Church fact: Christians have been worshipping in this spot for more than a thousand years. 
State fact: Since 1066 our kings and queens have come to Westminster Abbey to be crowned.

Today in Britain we live in a democracy in which people of different faiths, or none, can choose who governs us. Exploring Westminster Abbey will help you to understand how this country has come about and how the Abbey shows us faith at the heart of the nation today.

This map will help guide you around the Abbey. The trail starts at number 1 in the cloisters. Follow the blue dots in numerical order.

The martlet appears on the Westminster Abbey shield. It is a stylised bird with short tufts of feathers instead of legs. The inability of the martlet to land may symbolise the constant quest for knowledge and learning.
In the 11th century, Edward the Confessor built a new palace by the river at Westminster, where the Houses of Parliament are now, and a new Abbey church here. He had a joint vision for the two buildings: he would rule his country with God’s help.

For 500 years, until Henry VIII closed the monastery in 1540, the monks spent most of their time here in the cloisters, studying and teaching in the monastery school. Education in England started in monasteries like this, then in church schools.

**Why is education important to a democracy?**

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Edward the Confessor was king of England from 1042-1066. His reign was a time of peace and he was a holy man. He was buried in his abbey in 1066 and was made a saint in 1161.

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In the Coronation Service, the monarch holds certain objects or *regalia*.

**Draw lines to match up the objects with what you think they symbolise.**

- **Sword of State**
- **Orb** (a jewelled ball with a cross on top)
- **Two Sceptres** (jewelled rods)
- **St. Edward’s Crown**
- **A Ring**

**Kingship**

- **The Monarch’s Rule over the Country**
- **Jesus’ Rule over the World**
- **The ‘Marriage’ between the Monarch and the State**
- **Justice**

**There are four main parts to the Coronation service.**

- The king or queen is presented to the people.
- The king or queen swears an oath to uphold the law and the Church.
- The monarch is anointed with oil, presented with the regalia and crowned.
- The people pay homage.

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To anoint: to put oil on someone as a symbol that they are blessed by God.

To pay homage: to show respect to someone.
Ask a Marshal in a red gown for entry through the rope into the Nave.
Stand by the Grave of the Unknown Warrior.

During World War I, thousands of soldiers died. It was sometimes impossible to tell who they were, so their bodies were buried near the battlefield and marked with a white cross. On November 11th 1920, one of these soldiers was brought back and buried in the Abbey. The King attended the funeral. It is quite likely that the unknown warrior could not vote in elections to choose a Member of Parliament. This changed in 1918 when it was felt that the many men who had risked their lives for their country deserved to choose its government.

Why is it important that this soldier is unknown?

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In 1918 the Representation of the People Act gave the vote to all men over the age of 21 and women over the age of 30.

How old do both men and women have to be before they can vote today?

Stand looking at the painting of the Virgin Mary with Jesus in her lap, by the candles. Look up to the windows and find a picture of Henry III. Hint: he is holding a model of the Abbey in his left hand.

Look around at the columns, the arches and the roof and talk about how the architecture of this building makes the worshipper raise their eyes to heaven.

In the 13th century Henry III made the Palace of Westminster his main residence, close to the Abbey.

What message was Henry sending to his people by living next to the Abbey?
Find this wooden case in the aisle.

On the case is a crowned portcullis, the symbol of the Queen’s Westminster Rifles Regiment.

**Where have you seen this symbol before? Look out for it as you walk around the Abbey.**

Now look up at the stained glass window above. Just below it is a sculpture showing the assassination of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval.

**When and where was Spencer Perceval shot?**

**Why do you think this assassination is much less famous, even in Britain, than those of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy?**

Walk on through the gates until you reach this statue of William Wilberforce on your right.

**What law did Wilberforce, with the help of others, persuade Parliament to pass in 1807?**

**What is the name of one of the people who helped him?**

*Hint: look on the floor to the left of the statue*

In the Bible, St Paul writes to the Galatians: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

**Why might Wilberforce have studied this passage very carefully?**
Walk back the way you have come and into the centre of the Nave. Walk up through the Quire Screen, just as the king or queen would do on their way to be crowned at the High Altar.

Talk about the similarities between this part of the Abbey and the House of Lords and the House of Commons chambers. Think about:

- The colours used
- The layout of the seating
- Special seat for the monarch
- Look for the royal coat of arms
- Architectural style

Since the reign of Elizabeth I the Abbey has been a ‘Royal Peculiar’, subject only to the authority of the Sovereign, not the bishops who lead the Church of England. Bishops are not elected but sit in the House of Lords where they can influence the passing of laws.

Talk about whether you agree or disagree with the speech bubbles.

Bishops should not sit in Parliament because they are not elected.

Bishops should sit in the House of Lords because bishops have advised the ruler since 1066.

There should be no religious leaders in Parliament because there are many different religions in Britain today and many people are not religious.

Having bishops in Parliament means that when new laws are passed religious views are considered.

Bishops sit in the House of Lords because the Church of England is the ‘established’ (official) church in this country and has been since the time of Henry VIII.

Because the Church of England is the established church, there is a local parish church for every part of Great Britain and Northern Island where anyone can have a marriage, baptism or funeral.

Talk about whether you feel this is important in the 21st century.

This style of architecture is called ‘Gothic Revival’. It became popular at the beginning of the 19th century as people reacted against the classical style of the 18th century and began to prefer the grandeur and strangeness of the medieval period.

The Queen is Head of State in our country; she is Supreme Governor of the Church of England and she is also Head of the Commonwealth. On Commonwealth Day each year and in other services during the year, people of all different faiths come to the Abbey to share prayers.
The space between the Quire and the steps is called the Lantern. Stand underneath the painted patterned roof in the centre. This is where the king or queen stands or sits before and after the coronation. The High Altar is the most sacred part of a church where Holy Communion is celebrated.

For the coronation, the Coronation Chair is placed on this beautiful, 750 year old Cosmati Pavement. The monarch sits on the chair, facing the High Altar and away from the people, to be anointed and crowned.

Why do you think the chair faces the High Altar?

High Altar
The most sacred part of a church where Holy Communion is celebrated.

Holy Communion
Christians share bread and wine to remember Jesus’ death on the cross. The bread symbolises Jesus’ body and the wine his blood.

Until 1821 the monarch would spend the night before the coronation in the Palace of Westminster, then process over to the Abbey for the coronation and return to the palace for a grand banquet. At George III’s coronation in 1761 some of the congregation forgot that it is a solemn religious ceremony and began their banquet during the service!

Look out for the statues of three of Queen Victoria’s Prime Ministers: Sir Robert Peel, William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli.

The monarch meets the Prime Minister every week to discuss the state of the nation.

Why do these meetings continue when the monarch may no longer pass laws but only assent to them?

On the right, up a small flight of wooden steps, is the Chapel of St. Edward the Confessor. This is the most holy part of the Abbey as it contains the Shrine of St Edward. Prayers are still said in the Shrine on most days. Around it are buried medieval kings, including Henry III.

Why might kings and queens want to be buried close to the shrine?
Continue around the Ambulatory. Climb the steps and enter the Lady Chapel, built by Henry VII who is buried here. Look at the beautiful ceiling.

Between the angels over the gate you have just walked through Henry VII has placed symbols of his family, the Tudors. Look out for the rose, his grandmother’s fleur-de-lys and his mother’s portcullis.

**Talk about why you think he has done this.**

Walk to the far eastern end of the chapel, round the tomb of Henry VII and his wife, Elizabeth of York, where you will find a small stone on the floor marking the site of the burial place of Oliver Cromwell. Just beyond the wall of the Abbey here is Westminster Hall and Cromwell Green with its statue of Oliver Cromwell. Please do not stop long in this narrow space.

Cromwell was a leading member of the Parliament that executed Charles I in 1649. He ruled England as Lord Protector from 1653 until his death in 1658 when he was buried in the Abbey. In 1661, after the return to the throne of Charles II, son of Charles I, Cromwell’s body was dug up. He was then hanged and decapitated, his head being stuck on a spike outside Westminster Hall.

Go down the steps and continue around the Ambulatory. Continue into the South Transept, Poets’ Corner. Many of the people buried and remembered here are famous poets and writers. Look on the floor for the grave of Charles Dickens. He is near the door leading to St Faith’s Chapel. There are toilets in Poets’ Corner.

Before writing his stories, Charles Dickens spent 5 years as a reporter in the Houses of Parliament. He wanted to change society and could have become an MP but thought he could help the poor better as a writer than an MP.

**Do you think he was right?**
Leave Poets’ Corner and enter the Cloisters. Go straight ahead and turn left to visit the Chapter House.

The Chapter House is where the monks held meetings each day, to read a chapter of the Rule of St Benedict and discuss their day.

The monks at Westminster Abbey wore the black habit of the Order of St Benedict, who had originally established the Benedictine rules for the monks of his own abbey in Italy about 540 AD. According to the Rule, they were to take a vow of obedience, lead a simple life, be celibate and own no individual property. The monks would spend their days praying, reading, working in the fields and looking after pilgrims to the Abbey.

Read the text at the bottom of the windows opposite the entrance to find out which two other groups used to meet here in the 13th and 14th centuries.

At the end of your tour, try to imagine the King’s ‘Great Court’ meeting here, 750 years ago: the king on his throne, the nobles and bishops seated on the stone benches running around the octagonal walls. The tiled floor is original and shows the three lions of Henry III’s coat of arms which still survive as an emblem of England. The group of faces in the wall paintings are believed to depict members of Parliament!

Leave the Chapter House, turning left then right at the corner of the Cloister. We hope you enjoyed your visit! To leave, follow the signs for the exit via the Great West Door.