



WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Westminster Abbey, formally titled the **Collegiate Church of St Peter at Westminster**, is a large, mainly Gothic abbey church in the City of Westminster, London, located just to the west of the Palace of Westminster. It is one of the most notable religious buildings in the United Kingdom and has been the traditional place of coronation and burial site for English and, later, British monarchs. Between 1540 and 1556 the abbey had the status of a cathedral. Since 1560, however, the building is no longer an abbey nor a cathedral, having instead the status of a Church of England "Royal Peculiar"—a church responsible directly to the sovereign. The building itself is the original abbey church.

According to a tradition first reported by Sulcard in about 1080, a church was founded at the site (then known as Thorn Ey (Thorn Island)) in the 7th century, at the time of Mellitus, a Bishop of London. Construction of the present church began in 1245, on the orders of King Henry III.

Since 1066, when Harold Godwinson and William the Conqueror were crowned, the coronations of English and British monarchs have been held there. There have been at least 16 royal weddings at the abbey since 1100. Two were of reigning monarchs (Henry I and Richard II), although, before 1919, there had been none for some 500 years.

The first reports of the abbey are based on a late tradition claiming that a young fisherman called Aldrich on the River Thames saw a vision of Saint Peter near the site. This seems to be quoted to justify the gifts of salmon from Thames fishermen that the abbey received in later years. In the present era, the Fishmonger's Company still gives a salmon every year. The proven origins are that in the 960s or early 970s, Saint Dunstan, assisted by King Edgar, installed a community of Benedictine monks here.

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