

2. Evaluation of the World Heritage Site

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 Inscription on the list of World Heritage Sites depends on meeting one or more of the criteria set by UNESCO in the *Operational Guidelines for Implementation of the World Heritage Site Convention*. A site should also meet the test of authenticity.
- 2.1.2 This section sets out a summary of those outstanding universal values of the site which were recognised at the time of inscription in the list of World Heritage Sites in 1987. This is followed by a detailed analysis of those attributes, tangible and intangible, which are unique and outstanding. The analysis is presented as a Statement of Significance and it represents the current understanding of the outstanding universal values. Finally the ways in which Westminster meets the test of authenticity are discussed.

2.2 The outstanding universal values of the Westminster WHS and test of authenticity

- 2.2.1 The justification for the inscription for the Westminster WHS put forward by the state party to the World Heritage Committee when the site was nominated, illustrated the key attributes of the cultural property. The justification emphasised the architectural, historic and symbolic significance of the site:
- The importance, as a group, of the three buildings of the Palace of Westminster, Westminster Abbey and St Margaret's Church.
 - The Palace as a supreme example of Victorian Gothic and the work of Sir Charles Barry and A W N Pugin.
 - The surviving buildings of the medieval Palace of Westminster, notably the internationally important Westminster Hall and the Jewel Tower.
 - Westminster as the site of the development of parliamentary ideals since the 13th century and as the pre-eminent symbol of the democratic institution.
 - Westminster Abbey as a major ecclesiastical monument of great antiquity and beauty.

- Westminster Abbey as the place of coronation and shrine of British monarchs since the 11th century and the place where the nation's important statesmen, poets and other individuals are commemorated.
- St Margaret's Church as the church of the House of Commons.

2.2.2 Thus the following UNESCO criteria are met by the WHS:

Criterion (i) represents a masterpiece of human creative genius

Criterion (ii) exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design

Criterion (iv) be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history

Criterion (vi) to be directly associated with events or living tradition with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance

2.3 Statement of significance

2.3.1 Introduction

2.3.1.1 This Statement of Significance provides further detail of the current understanding of the cultural qualities which give the site its Outstanding Universal Values. It begins with the key overarching significances, which are followed by detailed discussion of the significant elements.

2.3.2 Overarching significances

2.3.2.1 The Westminster World Heritage site is of international importance:

- **As a place where sovereignty has been conferred and exercised continuously for nearly a thousand years**

Almost from their founding by Edward the Confessor c 1050, the Abbey and Palace of Westminster have jointly provided the physical locus of English, later British, sovereignty. At the coronation in Westminster Abbey where it has taken place since the time of William 1, the authority of the monarch as sovereign is sacramentally validated. At the Palace, sovereignty is exercised, originally by the monarch alone, now by the Queen in Parliament. The sacred and secular aspects of sovereignty are given unique physical expression in the conjunction of the two buildings.

- **In the development of parliamentary government and its transmission around the world**

Parliament came generally to meet at the Palace of Westminster because it was the King's principal London residence. When the King moved out after a fire in the early 16th century, Parliament remained. When the Palace again burned down in 1834, it was rebuilt as the home of Parliament. It remains so today. The evolution of Parliament was influenced by the physical configuration of the spaces at Westminster in which its two houses met in their formative years.

The law courts developed at Westminster for the same reason. The highest court was the House of Lords presided over by the monarch.

The influence and dissemination of the British parliamentary system across the world came about largely through the medium of empire.

- **As the place from which a significant part of the world was ruled in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries.**

In 1876 Queen Victoria was crowned Empress of India and at the height of the British empire, almost one quarter of the land surface of the globe was governed from Westminster.

- **For the outstanding architectural and artistic value of its buildings and their contents**

These are described in more detail in section 2.3.6

2.3.3 Symbolic and spiritual significance

2.3.3.1 Westminster is a contemporary centre of power and high politics and also one of the world's great museum places and repositories of collective memory. It has immense, incalculable symbolic value for the British people.

National Symbols

2.3.3.2 The Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey are among the most famous historical buildings in Britain. The Palace, in particular, is one of the most universally recognised buildings in the world.

The Clock and Bell

2.3.3.3 The clock tower, the clock, the bell, 'Big Ben' itself, and the sound of the bell's chimes are one of the pre-eminent symbols of Britain, visual and aural shorthand for the whole country.

The Home and Symbol of Parliamentary Democracy

2.3.3.4 Westminster is the home of the oldest continuously-existing parliamentary government in the world. It has a universal significance of representative democracy, and has at times been of special significance as a symbol of defiance in the face of dictatorship.

The Spiritual Home of the English Crown

2.3.3.5 The Abbey is the pre-eminent royal church, place of almost every coronation since 1066, shrine of Edward the Confessor, burial place of kings, scene of royal weddings and funerals.

The Abbey as National Valhalla

2.3.3.6 From the 17th century, Westminster Abbey has become a place of burial, or commemoration, for many of Britain's greatest and most distinguished figures. This commemorative tradition continues, and the Abbey is one of Britain's, and the world's, great places of communal memory.

A Setting for Ceremonial

2.3.3.7 Westminster's symbolic importance is regularly reinforced by grand occasions, such as the annual State Opening of Parliament, and the ceremonial joining of both Houses. Solemn events such as the Coronation of Her Majesty the Queen in 1952, or the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 2002, could hardly be conceived of elsewhere than at Westminster Hall and Abbey.

War Memorials in the Abbey

2.3.3.8 Westminster Abbey houses the grave of the Unknown Warrior, the most important of national memorials to the fallen of the First World War. The Abbey also houses the Battle of Britain Memorial Chapel, established in 1947.

2.3.4 Political significance

The Setting for Contemporary Political Life

2.3.4.1 Westminster is the focus of national sovereignty and authority in Britain. This naturally manifests itself, in day to day terms, in Westminster's being the principal setting for national political life, familiar from the television news, week after week.

The Life of Parliament

2.3.4.2 The two houses of Parliament, being the sovereign bodies of the United Kingdom, are unique, autonomous institutions. They have a complex culture, governed by rules and traditions, presided over by the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Chancellor.

The Voice of the Public

- 2.3.4.3 Westminster, as the natural focus of our national political life, is the natural destination of political demonstrations and marches. The Stranger's Galleries, and the frequency of lobbying activities, represent the principle of public access to Parliament.

The Mother of Parliaments

- 2.3.4.4 The 'Westminster model' of parliamentary government has been transmitted around the world. Many countries have legislatures which were inspired to some degree by Westminster, in spirit, in their institutional form, in the details of their style and procedure.

2.3.5 Historic Significance

- 2.3.5.1 Westminster is historically significant in so many ways, that in attempting to define its significance one runs the risk of trying to summarise the history of Britain.

The Heart of the State

- 2.3.5.2 From the 11th century to the present, Westminster has been continuously the political centre of the English, latterly the British, state. Westminster is to Britain what Capitol Hill is to the United States, the Kremlin is to Russia, Hradcany Hill is to the Czech Republic, or the Ile de la Cite is to France.

The Birthplace of Parliament

- 2.3.5.3 Westminster has been the home of Parliament since the 13th century: the institutions of government have evolved here over seven centuries.

The Seat of Parliamentary Government

- 2.3.5.4 Westminster saw the evolution of Parliament through in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and the invention of modern party politics. The 'Westminster model' has proved one of the most influential examples for the establishment of representative democratic institutions.

The Birthplace of English Common Law

- 2.3.5.5 Westminster, more than anywhere else, is the birthplace of the system of English Common Law, and Trial by Jury, which have spread around the world.

The Abbey as Royal Foundation and Coronation Place

- 2.3.5.6 Westminster Abbey, rebuilt by Edward the Confessor from c.1050, was the pre-eminent royal religious foundation of medieval England. It has been the pre-eminent setting for royal ceremonial in Britain ever since, having been the scene of every coronation since that of William I in 1066, and that of most royal funerals.

The Abbey as Royal Peculiar

- 2.3.5.7 The Abbey, was re-founded as a Collegiate Church of Dean and Canons by Elizabeth I in 1560, and thus one of the 'Royal Peculiars', ecclesiastical institutions which are independent of the Episcopal hierarchy and owe direct allegiance to the Crown represent the unique relationship between the state and the Church of England. The Dean and Canons stand as a reminder that Westminster's significance is as much about the continuity of historic institutions and faith as about buildings.

The Abbey as Royal Mausoleum

- 2.3.5.8 Westminster Abbey is the burial place of Edward the Confessor (d 1065, and canonised in 1161), whose shrine became a place of pilgrimage. From the reign of Henry III until that of George II, the Abbey was used as the principal royal mausoleum, and as such, is one of the great royal tomb-houses of the world.

Westminster Hall as a setting for state occasions

- 2.3.5.9 Built by Richard II, the Hall has been the setting for historic events, such as the trial of Charles I (1648), the trial of Warren Hastings and the coronation banquet of George IV (1821). More recently, it has been used for the lying-in state of monarchs prior to their funerals. The Hall is also occasionally used for ceremonial, joint meetings of both Houses of Parliament.

The Order of the Bath

2.3.5.10 The Order of the Bath, founded in 1399, is England's second Order of Chivalry and has been based in Henry VII's Chapel, Westminster since its re-establishment in 1725.

2.3.6 Architectural significance

Edward the Confessor's Church

2.3.6.1 The 11th century Abbey was one of the first great Romanesque building in Britain: a substantial part of the eastern cloister range remains, together with buried remains of the Confessor's church.

The Abbey Church

2.3.6.2 The present church, built by Henry III, c. 1245 – 72, is one of the great gothic churches of Europe, and of special significance as the most direct instance of the influence of the High Gothic style of northern France on English architecture. It is remarkable for its elaboration: in terms of cost per bay, it may have been the most expensive church ever built in medieval Europe.

Royal Patronage

2.3.6.3 The rebuilding of Westminster abbey from 1245 to 1272 was entirely inspired and paid for by Henry III and together with Henry VII's rebuilding of the Lady Chapel between 1502-09, is reckoned to be one of the greatest acts of individual patronage of the arts, whether royal or otherwise, in British history, and one of the greatest in European history.

Henry VII's Chapel

2.3.6.4 King Henry VII's Chapel, added to the east end of the Abbey in the place of Henry III's original Lady Chapel in 1503, to the designs of Robert and William Vertue, is the culminating masterpiece of the English Perpendicular Gothic.

The Chapter House

2.3.6.5 The Abbey has one of about thirty centrally planned, usually octagonal or polygonal, chapter houses, built in the British Isles between c.1120 and c. 1350. Although much of its appearance is due to restoration by Sir George Gilbert Scott, 1866 – 74, it is also of outstanding significance for architectural history.

The Architectural Significance of the Conventual Buildings

- 2.3.6.6 Westminster Abbey, almost uniquely amongst English monasteries, was never abandoned. The buildings have national significance as a well-preserved monastic ensemble on a grand scale. Later additions, such as Ashburnham House or the Westminster School Dormitory, are of great significance in themselves.

The Architectural Significance of the Medieval Palace

- 2.3.6.7 Four major elements of the medieval Palace of still stand today, namely Westminster Hall, St Stephen's Cloister, the chapel of St Mary Undercroft beneath St Stephens Hall, and the Jewel Tower. They are significant remains of the most important royal palace of medieval England.

The Architectural Significance of Westminster Hall

- 2.3.6.8 Westminster Hall is the finest secular medieval interior in the British Isles. Its lower walls date from the 11th century, but its hammer beam roof is the result of remodelling for Richard II, c. 1384 – 1401. The roof, the finest example of its type, represents an outstanding engineering achievement, and is the finest surviving piece of medieval carpentry in the world.

The Architectural Significance of the New Palace of Westminster

- 2.3.6.9 This public building is a masterpiece of 19th century architecture, acclaimed for its aesthetics as well as its planning. The Palace's construction employed various new techniques and materials making the New Palace a valuable case study in the history of construction.

The Decoration of the New Palace

- 2.3.6.10 The Palace is equally famous for its magnificent internal decoration which is usually reckoned as one of the masterpieces of the 19th century Gothic Revival. Many great designers contributed to its decoration, and it was immensely influential on Victorian design, in churches, public buildings and houses.

2.3.7 Works of art, fittings, furnishings and archives

The Royal Tombs in the Abbey

- 2.3.7.1 Westminster Abbey was established as a royal mausoleum by Henry III, who intended that the shrine of the king-saint, Edward the Confessor, should be surrounded by the monuments of the House of Plantagenet. The majority of the Confessor's shrine was dismantled at the Reformation, but the other royal tombs survive. They are of outstanding historic and artistic importance, in particular those of Henry III, Eleanor of Provence, Edward III and Richard II, which have life-size bronze effigies.

The Non-Royal Tombs and Monuments in the Abbey

- 2.3.7.2 Westminster Abbey has the most important assemblage of tombs and funerary monuments in Britain, running almost continuously from the 13th to the 21st centuries. This is of outstanding importance, for the artistic and historic importance of the monuments. It is also the finest historic assemblage of sculpture in Britain, indicative of the development of the art form through eight centuries.

Medieval Architectural Sculpture in the Abbey

- 2.3.7.3 At its construction, Westminster Abbey was given probably the richest sculptural embellishment ever applied to a medieval building on this scale. Fine examples include the naturalistic leaf carving, carved capitals, bosses, figures and corbels throughout the church. The Chapter House also boasts exceptional figures.

The Cosmati Pavement

- 2.3.7.4 The great inlaid floor of the sanctuary is a great work of art, unique in Britain and extremely rare in a European context. Its splendour and imperial origins, relates to the specific role of this place as the setting for the coronation rite.

Medieval Mural Painting in the Abbey

- 2.3.7.5 The Abbey houses some of England's best surviving medieval mural paintings, notably the panel of St Faith in the chapel dedicated to her (probably late 13th century); the panels of St Thomas and St Christopher in the South Transept (probably late 13th century); the Last Judgement and Apocalypse paintings in the Chapter House (1375 – 1404).

Medieval Panel Paintings in the Abbey

- 2.3.7.6 Of the Abbey's paintings, the outstanding survival is the Westminster Retable, an extremely rare survival of a medieval liturgical work of art of the highest order from any part of Europe. Four more 13th century panel paintings survive on a sedilia, and there is the great portrait of Richard II enthroned, dating from 1396.

Medieval Fittings and Furnishings in the Abbey

- 2.3.7.7 A number of other medieval furnishings survived the Reformation and the Commonwealth, the most outstanding of which is the Coronation Chair, carved in wood and used in every coronation since that of Edward II in 1308.

Medieval Sculpture in Westminster Hall

- 2.3.7.8 Westminster Hall houses an important sequence of medieval stone statues, representing Kings of England commissioned by Richard II.

Mural Painting and Mosaics in the New Palace of Westminster

- 2.3.7.9 The Prince Consort chaired a committee to consider revival of mural painting, and the resulting works span a variety of subjects from the Old Testament to the British Empire. The mosaics in the Central Lobby and St Stephen's Hall are also noteworthy.

Furnishings of the New Palace of Westminster

- 2.3.7.10 Great antiquities of mid C19th furniture made for the palace are retained here, making a vital contribution to its interiors, as some of the greatest set-pieces of 19th century decorative art.

The Abbey's Muniment Room

- 2.3.7.11 The Abbey's Muniment Room contains a great historic library collection, and an archive of medieval documents relating to the Abbey that date from the 13th century onwards, as well as a number of documents referring to major historical figures.

The Parliamentary Collection of Works of Art

2.3.7.12 The core of this is a collection of paintings and sculptures of British politicians of the 17th to 20th centuries.

There are also numerous paintings of other kinds, many of them representing special commissions for the Palace. This tradition of patronage of the arts continues to this day.

The Parliamentary Record Office

2.3.7.13 This Record Office has archives and record of both Houses of Parliament from the 14th century to the present day including copies of every Act of Parliament from the early 17th century onwards and important archives on the history of the Palace itself.

2.3.8 Intellectual Significance

2.3.8.1 With its long history of internationally important individuals, events and development of institutions, the WHS is an unparalleled knowledge resource for school children, students and life-long learning. It contains the complementary resources of buildings, archaeology, documents, artefacts and works of art.

2.3.9 Public significance

2.3.9.1 The significance of Westminster is linked not just to physical artefacts and the way we perceive them, but to the way the buildings and spaces are, through traditional, religious and ceremonial uses, a part of today's living culture.

2.3.9.2 Westminster can offer substantial benefits to visitors through enabling them to understand key national institutions and their role in contemporary society, as well as the way those institutions have evolved over the centuries. It also offers the opportunity to become involved with those institutions through a wide range of activities from church services to observing parliamentary debates

2.3.9.3 The WHS is one of the key tourist attractions for London and Great Britain. It is a place of interest, inspiration and beauty. As the focus of national government and events, it is important that people are able to come to see and experience at first hand the important monuments that they see on television and read about in newspapers.

The tourists not only take away their experiences, share them with others and to some extent, continue the democratic process, the revenue brought by their visits provides funds for the conservation of the buildings and monuments within the WHS, providing for their preservation for future generations.

2.4 Test of authenticity

2.4.1 In addition to meeting at least one of the criteria for inscription as a World Heritage Site, the *Operational Guidelines for Implementation of the World Heritage Site Convention* state that a site must demonstrate that it can:

- i meet the test of authenticity in design, material, workmanship, or setting ...
- ii have adequate legal and/or traditional protection and management mechanisms to ensure the conservation of the nominated cultural properties or cultural landscapes....

2.4.2 The first measure of the authenticity of Westminster WHS is the great predominance of authentic fabric of all periods, particularly in the medieval Westminster Abbey and conventual buildings, Westminster Hall and the Jewel Tower. A second indication is the thick layer of well-preserved archaeological deposits lying *in situ*, beneath the buildings and spaces of the Westminster WHS.

2.4.3 Like many historic sites, particularly those which remain in constant use over centuries, buildings within the Westminster WHS have been modified or have needed to be rebuilt at some stage in their history. That continuity of use and evolution is a further measure of the WHS' authenticity. Moreover the great majority of modifications, restorations or rebuilding have either used traditional (or long-lasting) materials or, as with the rebuilding of the Parliamentary buildings, have continued the original role and use of the building and remained true to the pre-eminence of the site in the use of eminent architects and craftsmen.

- 2.4.4 The Westminster WHS is a working and living place which continues to live its history, maintaining many of the traditions and practices in both day to day work and ceremonial occasions, while meeting the demands and opportunities of modern life. This continuity and change is a further indication of the authenticity of the tangible and intangible values of the Westminster WHS.

2.5 Revising the Outstanding Universal Values

- 2.5.1 Section 5 of the Nomination Document for Westminster World Heritage Site: Justification for inclusion, stressed the historic, architectural and symbolic values of the site and are summarised in 2.2.1 above. However the analysis of the significance set out above, which includes intellectual and public significance, suggests that the Outstanding Universal Values, as recognised by the World Heritage Committee, should be revised at the appropriate time. This, along with any application to revise the boundaries of the site, will need to be undertaken through DCMS as the state party.

2.6 Statutory Designations

2.6.1 Buildings

- 2.6.1.1 The Palace and Abbey buildings within the World Heritage Site are Grade I, Grade II* or Grade II Listed Buildings.

2.6.2 Archaeology

- 2.6.2.2 The whole of the WHS falls within Westminster's Area of Special Archaeological Priority: Lundenwic and Thorney Island.

- 2.6.2.3 The Chapter House and Pyx Chamber and the Jewel Tower are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

2.6.3 Strategic Views

- 2.6.3.1 Policies to protect Strategic Views include corridor boundaries that include all of the Palace of Westminster section of the WHS and all of St. Margaret's Church and part of the Henry VII Chapel eastern end of the Westminster Abbey section. The corridors are related to Strategic View 2 - from Primrose Hill to the Palace of Westminster and Strategic View 4 - from Parliament Hill to the Palace of Westminster.

2.6.4 Conservation Areas

- 2.6.4.1 The whole of the WHS falls within the Westminster Abbey and Parliament Square Conservation Area (No. 20) and adjoins principal parts of other areas: to the north the Whitehall Conservation Area (No. 19) to the south the Smith Square Conservation Area (No. 21).
- 2.6.4.2 To the east the whole of the river frontage opposite the WHS and beyond the midpoint of the River Thames and Westminster and Lambeth Bridges falls within Lambeth's Conservation Areas.

2.6.5 Parks and Gardens

- 2.6.5.1 Parliament Square and Victoria Tower Gardens are each included in the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.
- 2.6.5.2 The whole of the WHS falls within Westminster's Thames Policy Area and the boundary of Westminster's Thames Floodplain.
- 2.6.5.3 The Thames Path passes immediately adjoining the eastern section of the WHS along public highway from Victoria Tower Gardens in the South to the Thames Embankment Walk in the north.

