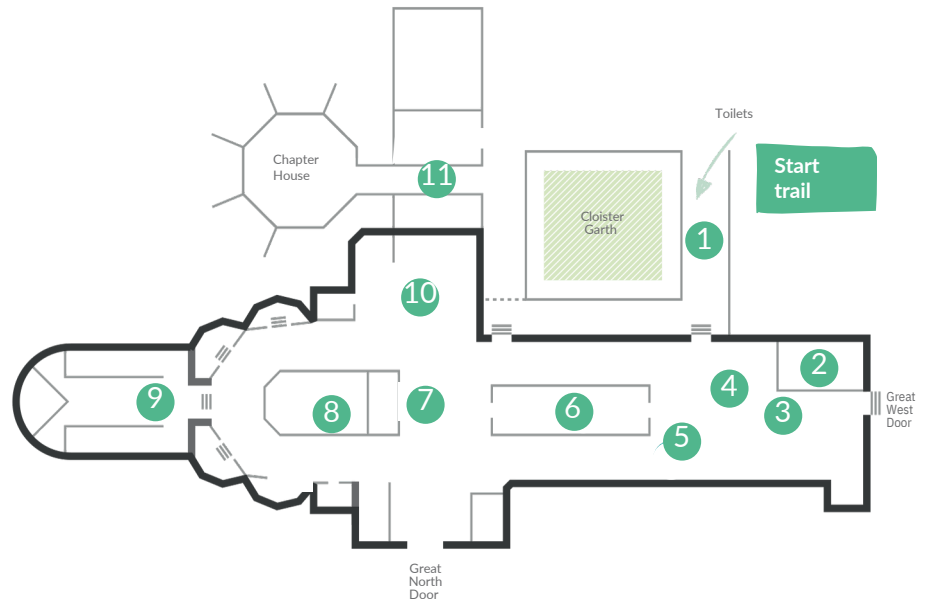


Abbey Highlights

There has been a place of worship here for over 1,000 years, and today the Abbey is still a living church. The first stone Abbey, built by King Edward the Confessor, was completed in 1065. In the 1240s it was rebuilt in the Gothic style by King Henry III. Westminster Abbey has been the site of coronations since 1066 and over 3,000 people are buried or remembered here.

This map will help guide you around the Abbey. Follow the green dots in numerical order.

Top tip! If you have any questions, feel free to ask an Abbey Marshal or Abbey Guide in a red or blue gown.



1 The cloisters

Westminster Abbey used to be a monastery, a place where monks live and worship together. The monks spent much of their time in the cloisters: meditating; exercising; studying; writing; and teaching. The Abbey was a working monastery for over 500 years, until the reign of King Henry VIII, when all monasteries in England were closed as part of the Reformation.



- A church has existed here since 950 AD when St Dunstan brought a group of Benedictine monks from Glastonbury. The Abbey was founded on an island in a boggy marsh near the Thames, called Thorney Island. Nothing of that structure remains today.
- As well as the first stone Abbey, Edward the Confessor also built the Palace of Westminster nearby, making it the seat of his government. Today, it is better known as the Houses of Parliament.

Question: Why do you think monks (or nuns) traditionally live together in communities?

Stretch: Why would it have been important to Edward the Confessor to put a church by his palace?

2 The Coronation Chair

Since 1308, this chair has been used in coronations as the place where the monarch sits during important parts of the service, including the crowning. It was made on the orders of King Edward I to hold the Stone of Scone, the Scottish coronation stone, which he had captured. The chair was originally decorated with patterns of foliage and animals but has been damaged over time. You might notice the marks on the back, which are graffiti from Victorian schoolboys and visitors.

- This chair is the oldest piece of furniture in the country still used for its original purpose.
- In 1950, Scottish students broke into Westminster Abbey and 'reclaimed' the Stone of Scone, in an act of Scottish nationalism. Whilst the stone was brought back to the Abbey, it was formally returned to Scotland as part of Scottish devolution in 1997. It is returned to the Abbey for coronations.
- King Charles III was crowned in the chair in 2023. The coronation service is a Christian service and includes Holy Communion, hymns and prayers.



Question: Why is it important for the same chair to be used in coronations?

Stretch: Why has the Stone of Scone been considered so controversial and symbolic?

3 The Grave of the Unknown Warrior

This is the grave of a person who died fighting for Britain during the First World War. Their identity is unknown; they might have served in the Army, Navy or Air Force, and may have been from any part of the British Isles, Dominions or Colonies. The Unknown Warrior represents all those who died in war and have no known grave. Out of respect, it's the only grave in the Abbey that people do not walk on.



- The First World War was the first time universal conscription was introduced in the UK. Meaning all men between 18 and 41 had to join the military, unless medically exempt.
- David Railton, an army chaplain, petitioned King George V and the Dean of Westminster to create the grave in 1920 after seeing many unidentified men laid in war cemeteries.
- The Unknown Warrior became a focus for the grief of those who did not know what became of their loved ones, as well as for the families of those buried overseas.

Question: Which words on the gravestone stood out to you?

Stretch: Do you think we should use modern DNA testing to identify the remains of the Unknown Warrior so his family can mourn?

4 Candles

Light is important in Christianity; in the Bible, Jesus is described as 'the light of the world'. Candles can also be a symbol of prayer. Both candle stations have an icon (a devotional painting of a religious figure) above them. They represent Mary with baby Jesus, and the adult Jesus. The Abbey is a Christian place of worship, but all are welcome to light a candle regardless of personal belief.

- People may choose to light candles in church for many reasons: prayer, thankfulness, remembrance of happy or sad events. You may wish to light a candle or have on person light one for your group.
- Icons are most commonly found in Orthodox Christian churches and help Christians focus and pray. They contain symbolic elements and are created by icon 'writers' as a form of prayer. Gold leaf and blue are used to symbolise heaven. Red or brown symbolises earth. Jesus is often shown wearing both colours to show that he is God incarnate (made of flesh).



Question: When might you light a candle or use light in a symbolic way? Why do you think the idea of light is so important in different faiths? How does it make you feel?

5 Scientists' Corner

This area of the Abbey is where people are buried or remembered for their contribution to science and our understanding of the world. There's no faith test to be remembered at the Abbey; people are chosen because of their contribution to a particular field of human knowledge, public service or the arts. The decision around new memorials is made by the Dean of Westminster, the most senior priest who is in charge. The Dean consults with lots of different people to help make the decision.



- Some of the most recognisable names in the fields of physics, chemistry, mathematics and astronomy are remembered here. Sir Isaac Newton, Stephen Hawking and Charles Darwin are all buried in the Abbey.
- Currently, there are no female scientists remembered in Scientists' Corner. Representation of women and people of colour in the memorials of Westminster Abbey are limited. History has diminished their roles and importance; however greater representation is something the Abbey is working towards.

Question: Can you think of someone who you believe should be memorialised at Westminster Abbey?

Stretch: People from minority communities have often been under-represented in public spaces in the UK. Do you feel this needs to be addressed and how?

6 The quire

When the Abbey was a monastery, this is where the monks would have worshipped.

Today the Abbey choristers sing in these stalls during daily services. As well as a boys' choir who attend boarding school here, the Abbey also has a girls' choir, based next door at St Margaret's Church. Look out for the seats labelled South Africa, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, which are reserved for representatives of these Commonwealth countries.

- The monks would gather in the quire to sing and pray. They sang Latin choral music and Gregorian chants unaccompanied.
- In Christianity, singing is a form of worship - of showing God how much he is worth. The choir leads the congregation in the singing of religious songs (hymns), psalms (songs from the Bible), and prayers (part of the liturgy - the set words used in some churches).
- The Commonwealth is a group of 56 countries with shared values and ambitions who have pledged to work together towards peace and cooperation. Every year in March a special service is held at Westminster Abbey to celebrate the people and cultures of the Commonwealth nations.



Question: Can you spot the organ?

Stretch: Why do you think the Abbey has so much decoration? Do you think this helps Christians when they worship or is it distracting?

7 The high altar

This is where services such as weddings, funerals and coronation take place, as well as some of the daily services. The mosaic floor, called the Cosmati Pavement, is made from thousands of individually cut pieces of stone and glass. During a coronation, the Coronation Chair is placed in the centre of this floor. The most recent royal wedding (that of William and Catherine, the Prince and Princess of Wales) took place here in 2011.



- The Cosmati Pavement represents the universe. When the monarch is crowned, the Coronation Chair is placed in the central circle, which represents the Earth. The monarch also sits facing the high altar.
- The anointing with holy oil is the most important part of the ceremony, symbolising God's blessing on the monarch.
- The high altar is up steps and behind a rope to remind people that it is considered a holy place. The mosaic behind the altar depicts the Last Supper, Jesus' final meal with his disciples. Every day at Westminster Abbey this meal is remembered in a service called the Eucharist, which means 'thanksgiving'.

Question: Why would the monarch face towards the high altar during the coronation?

Stretch: Do you think the coronation ceremony should be a religious service held in a church? Why or why not?

- 8 The shrine is not open to the general public as it is very old and fragile. Please look up to your right to see it.

Shrine of St Edward the Confessor

After building the first stone Abbey, King Edward the Confessor was buried here in 1066 and canonised (made a saint) in 1161. When the Abbey was rebuilt by King Henry III, St Edward's body was moved into this new shrine. The tombs around the shrine belong to medieval kings and queens who wanted to be buried as close to the saint as possible. St Edward's shrine has been a place of pilgrimage for hundreds of years, and pilgrims still come to pray here today.

- Many shrines were despoiled during the Reformation, most famously Thomas Becket's shrine at Canterbury. The monks of Westminster hid St Edward's body during the Reformation, restoring it only after Queen Mary I was crowned.
- The shrine isn't open to the general public because it's very old and fragile. However, prayers are offered here several times a day. In October, during Edwartide, the Abbey celebrates the life of St Edward the Confessor with special services and a day of pilgrimage.



Question: Is there anywhere which is particularly important to you? What makes it special? Do you think you will continue to visit it as you get older? Why?

Stretch: Why would St Edward the Confessor be buried in the middle of the church?

9 The Lady Chapel

Started by King Henry VII in 1503 and completed by his son, King Henry VIII, the Lady Chapel was designed as a burial place for Tudor monarchs. A lady chapel, dedicated to Mary (the mother of Jesus), can be found in most large churches. Look out for the colourful banners, belonging to the Knights of the Order of the Bath. This military order was established in 1725 and use the Lady Chapel for special services. Newly installed knights design their banners to reflect their careers and interests.



- The fan-vaulted ceiling was hand carved, and the chapel designed to look like heaven. It cost £20,000 to build, which would have been hugely expensive at the time. The 16th century historian John Leland described it as 'the wonder of the world'.
- The chapel is full of Tudor imagery, including the Tudor rose and the portcullis. The many Tudor symbols in this room would have acted as propaganda, illustrating the ruling dynasty's power.
- On the altar there is a painting of Mary, Jesus' mother, and Jesus as a baby by Vivarini. Jesus holds two cherries symbolising the sweetness of heaven.

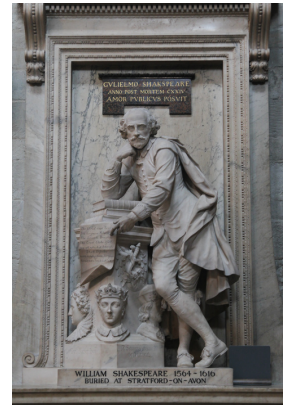
Question: If you were to design a banner, what symbols would you include to reflect your own interests?

Stretch: Why would the Tudors decide to build a chapel to show their power?

10 Poets' Corner

Over 100 poets and writers are buried or remembered in Poets' Corner. The first poet buried here, in 1400, was Geoffrey Chaucer, author of *The Canterbury Tales*. This wasn't because of his poetry but rather his job as Clerk of the King's Works, looking after royal properties. Nearly 200 years later, the poet Edmund Spenser asked to be buried near Chaucer. This started a tradition of literary memorials which still continues today, and also includes musicians, actors, singers and directors.

- Famous burials in Poets' Corner include Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Hardy.
- Edmund Spenser was an Elizabethan poet. Many of his contemporaries attended his funeral, possibly including Shakespeare, and they all threw elegies (poems about loss) into the grave. Neither Spenser's grave, nor the elegies, have ever been found.
- The large wall paintings of St Thomas and St Christopher were painted in the 13th century and indicate how the Abbey would have been decorated before the Reformation. The paintings were discovered by chance in 1934; they had been hidden behind large monuments for centuries.

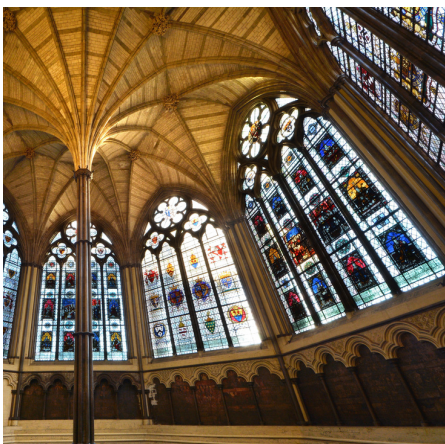


Question: Look around and see if you can see someone you know. Tell another student why you recognise their name.

Stretch: Poets' Corner is sometimes described as a place of pilgrimage for literature lovers. Would you agree and if so, why?

11 The Chapter House

The Chapter House was a meeting place for the monks who gathered every day to hear a chapter from the rules of St Benedict. In the entrance to the Chapter House is the oldest door in Britain, dating to the 1050s. Nearby is the Pyx Chamber, where pyxes (small boxes) containing gold and silver coins were kept. The Pyx Chamber is one of the few remaining parts of the first stone church and is nearly 1,000 years old.



- The circular seating and the design of this room meant that everyone could see and hear each other. It was also a private space with high windows and only one entrance, perfect for important meetings.
- The wall paintings are original and date back to the 14th century. They depict scenes from the Bible (the Book of Revelation including the Last Judgement).
- Britain's oldest door was constructed sometime in the 1050s and would have been part of St Edward the Confessor's church. It would have originally been around nine feet high.

Question: Why might paintings of 'The Last Judgement' have been chosen to decorate the walls of the Chapter House?

Stretch: Some of these stained-glass windows were damaged in the Second World War, and were replaced with new designs. Is it ok in a heritage site to make changes?



Use this space to make notes and reflect.



Use this space to make notes and reflect.