I. The south side of Dean's Yard is dominated by Church House, built between 1936-40 by Sir Herbert Baker.

As well as the Abbey, Edward the Confessor established the Royal Palace of Westminster in this area, on the site now occupied by the Houses of Parliament. To the palace itself was added Westminster Hall, built by William the Conqueror's son William Rufus in 1097. At the extreme south-west corner of the palace complex stood the Jewel Tower, built in 1366. Westminster Hall was re-built between 1394-1402; this included the construction of a magnificent hammerbeam roof with massive timbers. After Henry VIII moved to Whitehall Palace in 1529, Westminster Palace was increasingly used by the Civil Service and became the seat of the Court of Common Pleas ("the Commons"). The Hall was used by the Royal Courts of Justice for occasions such as state trials, including those of Guy Fawkes (1606) and Charles I (1649). In October 1834 a fire destroyed the old Palace, though the Hall escaped without significant damage. The subsequent competition for new and enlarged Houses of Parliament (to be in either Gothic or Tudor style) was won by Sir Charles Barry, whose axial plan for the site was complemented by A.W.N. Pugin's Gothic detailing. The resulting neo-Gothic main buildings were completed and officially opened in 1852, followed by the Clock Tower in 1858 (housing the bell known as Big Ben) and in 1860 the Victoria Tower, which houses the records of Parliament. Barry also laid out Parliament Square, clearing the more humble buildings which occupied the site, so as to provide the new Houses of Parliament with a worthy setting. The current layout, designed by Grey Worum, dates from the post-war period. The mid-nineteenth century also saw slum clearance and new development to the immediate west, with the opening of Victoria Street in 1852, specifically designed to link Westminster with Victoria Station and the newly developed districts of Belgravia and Pimlico. Further clearance to the west of Parliament Square was carried out to provide for the large institutional buildings in keeping with the area's administrative character, including the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (1896-98), the Methodist Central Hall (1905-11), Middlesex Guildhall (1906-13) and the Institution of Civil Engineers (1912). The historic nature of the area restricted further development. The Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre (1986) in Broad Sanctuary, diagonally opposite the Abbey, was built on one of the few remaining development sites within the Conservation Area.

Listed Buildings: A large number of buildings within the area are listed Grade I, including the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey (with the Cloisters and Chapter House), Westminster School, St. Margaret's Church and the Jewel Tower (which is also an Ancient Monument). Middlesex Guildhall, Methodist Central Hall and 11 Great George Street, together with Westminster Bridge are listed Grade II*.

Clergy House, Great Peter Street, Church House and the remaining buildings around Deans Yards, Nos. 14, 22, 36-40 Great Smith Street, Nos. 1-2 Abbey

Orchard Street, No. 8 Storey's Gate, the Institution of Civil Engineers and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Great George Street are all Grade II listed.

Also listed are a number of lampstandards and statues in the area, in particular within and adjacent to Parliament Square.

Key Features: The hub of the area is Parliament Square, with its world famous views of the neo-Gothic Houses of Parliament and the Clock Tower. It also provides a setting for a number of statues of former prime ministers (including Churchill) and statesmen (including Abraham Lincoln). The Square is also an important part of the Ceremonial Route from Westminster Abbey to St. Paul's. The south side of the Square is dominated by Westminster Abbey, with its complex of ecclesiastical buildings and Westminster School, and the smaller scale St. Margaret's Church. To the west are a number of institutional buildings dating from the turn of the century. Behind the Guildhall, enclosing the north side of Broad Sanctuary, sits the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre (Powell and Moya, 1986). This is one of the few late twentieth century additions to the area, and confidently faces Hawksmoor's neo-Gothic western entrance to the Abbey on the east side of Broad Sanctuary. The south side of Broad Sanctuary is enclosed by Sir George Gilbert Scott's terrace of houses (now used as offices) and in the middle stands the Gothic Crimean War and Indian Mutiny Memorial, also by Gilbert Scott and erected in memory of the fallen of Westminster School. More domestic scale Victorian and Edwardian buildings, in a mixture of residential, commercial and public uses, are found in the south west corner of the Area, around Great Smith Street and Great Peter Street. The area contains a number of open spaces which provide quiet havens from the constant flow of traffic through Parliament Square. These include Dean's Yard, the Abbey Garden (open occasionally to the public) and the Victoria Tower Gardens, with their views across the river to Lambeth Palace and towards Westminster Bridge with Somerset House beyond.

Adjacent Conservation Areas: To the north Whitehall Conservation Area, to the west Birdcage Walk Conservation Area and to the south Smith Square Conservation Area.

Strategic Views: The strategic views from Primrose Hill to the Palace of Westminster and Parliament Hill to the Palace of Westminster, both cut across the site.

Areas of Special Archaeological Priority: The Lundenwic and Thorney Island area of special archaeological priority.

Article 4 Directions: None.

Regulation 7 Directions: None.

Planning Briefs and Design Guidelines: None specific to this area. Part of the Conservation Area is a designated World Heritage Site.

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens:
Victoria Tower Gardens (Grade II)

Spaces protected by the London Squares Act 1931: Dean's Yard

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