

UNITED KINGDOM

Westminster Palace, Westminster Abbey and Saint Margaret's Church

Brief description

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.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription 1987

Agency responsible for site management

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Also: Westminster City Council; Westminster Abbey; Westminster School; Houses of Parliament (addresses not provided).

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria C (i) (ii) (iv)

- Change to criteria proposed: adding criteria C (vi) (Spiritual and ceremonial importance of the Abbey and the Palace of Westminster is the heart of democracy and governance)

Justification as provided by the State Party

(426Rev): The Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church are important both individually and as a group. The Palace as it stands today is largely seen as a supreme example of Victorian Gothic, the masterpiece of two of the most eminent English architects of their day, Charles Barry and Augustus Welby Pugin. None the less it retains medieval work of major importance, notably Westminster Hall, assessed by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments for England as

'probably the finest timber-roofed building in Europe'. The Jewel Tower also survives intact, a remainder that as the one time repository of the King's personal treasure it once formed part of what was in its day in every sense a royal palace.

In terms of ideas and beliefs the Palace, together with parts of the Abbey, has been the site of Parliamentary institutions from the 13th century to the present day and can thus be said to symbolise democratic institutions as such.

Westminster Abbey, adjacent to the Palace, is also inseparable from the parliamentary history of the nation, since 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. This is in a sense an historical accident due to the fact that in the 11th century Edward the Confessor sited palace and abbey side by side. However it was no doubt precisely the juxtaposition of the two that led Barry and Pugin to adopt the Gothic style for their 19th century Palace. However the abbey is a major monument in its own right, not only a place of worship and a building of great beauty and interest, but also as a building bound up with every moment of the nation's history. It is the shrine of royalty where since the 11th century all but two monarchs have been crowned, and where up to Victorian times the majority were buried. It is also the sacred place where the nation perpetuates the memory of its great sons, statesmen and poets as well as the Unknown Warrior, sad symbol of past international conflict.

Architecturally St Margaret's Church is not of major importance owing to the extent of the restoration which has taken place there over the years, although the tower as rebuilt is regarded as an important example of Gothicism. But with the Palace and the Abbey it forms part of a group which is of world importance, serving in the first place as a parish church, but also, since the 17th century, as the church of the House of Commons. As such it makes its own contribution to the importance of the group as a whole.

Palace, abbey and church constitute this group, scarred by history and extended, altered and rebuilt over the years, but fully worthy of consideration as of outstanding universal value as buildings of architectural importance which have played and still play a major role not only in the history of the nation but of spiritual and democratic ideals throughout the world.

UNESCO Criteria 5a, (i), (ii), (iv), and (vi)

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

(426, May 1987): 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 III, 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 theatre 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 defence 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.

(426Rev): [...] 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.

Committee Decision

Bureau (1987): the Bureau recommended that the examination of this property be deferred until the nomination has been reformulated to include Westminster Abbey.

- The revised Statement of Significance is included in the draft management plan. The State Party will discuss and agree a new Statement of outstanding universal value which will be submitted to the World Heritage Committee in due course
- No change to UNESCO's official description of the site required

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: inadequate (This is being examined as part of the management plan process and will include at the very least the road between the two parts of the site. The State Party will put forward proposals for consideration by the World Heritage Committee in due course)
- Buffer zone: no buffer zone has been defined
- A management plan is being prepared and the issue of a buffer zone is being examined

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained
- Possible development pressures as a result of changes in government administrative arrangements; threats to the security of the area by terrorists; possible alterations in traffic management. However, this should not affect the outstanding universal value of the site

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- National legislation to protect archaeological sites and historic buildings and conservation areas. Specific policies in regional and local plans. The Abbey is protected by its own legislation
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed:

- Regional guidance on strategic views is currently being reformulated and this may have an impact on the protection of the setting of the World Heritage site
- Regional level of action. Timeframe: not known

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Visitor attraction, urban centre, religious use. Other: educational establishment and seat of government

Management/Administrative Body

- Steering group formally established on 01 January 2003 to oversee and publish the management plan and then to hand on to a successor body
- No site manager but one is needed
- Management by the State Party; management under protective legislation. Other: the Palace of Westminster, Westminster School, Westminster Abbey and English Heritage are responsible for the management of their own buildings and often co-ordinate with each other
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national (DCMS); regional; local (owners and managers of the various parts of the site, including the Parliamentary authorities, the Dean and Chapter of Westminster and Westminster School)
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- Implement the management plan
- Timeframe: not known

5. Management Plan

- No management plan but one is in preparation (due to be completed: December 2005)

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- No funding exists for WHS activities. Individual owners and managers provide funds for the conservation and protection of their buildings. Westminster City Council have funded projects in the Abbey and may be a source of funding in the future. Grants from other organizations may be available. English Heritage provided and the City of Westminster funds towards the preparation of the management plan
- No funding drawn in through the World Heritage Fund
- Insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: 0
- Other access to staff: specialists in architectural history, conservation, archaeology, historic building repair, security, conservation engineering and safety etc can be found at English Heritage. Westminster City Council has

a pool of specialist conservation specialists as well as experts in transportation, urban design and planning. The Parliamentary Estates Directorate has a specialist conservation architect and archivist. Westminster Abbey have access to dedicated conservation professionals

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: conservation, management, education; visitor management
- Average: promotion, interpretation
- Staff resources are inadequate
- Westminster Abbey has volunteer Honorary Stewards, bell Ringers, museum assistants, guides and other guilds that assist with the liturgy. Volunteers are not used elsewhere.

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Each site/building has access to its own training facilities and has access to specialized firms who undertaken specialized conservation work
- No training on site management

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: 2,663,018 visitors in 2004. Trend: 3.4% increase
- Visitor facilities: Westminster Abbey has visitor information leaflets, guides, a guidebook and an audio tour. There is a refreshment stall and a gift shop. The Jewel Tower has exhibition panels, a guidebook and a shop. The Houses of Parliament during the summer parliamentary recess have guides, leaflets, an audio tour and a gift shop. All year round there is a café and access to the visitors' galleries with information leaflets in many languages
- Visitor facilities are adequate
- Visitor needs: none
- There is no tourism/visitor management plan for the site (Individual sites have plans but there is no plan for the whole World Heritage site)

10. Scientific Studies

- There is no agreed research framework/strategy for the site
- Visitor management, transportation studies
- Studies used for management of site: transport studies have been undertaken looking at

reducing the traffic in the WHS. Studies looking at visitor/pedestrian movement and examination of signage and interpretation have been undertaken during the preparation of the draft WHS management plan

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- No signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem not used on publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among: local authorities. Inadequate: visitors, local communities, businesses
- There is no education strategy for the site
- No website available
- Local participation: the management plan will address the issues and benefits of community involvement

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- There have been major conservation programmes over the last 20 years at Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament and in more recent years installation of security measures. Where appropriate archaeological and historic building recording has taken place. These investigations have revealed early occupation and utilisation of the low lying Thorney Island which rises out of the marshy area where the river Tyburn meets the River Thames. The Thames is easily fordable at this point. Prehistoric and Roman remains have been found during small scale excavations
- Present state of conservation: good

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressure, visitor/tourism pressure. Other: security issues, traffic increase
- Possible developments in areas immediately surrounding the site and this may be exacerbated as a result of recent governmental decisions to relocate functions elsewhere. Security issues arise because of the democratic, governmental, ceremonial and royal functions of the whole WHS. Other issues include increase in pollution and traffic

- Emergency measures: Parliament Square Feasibility Study commissioned by the World Squares for all steering group. This will consider issues in identifying a range of options for the future of Parliament Square. The study area includes areas of the WHS and is due to be completed in late 2005

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, management. Other: intangible
- Weaknesses of management: the partners are not yet used to working within a World Heritage site framework to achieve further benefits. There are a large number of stakeholders