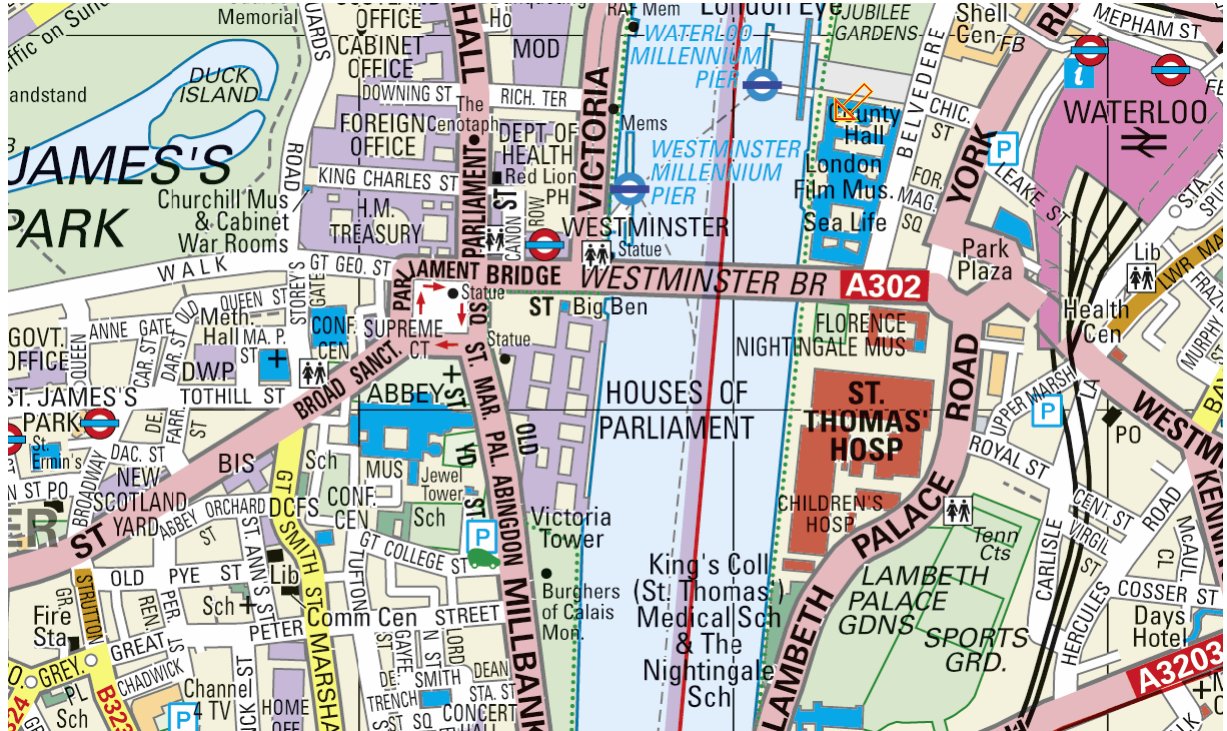




City of Westminster

Palace of Westminster



The **Palace of Westminster** is the meeting place of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the two houses of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Commonly known as the Houses of Parliament after its tenants, the Palace lies on the Middlesex bank of the River Thames in the City of Westminster, in central London. Its name, which derives from the neighbouring Westminster Abbey, may refer to either of two structures: the Old Palace, a medieval building complex that was destroyed by fire in 1834, and its replacement New Palace that stands today. For ceremonial purposes, the palace retains its original style and status as a royal residence.

The first royal palace was built on the site in the eleventh century, and Westminster was the primary London residence of the Kings of England until a fire destroyed much of the complex in 1512. After that, it served as the home of Parliament, which had been meeting there since the thirteenth century, and the seat of the Royal Courts of Justice, based in and around Westminster Hall. In 1834, an even greater fire ravaged the heavily rebuilt Houses of Parliament, and the only structures of significance to survive were Westminster Hall, the Cloisters of St Stephen's, the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft and the Jewel Tower.

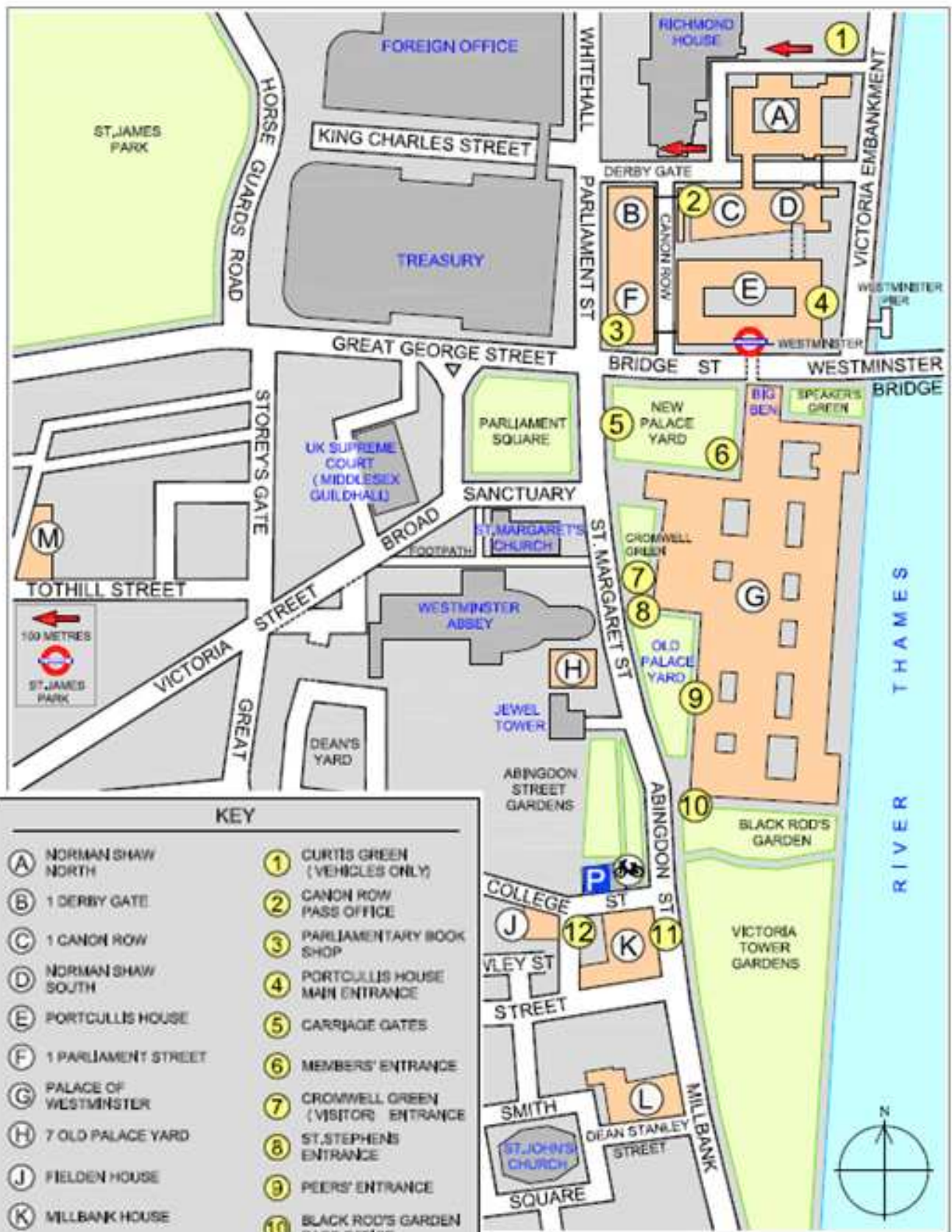
The subsequent competition for the reconstruction of the Palace was won by architect **Charles Barry** and his design for a building in the Perpendicular Gothic style. The remains of the Old Palace (with the exception of the detached Jewel Tower) were incorporated in its much larger replacement, which contains over 1,100 rooms organised symmetrically around two series of courtyards. Part of the New Palace's area of 3.24 hectares (8 acres) was reclaimed from the Thames, which is the setting of its principal façade, the 266-metre (873 ft) river front. Construction started in 1840 and lasted for thirty years, suffering great delays and cost overruns, as well as the death of both leading architects; works for the interior decoration continued intermittently well into the twentieth century. Major conservation work has been carried out since, due to the effects of London's air pollution, and extensive repairs took place after the Second World War, including the reconstruction of the Commons Chamber following its bombing in 1941.

The Palace is one of the centres of political life in the United Kingdom; "Westminster" has become a metonym for the UK Parliament, and the Westminster system of government has taken its name after it. The Elizabeth Tower, in particular, which is often referred to by the name of its main bell, "Big Ben", is an iconic landmark of London and the United Kingdom in general, one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city and an emblem of parliamentary democracy. The Palace of Westminster has been a Grade I listed building since 1970 and part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987.



Cromwell Green, visitors entrance, outside Westminster Hall, is the site of Hamo Thornycroft's bronze statue of Oliver Cromwell, erected amid controversy in 1899

There are a number of small gardens surrounding the Palace of Westminster. Victoria Tower Gardens is open as a public park along the side of the river south of the palace. Black Rod's Garden is closed to the public and is used as a private entrance. Old Palace Yard, in front of the Palace; Cromwell Green also on the frontage; New Palace Yard (on the north side) and Speaker's Green (directly north of the Palace) and College Green are all private and closed to the public.



KEY

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|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (A) NORMAN SHAW NORTH | (1) CURTIS GREEN (VEHICLES ONLY) |
| (B) 1 DERBY GATE | (2) CANON ROW PASS OFFICE |
| (C) 1 CANON ROW | (3) PARLIAMENTARY BOOK SHOP |
| (D) NORMAN SHAW SOUTH | (4) PORTCULLIS HOUSE MAIN ENTRANCE |
| (E) PORTCULLIS HOUSE | (5) CARRIAGE GATES |
| (F) 1 PARLIAMENT STREET | (6) MEMBERS' ENTRANCE |
| (G) PALACE OF WESTMINSTER | (7) CROMWELL GREEN (VISITOR ENTRANCE) |
| (H) 7 OLD PALACE YARD | (8) ST. STEPHENS ENTRANCE |
| (J) FIELDEN HOUSE | (9) PEERS' ENTRANCE |
| (K) MILLBANK HOUSE | (10) BLACK ROD'S GARDEN PASS OFFICE |
| (L) 7 MILLBANK | (11) MILLBANK HOUSE MAIN ENTRANCE |
| (M) 14 TOTHILL STREET | (12) FIELDEN HOUSE |

Overseas visitors

Overseas visitors can watch laws being made, attend debates and watch committees when Parliament is in session. They can visit the Archives on Mondays to Fridays and tour Parliament on Saturdays and during Summer Opening.

Saturday and Summer Opening



The guided tour takes about 75 minutes and includes the Commons and Lords Chambers, the Queen's Robing Room, the Royal Gallery and Westminster Hall.

What does the tour cover?

The tour takes in some of the most important areas of the Palace in which Parliament meets, and explains what Parliament is and does, what it has meant to different people at different times, and how it came to be what it is today.

Most of the buildings seen on the tour were built in the mid 19th Century following a devastating fire, but the route also incorporates some of the earlier buildings, such as Westminster Hall, begun in 1097 by William Rufus, son of William the Conqueror.

Times and availability

Visitors can buy tickets for a tour of Parliament on most Saturdays throughout the year and six days a week during the Summer Opening period.

Saturday Tours

Tours are available on Saturdays from 9.15am - 4.30pm.

Booking

Tickets for tours can be booked:

- Online on the [ticketmaster website](#)
- By telephone on 0844 847 1672

Tickets can also be purchased in person in advance or on the day (subject to availability) from the ticket office located adjacent to the Jewel Tower, opposite the Houses of Parliament. The ticket office is open from 8.45am to 4.45pm on all days when Saturday or Summer tours are in operation. **Please note: there is no step-free access to this office.**

Ticket prices

- Adult: £15
- **Child (5-15 years): £6**
- Concessions (students, over 60s and members of the armed forces): £10
- Disabled visitors: Standard prices as listed above (carers have free admission, but will require a ticket for entrance).

Recess dates

Parliament does not sit all year round. During periods called recesses, Members can carry out their other duties.

Recess dates are announced in the House of Commons by the Leader of the House of Commons. The exact pattern of recesses can change and is normally slightly different for the two Houses.

The Leader of the House of Commons has only announced recess dates up to January 2014. This page will be updated within one working day when further announcements have been made. This page was last updated on 18 October 2012.

House of Commons

Recess dates 2012-13 and 2013-14 (Note: All recess dates are provisional)

Recess	House rises	House returns
Summer	18 July 2013	2 September 2013

Royalty and splendour in the House of Lords



Exclusive guided tours focusing on the art and decorative arts of the House of Lords are available on selected Friday evenings throughout 2012.

What does the tour cover?

The finest British artists of their day designed the wonderful frescoes, portraits, statues, thrones, fireplaces and furniture that are explored in a new tour.

The 75 minute long guided tours will run from 5.30pm during spring and summer and offer an exclusive experience after the doors close to the public.

The visit showcases the exquisite craftsmanship of A.W.N. Pugin and Charles Barry and the artistry of William Dyce and Daniel Maclise amongst others.

The tour starts in Sovereign's Entrance and follows the Royal Processional Route through the House of Lords and finishes with a glass of champagne in one of the Palace's private rooms.

Times and availability

Visitors attending this tour should arrive at Black Rod's Garden entrance and allow 15 minutes before the tour begins to allow time to pass through security.

Tours are available 16 and 30 March, 25 May, 29 June and 20 July at 5.30pm, 5.45pm and 6pm

Booking

Tickets for tours can be booked:

- Online on the [ticketmaster website](#)
- By telephone on 0844 847 1672

Ticket prices

- Standard: £30.00