



Palace of Westminster | Factsheet

The Palace of Westminster is one of the most iconic and significant buildings in the world. It is home to one of the busiest parliaments, with more than a million people, including 100,000 schoolchildren, passing through its doors each year.

Key Facts

- Grade I listed building and part of UNESCO Westminster World Heritage Site
- Total ground area of Palace: 8 acres (32,375m²) – includes all courtyards, gardens and 5 acres of buildings
- Total internal area of the Palace: 112,476m² – includes all floors, internal walls, plant rooms, hallways, storage spaces, and underground car park
- Nearly 300m in length
- More than 1,100 rooms, 100 staircases and 31 lifts in the Palace precincts
- More than 3km of passages set over seven levels

The Palace is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site which also incorporates Westminster Abbey, the Jewel Tower and St Margaret's Church.

The Palace contains a combination of ancient and modern structures and is home to a significant collection of works of art, archives and furnishings. It houses royal ceremonial rooms for the State Opening of Parliament, the Chambers for both Houses and their attendant spaces, offices for members of both Houses and their staff, together with staff working for the administrations.

Designed by the architect Charles Barry to be the purpose-built home of Parliament, it replaced the old Palace which burned down in a major fire in 1834, and is now considered to be one of the finest examples of neo-gothic architecture in the world. Augustus Welby Pugin assisted Barry by designing most of the Palace's ornate Gothic interiors, including carvings, gilt work, panelling and furniture.

The Palace is on four main levels and was designed so the surviving medieval buildings – Westminster Hall, the Cloisters of St Stephen's College, and the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft – formed an integral part of the whole.

The ground floor river front houses offices, catering facilities and meeting rooms, the first or principal floor includes the Chambers, libraries, and dining rooms, the second or Committee floor on the river front has Committee rooms, as does the third or Upper Committee floor.

The Palace was damaged by air raids on 14 different occasions during the Second World War. The most notable damage was caused in 1941, when the Commons Chamber was entirely destroyed. A replacement was constructed to the designs of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and opened in 1950.

Westminster Hall

- Oldest structure on the estate, completed in 1099
- One of very few parts of the ancient Palace which survives in almost its original form
- Probably the largest hall of its time in Europe
- Used mainly for state occasions and ceremonies
- Largest medieval timber roof in Northern Europe, measuring 20.7m by 73.2m

Elizabeth Tower

- Formerly called the Clock Tower
- Commonly known as Big Ben after its main bell
- Houses turret clock designed by E.B. Denison
- Height: 96.3m
- Steps to the belfry: 334
- Steps to the lantern (Ayrton Light): 399
- Weight of the Great Bell (Big Ben): 13.8 tonnes

Victoria Tower

- Designed as a royal entrance
- Gateways built wide enough to allow Queen's Coach to drive through for State Openings of Parliament
- Home to Parliamentary Archives
- Iron flagstaff flies Royal Standard if monarch is present or Union flag at all other times
- Height: 98.5m

Central Tower

- Only Palace tower to have a stone spire
- Contains largest known octagonal gothic vault without a central pillar
- Originally designed to serve as a ventilating chimney for stale air and smoke from fireplaces

Main Image: The Palace of Westminster
© UK Parliament