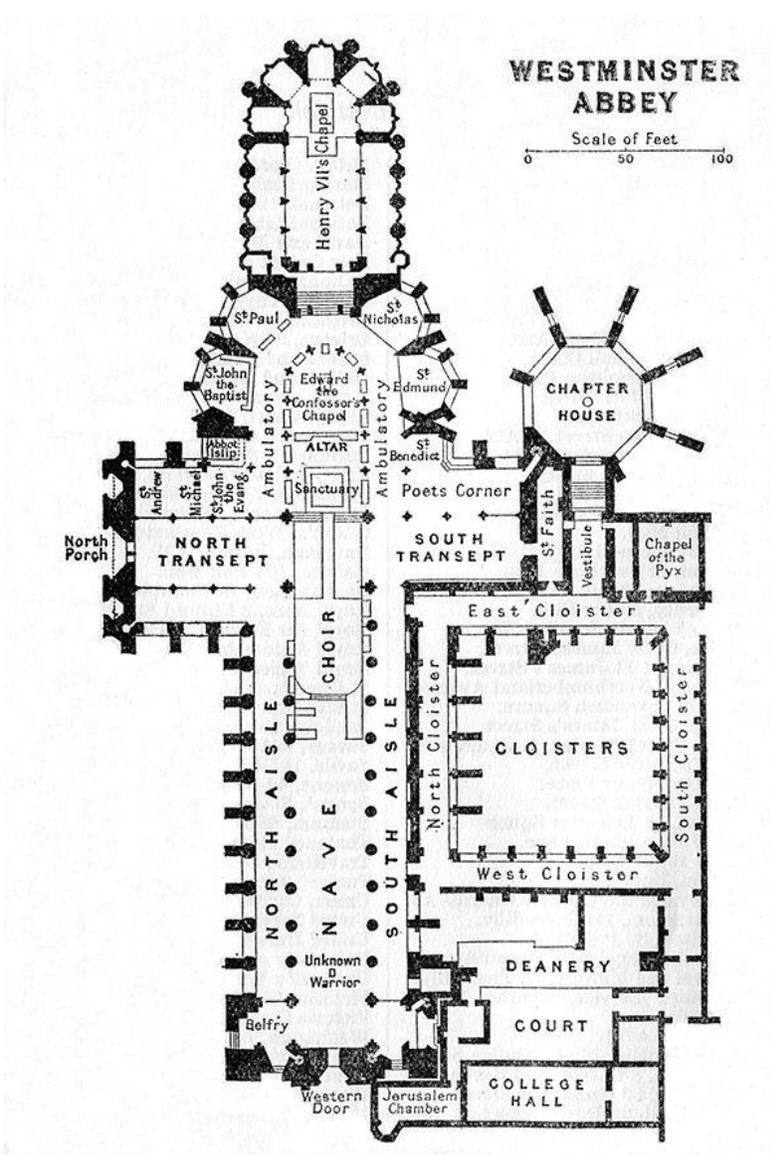


Westminster Abbey

20 Deans Yd., Westminster, SW1P 3PA
Tube: Westminster (Jubilee, District, Circle Lines)
St James's Park (District and Circle Lines)
9:30 AM - 3:30 PM (Mon-Fri) £22
9:30 AM - 1:30 PM (Saturday)



An architectural masterpiece of the **13th to 16th centuries**, Westminster Abbey also presents a unique pageant of British history – the shrine of St Edward the Confessor, the tombs of kings and queens, and countless memorials to the famous and the great. It has been the **setting for every Coronation since 1066** and for numerous other royal occasions, Today it is still a church dedicated to regular worship and to the celebration of great events in the life of the nation. Neither a cathedral nor a parish church, Westminster Abbey (or the **Collegiate Church of St Peter, Westminster** to give it its correct title) is a "Royal Peculiar" under the jurisdiction of a Dean and Chapter, subject only to the Sovereign and not to any archbishop or bishop.

In 1040 King Edward chose to re-endow and greatly enlarge, a small Benedictine monastery building a large stone church in honour of St Peter the Apostle. This church became known as the "**west minster**" to distinguish it from **St Paul's Cathedral (the east minster)** in the City of London. Unfortunately, when the new church was consecrated December 1065 the King was too ill to attend and died a few days later. His mortal remains were entombed in front of the High Altar.

The only traces of Edward's monastery to be seen today are in the round arches and massive supporting columns of the **undercroft** and the Pyx Chamber in the cloisters. The undercroft was originally part of the domestic quarters of the monks. Among the most significant ceremonies that occurred in the Abbey at this period was the coronation of William the Conqueror on Christmas day 1066, and the "translation" or moving of King Edward's body to a new tomb a few years after his canonisation in 1161.

Edward's Abbey survived for two centuries until the middle of the 13th century when **King Henry III decided to rebuild it in the new Gothic style of architecture**. It was a **great age for cathedrals**: in France it saw the construction of Amiens, Evreux and Chartres and in England Canterbury, Winchester and Salisbury, to mention a few. Under the decree of the King of England, Westminster Abbey was designed to be not only a great monastery and place of worship, but also a place for the coronation and burial of monarchs.

Every monarch since William the Conqueror has been crowned in the Abbey. The Abbey contains over 600 monuments and wall tablets – the **most important collection of monumental sculpture anywhere in the country** - and over 3000 people are buried here.

A remarkable new addition to the Abbey was the glorious **Lady chapel built by King Henry VII, first of the Tudor monarchs**, which now bears his name. This has a spectacular **fan-vaulted roof**.

Two centuries later a further addition was made to the Abbey when the western towers (left unfinished from medieval times) were completed in 1745. Little remains of the original medieval stained glass, once one of the Abbey's chief glories. The great west window and the rose window date from the early 18th century but the remainder of the glass dates from the 19th century onwards.

History did not cease with the dissolution of the medieval monastery in 1540. The same year **Henry VIII erected Westminster into a cathedral church** with a bishop a dean and twelve **prebendaries**. The **bishopric** was surrendered in 1550 and the diocese was re-united with London, Westminster being made by Act of Parliament a cathedral church in the diocese of London. Mary I restored the Benedictine monastery in 1556.

But on the **accession of Elizabeth I** the religious houses revived by Mary were given by Parliament to the Crown and the **Abbot and monks were removed in 1559**. **Queen Elizabeth I, buried in the north aisle of Henry VII's chapel**, refounded the Abbey by a charter 1560 as a **Collegiate Church** exempt from the jurisdiction of archbishops and bishops and with the Sovereign as its Visitor. Its Royal Peculiar status from 1534 was re-affirmed by the Queen and In place of the monastic community a collegiate body of a dean and prebendaries, minor canons and a lay staff was established and charged with the task of continuing the tradition of daily worship (for which a musical foundation of choristers, singing men and organist was provided) and with the education of forty Scholars who formed the nucleus of what is now Westminster School (one of the country's leading independent schools). In addition the Dean and Chapter were responsible for much of the civil government of Westminster, a role which was only fully relinquished in the early 20th century.