

# ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES  
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES  
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS  
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ  
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 426

## A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Westminster Palace

Location : City of Westminster, London

State Party : United Kingdom

Date : December 23, 1986

## B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the inclusion of the proposed cultural property on the World Heritage List be deferred.

## C) JUSTIFICATION

On 16 October 1834, a fire almost completely destroyed the old Westminster Palace. Since 1547, it had been the seat of regular parliamentary assemblies. Previously (prior to the acquisition of Whitehall in 1529 and prior to the construction of St. James' Palace in 1532), it was the principal residence of the kings of England, from Edward the Confessor to Henry VIII.

The reconstruction of a new Westminster Palace by Barry and Pugin beginning in 1835 translates, by aesthetic choices which at that time were very avant-garde, a clear political determination. The seat of Parliament, which includes to the south of a central tower, the House of Lords, and to the north, the House of Commons, illustrates in colossal proportions, the grandeur of the constitutional monarchy and the principle of the bicameral system. It covers 3.3 hectares of land; its facade, situated along the Thames, is 266 m in length; Victoria Tower, to the south, rises to 98 m; the Clock Tower (Big Ben), to the north, is 96.3 m tall. The ensemble is constructed in the Gothic Tudor style, so as to show, by a deliberately English historical reference, the national character of the monument.

Although only completed in 1888, the construction of this vast complex of towers, galleries, meeting rooms, commission rooms, libraries and apartments grouped around some precious vestiges of medieval times (the main three are Westminster Hall, the chapel of Saint Mary of the Crypt and the Jewel Tower), was mainly carried out between 1840, when the first stone was laid, and 1858, when Victoria Tower was completed. The House of Lords began to be used on 15 April 1847, and the House of Commons, on 30 May 1850, and was then used permanently when the parliamentary session opened on 3 February 1852.

This enormous site, which required more than 21,000 m<sup>3</sup> of stone, not to mention the blocks of Portland and Anston limestone which Armstead, Thomas and their assistants used to sculpt over 300 statues representing, in addition to the saints, protectors of the Kingdom, the kings and queens of England from the Norman Conquest to the reign of Queen Victoria, cost over 2 million pounds sterling. The undertaking mobilized a host of craftsmen and artists for several decades, owing to the care taken with respect to the interior decoration and the furnishings by a Royal Fine Arts Commission instituted in 1841 under the chairmanship of the Prince Consort.

ICOMOS has already mentioned Westminster Palace in one of its 1986 evaluations as being one of the most significant monuments of Neo-Gothic architecture, and approves a nomination which would easily be justifiable for several reasons. Among the vestiges of the medieval period, Westminster Hall, rebuilt in 1394-1399 by Henri Yevele, is a key monument of Perpendicular style, and its admirable oak roof, the work of Hughes Herland, master carpenter of Henry II is one of the greatest achievements of Medieval construction in wood. In and of itself and in spite of repairs to some parts (notably the House of Commons) following damage during World War II the new Westminster Palace is an outstanding, coherent and complete example of Neo-Gothic style, with the magnificent interiors of the Royal Gallery, the House of Lords, the Central Lobby, the House of Commons, etc. The palace is also a vivid symbol of one of the oldest parliamentary institutions in the world. Victoria Tower holds 3 million archival documents, including all acts of Parliament since 1497; Westminster Hall was the theater of extraordinary assemblies in which Edward II and Richard II were deposed; associated with the site are the memories of the struggle of Pym and Hampden to preserve constitutional power, the speeches of Burke in defense of the American colonies and those of Wilberforce against slavery - a heavy historical responsibility that the men of the 19th century took up and did not abandon.

However, ICOMOS regrets the very restrictive delimitation proposed for the inclusion of the site on the World Heritage List.

With the exception of the Jewel Tower, the southwest angle of the old Westminster Palace, only the Parliament buildings, to the east of St. Margaret Street, Old Palace Yard and Abingdon Street have been proposed. Although this proposal is defensible, it seems extremely regrettable that the nearby and complementary ensembles of St. Margaret's and Westminster Abbey have been excluded.

Westminster Abbey, where all the kings of England have been crowned since 1066, is inseparable from the parliamentary history of the Kingdom. Prior to 1547, when the king granted the Commons the chapel of St. Stephen, they had no seat in the palace and held their meetings in the Abbey, either in the chapter house, or in

the refectory. St. Margaret's, a charming Perpendicular-style construction, continues to be the parish church of the House of Commons.

Since Charles Barry and Augustus Welby Pugin deliberately chose stylistic references for the ensemble close to Westminster Abbey, the disassociation of the two ensembles, which are topographically similar and historically linked, would equally harm appropriate aesthetic understanding of the 19th-century Neo-Gothic Palace.

There is little need to add that the best suggestion, to regroup the monument complex comprising Westminster Abbey, St. Margaret's, the Jewel Tower and Westminster Palace within a perimeter extending from the Thames to the east, Parliament Square to the north and College Street to the south, by the unique quality of a thus constructed cultural property, is in perfect accordance with the criteria for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

ICOMOS, May 1987

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## WESTMINSTER ABBEY, ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH AND WESTMINSTER PALACE

Having been informed of the new nomination proposed by the United Kingdom concerning Westminster Abbey, St. Margaret's Church and Westminster Palace, ICOMOS notes that this revised nomination perfectly meets its requirements and the recommendations of the Bureau, and therefore the inscription of this property needs no longer be deferred.

The delimitation of the property has been enlarged according to the recommendations of the Bureau; this gives more strength to the argument for this new nomination.

Indeed, the history of the Parliamentary institution can be found in the monuments included in the new area as a whole: in the Middle Ages the Commons used to meet in the Chapterhouse of Westminster Abbey; St Margaret's still remains to this day their church.

The Abbey Church of Westminster, where kings and queens have been crowned since 1066, is also linked since to the history of the most ancient of parliamentary monarchies of present times. The throne in which is incorporated the Stone of Scone constitutes symbolic evidence in this respect.

The new nomination no longer concerns only a Neo-gothic group of monuments (Westminster Palace and Parliament) but is extended to an architectural diachronic complex of great value. By the complementarity of architectural design, decor and functions, Westminster Palace, Westminster Abbey and St. Margaret's Church constitute an exceptional cultural property which meets three criteria for inscription on the World Heritage List.

- Criterion 1 Westminster Abbey is a unique artistic construction representing a striking sequence of the successive phases of English Gothic art.

- **Criterion 2** 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 at Westminster Palace, in the "Gothic Revival" of the XIX century.

- **Criterion 4** The Abbey, the Palace and St. Margaret's illustrate in a concrete way the specificities of parliamentary monarchy over as long a period of time as nine centuries. Whether one looks at the royal tombs of the chapterhouse, 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.