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World
Heritage
Convention

News & Events

The List

About World Heritage

Activities

Publications

Partnerships

Resources

UNESCO » Culture » World Heritage Centre » The List » World Heritage List

B z

Search

Advanced

Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey including Saint Margaret's Church

Description

Maps

Documents

Gallery

Video

Indicators

Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey including Saint Margaret's Church

Westminster Palace, rebuilt from the year 1840 on the site of important medieval remains, is a fine example of neo-Gothic architecture. The site – which also comprises the small medieval Church of Saint Margaret, built in Perpendicular Gothic style, and Westminster Abbey, where all the sovereigns since the 11th century have been crowned – is of great historic and symbolic significance.

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Arabic

Chinese

Russian

Spanish

Japanese

Dutch

Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey including Saint Margaret's Church (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) © Tim Schnarr

Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church lie next to the River Thames in the heart of London. With their intricate silhouettes, they have symbolised monarchy, religion and power since Edward the Confessor built his palace and church on Thorney Island in the 11th century AD. Changing through the centuries together, they represent the journey from a feudal society to a modern democracy and show the intertwined history of church, monarchy and state.

The Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church continue in their original functions and play a pivotal role in society and government, with the Abbey being the place where monarchs are crowned, married and buried. It is also a focus for national memorials of those who have served their country, whether prominent individuals or representatives, such as the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. The Abbey, a place of worship for over 1000 years, maintains the daily cycle of worship as well as being the church where major national celebrations and cultural events are held. The Palace of Westminster continues to be the seat of Parliament.

Westminster School can trace its origins back to 1178 and was re-founded by Queen Elizabeth I in 1560. It is located around Little Dean's Yard.

The iconic silhouette of the ensemble is an intrinsic part of its identity, which is recognised internationally with the sound of "Big Ben" being broadcast regularly around the world.

The Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey, and St Margaret's Church together encapsulate the history of one of the most ancient parliamentary monarchies of present times and the growth of parliamentary and constitutional institutions.

In tangible form, Westminster Abbey is a striking example of the successive phases of English Gothic art and architecture and the inspiration for the work of Charles Barry and Augustus Welby Pugin on the Palace of Westminster.

The Palace of Westminster illustrates in colossal form the grandeur of constitutional monarchy and the principle of the bicameral parliamentary system, as envisaged in the 19th century, constructed through English architectural references to show the national character.

The Palace is one of the most significant monuments of neo-Gothic architecture, as an

outstanding, coherent and complete example of neo-Gothic style. Westminster Hall is a key monument of the Perpendicular style and its admirable oak roof is one of the greatest achievements of medieval construction in wood. Westminster is a place in which great historical events have taken place that shaped the English and British nations.

The church of St Margaret, a charming perpendicular style construction, continues to be the parish church of the Palace of Westminster and has been the place of worship of the Speaker and the House of Commons since 1614 and is an integral part of the complex.

Criterion (i): Westminster Abbey is a unique artistic construction representing a striking sequence of the successive phases of English Gothic art.

Criterion (ii): Other than its influence on English architecture during the Middle Ages, the Abbey has played another leading role by influencing the work of Charles Barry and Augustus Welby Pugin in Westminster Palace, in the "Gothic Revival" of the 19th century.

Criterion (iv): The Abbey, the Palace, and St Margaret's illustrate in a concrete way the specificities of parliamentary monarchy over a period of time as long as nine centuries. Whether one looks at the royal tombs, the Chapter House, the remarkable vastness of Westminster Hall, of the House of Lords, or of the House of Commons, art is everywhere present and harmonious, making a veritable museum of the history of the United Kingdom.

Integrity

The property contains the key attributes necessary to convey its Outstanding Universal Value. In 2008 a minor boundary modification was approved to join the existing component parts of the property into a single ensemble, by including the portion of the road which separated them. There are associated attributes outside the boundary, which could be considered for inclusion in the future, and this will be examined during the next Management Plan review.

The instantly recognisable location and setting of the property in the centre of London, next to the River Thames, are an essential part of the property's importance. This place has been a centre of government and religion since the days of King Edward the Confessor in the 11th century and its historical importance is emphasised by the buildings' size and dominance. Their intricate architectural form can be appreciated against the sky and make a unique contribution to the London skyline.

The distinctive skyline is still prominent and recognisable despite the presence of a few tall buildings as part of the property. The most prominent of these, Milbank Tower and to some extent Centre Point - now protected in their own right - were both extant at the time of inscription. However important views of the property are vulnerable to development projects

for tall buildings. Discussions have begun and are ongoing on how to ensure that the skyline of the property and its overall prominence is sustained, and key views into, within and out of the property are conserved. The main challenge is agreeing on a mechanism to define and give protection to its wider setting. Until agreement can be reached on this, the integrity of the site is under threat.

The buildings are all in their original use and are well maintained to a high standard. There has been little change to the buildings since the time of inscription although external repairs continue and security measures have been installed at the Palace of Westminster.

The heavy volume of traffic in the roads around the property does impact adversely on its internal coherence and on its integrity as a single entity.

Authenticity

The power and dominance of state religion, monarchy and the parliamentary system is represented tangibly by the location of the buildings in the heart of London next to the River Thames, by the size of the buildings, their intricate architectural design and embellishment and the high quality materials used. The Palace of Westminster, the clock tower and "Big Ben's" distinctive sound have become internationally recognised symbols of Britain and democracy. All the buildings maintain high authenticity in their materials and substance as well as in their form and design.

The property maintains its principal historic uses and functions effectively. The Gothic Westminster Abbey, a working church, continues to be used as a place of daily worship. It remains the Coronation church of the nation and there are frequent services to mark significant national events as well as royal weddings and funerals and for great national services. Many great British writers, artists, politicians and scientists are buried or memorialised here. The Palace of Westminster continues to be used as the seat of the United Kingdom's two-chamber system of democracy. St Margaret's Church, now part of Westminster Abbey, remains at heart a medieval parish church, ministering to Members of both Houses of Parliament.

Protection and management requirements

The UK Government protects World Heritage properties in England in two ways. Firstly individual buildings, monuments and landscapes are designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act and secondly through the UK Spatial Planning system under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Acts. The individual sites within the property are protected as Listed Buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Government guidance on protecting the Historic Environment and World Heritage is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and Circular 07/09. Policies to protect, promote, conserve and enhance World Heritage properties, their settings and buffer zones are also found in statutory planning documents. Policies to ensure this can be found in statutory planning documents, which are reviewed and publicly consulted upon on a regular cycle.

The Mayor's London Plan provides a strategic social, economic, transport and environmental framework for London and its future development over the next 20-25 years and is reviewed regularly. It contains policies to protect and enhance the historic environment, including World Heritage properties. Further guidance is set out in London's World Heritage Sites – Guidance on Setting, and The London View Management Framework Supplementary Planning Guidance provides guidance on the protection of important designated views. It includes 10 views of the Westminster World Heritage property including a view looking from Parliament Square towards the Palace of Westminster.

The City of Westminster also has policies in its Core Strategy to protect the historic environment generally and the property specifically. Its cross cutting policies provide for management of the historic environment and protection of important views, buildings and spaces with particular reference to the Westminster World Heritage property. Although the property is located within the City of Westminster, much of its setting covers adjoining boroughs. The neighbouring Boroughs of Lambeth and Wandsworth also include policies in their Local Plans for the protection of the setting of the Westminster World Heritage property.

Both Westminster Abbey and the Palace of Westminster have Conservation Plans that put in place a comprehensive conservation maintenance regime based on regular inspection programmes. The Westminster World Heritage Site Management Plan was published by the property's Steering Group in 2007. There is no coordinator, and implementation of key objectives is undertaken by the key stakeholders – the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and Westminster City Council - working within the Steering Group framework.

There are continuing pressures for development and regeneration in the area around the property and permission has been given for tall buildings which could adversely impact on its important views. The guidance set out in the Mayor's Supplementary Planning Guidance on London's World Heritage Sites – Guidance on Setting, together with the London View Management Framework, English Heritage's Conservation Principles and Seeing the History in the View identify methodologies to which could be used to assess impacts on views and on the setting of the World Heritage property and its Outstanding Universal Value. However, there is no single, specific mechanism in place to protect the setting of the property.

As one of the most famous sites in London and a key tourist attraction, the property receives high numbers of visitors who require proactive management to minimise congestion and careful visitor management to protect the fabric and setting of the property. The protection

and enhancement of the public realm and better traffic management, particularly in the quiet spaces adjacent to the property, are also important in protecting its setting. To address these issues, an overall visitor management strategy and a traffic management strategy are needed to complement the visitor management strategies of the individual stakeholders, together with greater protection of the setting of the property and its key views. Ways in which this can be achieved will be examined in the Management Plan reviews

Media

-  [Westminster Palace, Westminster Abbey and Saint Margaret's Church \(UNESCO/NHK\)](#)

News (1)

- [Climate change threatens UNESCO World Heritage sites](#) Tuesday, 10 April 2007

Links

- [Jewel Tower](#)
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- [House of Parliament](#)
- [Westminster Abbey Website](#)

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City of Westminster, London, England

N51 29 59 E0 7 43

Date of Inscription: 1987

Minor boundary modification inscribed year: 2008

Criteria: (i)(ii)(iv)

Property : 10.26 ha

Ref: 426bis



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Periodic Reporting

 [Access to the Periodic Reporting Questionnaire](#)

State of Conservation (SOC) by year

[2017](#) [2015](#) [2014](#) [2013](#) [2012](#) [2011](#) [2009](#) [2008](#) [2007](#)

Global Strategy

[Criteria](#)

[Upstream Process](#)

[Tentative Lists](#)

[World Heritage List Nominations](#)

World Heritage List

[New Inscribed Properties](#)

[Interactive Map](#)

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[The List in Danger](#)

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[More sessions...](#)
[The 43rd session \(2019\)](#)
[The 42nd session \(2018\)](#)

General Assembly

[22st GA UNESCO Paris \(2019\)](#)
[21st GA UNESCO Paris \(2017\)](#)

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[The Convention, Convention Text](#)
[Operational Guidelines](#)
[The Emblem](#)
[The States Parties](#)
[The Advisory Bodies](#)
[The Centre](#)
[Employment & Internships](#)
[Who's Who](#)

Partnerships

[Become a Partner](#)
[What Partners Do](#)
[Our Partners](#)

Activities

[All our activities](#)
[Volunteer](#)
[Group Tools](#)

Publications

[World Heritage Review Series](#)
[Resource Manuals](#)
[World Heritage wall map](#)
[More publications ...](#)

[World Heritage List](#)
[World Heritage in Danger](#)
[New Inscriptions](#)
[Criteria for Selection](#)
[Tentative Lists](#)
[World Heritage List Nominations](#)

Reporting & Monitoring

[State of Conservation \(SOC\)](#)
[Periodic Reporting](#)
[Questionnaires 2008-2015](#)
[Reactive Monitoring](#)
[Africa](#)
[Arab States](#)
[Asia & Pacific](#)
[Latin America and the Caribbean](#)
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[World Heritage Fund](#)
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