

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

PARLIAMENT SQUARE

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	PARLIAMENT SQUARE
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	City of Westminster (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.500744 Longitude: -0.12776659 National Grid Reference: TQ 30050 79640, TQ 30114 79629 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001342 Date first listed: 26-Nov-1996

Details

A ceremonial public square, re-designed by George Grey Wornum in 1949-50 to improve traffic flow and pedestrian access in a highly significant setting, completed for the Festival of Britain Year, 1951.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT The area now occupied by Parliament Square was formerly a crowded district of narrow streets and small houses. These were cleared under Acts passed between 1804 and 1814 to create an open area which came to be known as 'the Desert of Westminster'. A churchyard lay north of Westminster Abbey, while the area north of St Margaret's Church to Bridge Street (roughly the east half of the present Parliament Square) was laid out as Garden Square, with a perimeter path and a few specimen trees within a railed enclosure (shown in a view published in the Illustrated London News in 1851). To the west of this, across to Little George Street, was an open area laid out as gardens, at the northern end of which was a set of buildings. In the mid-C19 Lord John Manners partly redesigned Garden Square, which had been thought not grand enough as the terminus of the south prospect down Whitehall. His work was not a success. In 1866-8 Sir Charles Barry, who had been responsible for the rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster completed in 1860, was called upon to improve the Square and make it fit in with the new Palace of Westminster. Barry's design incorporated the extension of Bridge Street, which opened New Palace Yard and Westminster Hall to public view. Coincident with these works, the Metropolitan District Railway was constructed diagonally across the square, and the works caused extensive surface disruption. The result of the alterations was a central garden of two symmetrical grass plots with statues of statesmen, separated by a central east/west thoroughfare. A separate enclosure to the west, known as the Canning Enclosure, had a statue of George Canning, (d.1827), statesman and briefly in the last year of his life Prime Minister.

Discussions about altering the layout of the Square and its surrounds began in the 1930s, mainly precipitated by the need to improve traffic flow. These were revived in 1946, and after much deliberation in 1948 George Grey Wornum was invited to reconfigure the area under the Parliament Square (Improvements) Bill, in order to improve traffic conditions in preparation for the 1951 Festival of Britain. The Ministry of Transport set the requirement for one central island, and the Metropolitan Police specified that no pavement be provided and that pedestrian access to the Square be limited to the north-west, south-east, and south-west corners. Particular care was given 'to provide a worthy pedestrian approach across it from the north side of the

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square to the Abbey' (The Builder, 1949). Wornum's scheme in response to these briefs, an early version of which was ready in 1949, was a simple, dignified design, with the Square broadened westwards, leaving a reduced western section onto Little George Street. In addition, Wornum produced a specification for 25 tall and eight medium lamp standards for the Square and elsewhere in Westminster, and for teak benches. The planting of the Square was designed by the Bailiff of the Royal Parks. It included the catalpa trees which carry on the row of trees in New Palace Yard, considered to grow well without obscuring significant views, and hydrangeas, azaleas and one or two other types of flower along the boundaries of the Square, 'but nothing yellow'. Work was completed in April 1951. Under Wornum's scheme the four existing statues of past Prime Ministers were placed on the upper terrace garden, while the two statues of Lincoln and Canning were retained, albeit in a slightly different positions, on Canning Green.

Later alterations have been few. Flag post holes and traffic lights were introduced in the 1970s, and four further statues have been added: of Jan Smuts on the north side of the Square facing Westminster Abbey in 1956; of Winston Churchill on the north-east corner of the Square in 1973 (listed Grade II); of Nelson Mandela at the south-west corner in 2007; and of David Lloyd-George to the west of Churchill, also in 2007.

In 1999 the Greater London Authority assumed responsibility for Parliament Square Garden, which does not include the pavements to the east and west which are the responsibility of Westminster City Council. The green to the west, adjacent to Little George Street is managed by The Royal Parks (2003).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Parliament Square lies within Westminster, equidistant between Westminster Bridge 200m to the east and the south-east corner of St James's Park (q.v.) to the west. The Square is defined by Great George Street to the north, St Margaret Street to the east, Parliament Square road to the south, and Little George Street to the west. Within it are the main, central island and to the west, the smaller, but similarly treated, Canning Green. The Square adjoins, but lies outside the World Heritage Site inscribed in 1987 in recognition of the outstanding universal architectural, historic and symbolic significance of this group of buildings and spaces. It is included within the Westminster Abbey and Parliament Square Area Conservation Area. Numerous listed buildings and structures stand around its edge, most notably St Margaret's church and Westminster Abbey (both Grade I) to the south; Westminster Hall (Grade I) to the east; the Middlesex Guildhall (now the Supreme Court) and the Methodist Central Hall (both Grade II*) and the buildings of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Institute of Chartered Engineers (both Grade II) to the west; and HM Treasury (Grade II*) and 34-6 Parliament Street and 10 Bridge Street (both Grade II) to the north.

OTHER LAND The main area of the Square comprises a square area, roughly 75m across, with rounded corners. A level, formal lawn takes up over half of the site, open to the south towards Westminster Abbey and to the east towards the Palace of Westminster, and with terraces and walks forming L-shaped axes on its west and north sides. To the west, a paved walk of Portland stone flags, with geometric patterning provided by slightly darker York stone flags, is aligned on the north door to Westminster Abbey which stands to the south, and as the only decorative paving element, emphasises the importance of this route. Teak benches stand against raised flower beds, between which sets of stone steps, on which are set large Portland stone jardinières on low plinths, rise to an upper stone terrace which preserves the pre-existing line of plane trees. Set along the terrace are statues of past Prime Ministers, all set to face Parliament and placed on large plinths (the statues were part of the earlier scheme): at the north-west corner the Earl of Derby (Matthew Noble, 1874, listed Grade II), in the centre the Earl of Beaconsfield (Mario Raggi, 1883, listed Grade II), and near the south-west corner Sir Robert Peel (Noble 1876, listed Grade II). A raised flower bed separates the upper terrace from the road on the western edge of the Square. All the detailing, including the benches, was designed by Wornum. A statue of Nelson Mandela was placed at the south-west corner of the Square, just beyond the end of the terrace, in 2007.

Linking at right angles to this along the north side of the square, aligned on The Clock Tower (St Stephen's Tower) is a paved walk of Portland stone flags flanked to the south, abutting the lawn, by flower beds with Portland stone kerbs. To the north is a raised terrace also lined in Portland stone, and planted with two (of an original three) catalpa trees, whose planting reflected that of catalpas in New Palace Yard, and intended to enhance but not obscure the view. The west end of this walk is dominated

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by a statue of Viscount Palmerston (T. Woolner, 1876, on a pedestal by E M Barry, listed Grade II) while towards the centre is a statue of Field Marshal Jan Smuts (Jacob Epstein, listed Grade II) installed there in 1956. Wornum's design had allowed for the addition of some public monuments, notably at the north-east corner where any installation would be well seen from the Whitehall approach to the square. A statue of Winston Churchill (listed Grade II) was placed here in 1973. In 2007, a statue of Nelson Mandela (by Ian Walters) was added to the south east corner of the Square, and one of David Lloyd-George (by Glyn Williams) on the north side of the Square between Churchill and Jan Smuts.

Around the perimeter of the square are flagpole holes, added in the 1970s.

The western part of the landscape, Canning Green, comprises a raised wedge-shaped lawn, within a Portland stone parapet wall, in front of the Guildhall and Chartered Surveyors' building. The pre-existing statues of George Canning (Sir Richard Westmacott 1832, moved to the Square 1867, listed Grade II) and Abraham Lincoln (copy of Augustus St Gaudens' statue in Chicago, erected 1920, listed Grade II) were slightly moved under Wornum's scheme so that they now stand to the north and south ends, respectively, looking east. In 2009 the southern end of the Wornum design for Canning Green was altered in order to provide enhanced access to the former Middlesex Guildhall (now the Supreme Court). This has created an oval space replicating the detail of Wornum's design.

REFERENCES Illustrated London News, 16 March 1867 J London Soc 37, (1966), pp 91-104 N Bingham, Victorian and Edwardian Whitehall: Architecture and Planning, 1865-1918 (unpub PhD thesis, Univ of London 1985) I Watson, Pimlico Past and Present (1987) Weinreb B et al, The London Encyclopaedia (3rd edition, 2008) Parliament Square: The evolution of the area (consultant report: Montagu Evans, June 2007) Parliament Square: Its significance and value as a place (consultant report: KM Heritage for English Heritage, August 2007) Simms, B, Parliament Square: Review and Appraisal of the Grey Wornum Design (draft consultant report for English Heritage, June 2008)

Maps R Horwood, Map of London, 1792-9, 2nd edition 1813 by William Faden Bacon, Map of London, 1888

Archival items Prints and preparatory sketches of G Wornum's design (RIBA Drawings Collection)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Parliament Square is included on the Register of Parks and Gardens at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * Design interest: a characteristically simple, restrained, open and elegant post-war remodelling of Parliament Square, determined by Parliament Square (Improvements) Bill, by the celebrated architect GG Wornum to enhance the setting and views of major historic buildings, (now within the setting of Westminster World Heritage Site and Westminster Conservation Area); to define pedestrian access in direct response to the setting and to ease traffic flow in the light of increased volume, completed to coincide with the Festival of Britain in 1951; * Planting: designed by the Bailiff of the Royal Parks; retention of existing plane trees set on raised terrace to west; planting of catalpa trees to the north echoing those in New Palace Yard and St Margaret's Church, to define but not obscure significant views; offset by minimally treated flat areas of lawns within rounded kerbs, these green elements providing a counterpoint to the surrounding buildings; * Historic interest: a post-war approach to landscape design which was seen not merely as a static object, to complement a setting of major historical and architectural significance (comprising highly graded listed buildings), but also as a means of controlling the flow of vehicular traffic and pedestrians in the capital; also the setting for statuary, most individually listed Grade II, of former Prime Ministers and notable public figures, by eminent C19 and C20 sculptors.

Description written: March 1999; amended November 2003; amended August 2008 and April 2010 Register Inspector: LCH

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.