

Resource adapted from the Westminster Abbey website, [here](#).

CORONATIONS AT THE ABBEY

A history of coronations

Westminster Abbey has been Britain's coronation church since 1066. King Charles III will be the 40th reigning monarch to be crowned at the Abbey in May 2023.

The English coronation service was drawn up by St Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, for the coronation of Edgar, first King of All England, in 973 at Bath Abbey.

Early coronations

The first documented coronation at Westminster was that of William the Conqueror on 25th December 1066. Before this year there had been no fixed location for the ceremony. Edward the Confessor does not seem to have deliberately planned his new Abbey as a coronation church. His immediate successor, Harold Godwinson, is likely to have been crowned here following the Confessor's death but there is no surviving contemporary evidence to confirm this ceremony. William probably chose the Abbey for his coronation to reinforce his claim to be a legitimate successor of Edward.

The Abbey's role as a coronation church influenced Henry III's rebuilding of it in the Gothic style of architecture from AD 1245 with a large space or "theatre" planned under the lantern, between the quire and the high altar. The first king to be crowned in the present Abbey was Edward I in 1274.

Other coronations

The two monarchs who did not have any coronation were Edward V (the boy king), who was presumed murdered in the Tower of London before he could be crowned, and Edward VIII who abdicated 11 months after succeeding his father and before the date set for his coronation.

William III and Mary II were the only joint monarchs to be crowned, and the chair specially made for Mary's use in 1689 is on view in the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Galleries in the Abbey triforium.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, public spectacle sometimes overshadowed religious significance. At George III's coronation some of the congregation began to eat a meal during the sermon. George IV's coronation was a great theatrical occasion but he flatly refused to allow his estranged wife Caroline to enter the Abbey. William IV had to be persuaded to have a coronation at all and spent so little money on it that it became known as 'the penny coronation'. With Queen Victoria's coronation in 1838 came a renewed appreciation of the true religious meaning of the ceremony.

By the time Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in 1953 millions around the world were able to witness her coronation on television.

Arranging and planning

All arrangements for coronation ceremonies are made by the Earl Marshal with His Majesty's Government on behalf of the Crown and not by the Abbey authorities. But the Dean of Westminster

instructs the sovereign on all matters connected with the service and assists the Archbishop of Canterbury, who always crowns the monarch (unless the See is vacant and then a senior bishop will perform this).

Since the late 14th century every coronation ceremony has basically followed the same order of service laid down in the Abbey's magnificent mediaeval illuminated Latin manuscript, the Liber Regalis, which can be viewed in the Galleries at the Abbey. The coronation of Elizabeth I was a mixture of Latin and English but that of James I in 1603 was an entirely English liturgy.

The act of crowning takes place in the Coronation Chair, facing the High Altar, on the Cosmati mosaic pavement. The chair was commissioned by Edward I.

Queen Elizabeth II's coronation

The main elements of the service, as performed on 2nd June 1953, were:

The Preparation

A procession of the Regalia takes place, from the Jerusalem Chamber, in the Abbey precincts, to the High Altar, where the special coronation oil is consecrated. Other items of regalia are taken to St Edward's chapel and to the Annexe ready for the main processions.

Entry into the Church

The anthem "I was glad when they said unto me, we will go into the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122 KJV) was sung by the massed choirs as the monarch entered the west door. The boys of Westminster School shouted "Vivat Regina, Vivat Regina Elizabetha" as the procession emerged into the quire which is a special custom of the school. This means "Long live the Queen, long live Queen Elizabeth". The monarch sat in the Chair of Estate, in front of the Royal Gallery, to the south side of the Altar.

The Recognition

The sovereign stood beside the Coronation Chair and was presented to each side of the Abbey congregations as their undoubted Queen. To which the congregation shouted, "God Save Queen Elizabeth!"

The Oath

The Archbishop administered the Coronation Oath to the Queen, which is required by law. Afterward, at the Altar the sovereign touched the Holy Bible saying "The things which I have here before promised, I will perform and keep. So help me God". The Oath was then signed.

Presentation of the Holy Bible

The Bible, "the most valuable thing that this world affords", was presented by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland (the first time the Moderator had performed this duty at a coronation). The Communion service then began, following the order in the Book of Common Prayer.

The Anointing

Seated in the Coronation Chair the monarch was anointed with Holy Oil. A canopy was held over the sovereign to shield this part of the ceremony from the congregation as this, and not the crowning, is the most sacred part of the service.

The Investiture

The monarch put on the special ceremonial robes for the Coronation, known as the Colobium Sindonis and the Supertunica of cloth of gold. The golden spurs were presented to the Queen and the Sword of State was offered at the Altar after which the ceremonial sword was presented. The Queen was invested with the armills (special ceremonial bracelets, symbolising the bond between the monarch and people), further robes including the Stole and the Robe Royal, and then the Orb was presented. Then the coronation Ring was put on and the Sceptre with the Cross and the Rod with the Dove were presented to the Queen.

The Crowning and Homage

The Archbishop of Canterbury then brought St Edward's Crown from the Altar and placed it on the sovereign's head at the most important part of the ceremony. All present in the Abbey then shouted, "God Save The Queen!" After the Benediction, or blessing, the monarch moved from St Edward's Chair to her Throne, in the centre part of the theatre. The royal princes and senior peers of each rank ascended the steps to the Throne to pay their homage.

The Recess

The monarch retired into St Edward the Confessor's chapel, behind the High Altar, and put on the Imperial State Crown and Robe of purple velvet, and carrying the Orb and Sceptre she emerged once more and moved in the procession out of the Abbey, while the National Anthem was sung.

Music

Music plays an important part in the service. Many of the texts have been used at successive coronations. "Zadok the Priest" was sung at Edgar's coronation, receiving its famous setting by Handel in 1727 for George II's coronation, which has been used ever since. The singing of the National Anthem was only introduced at the 1953 coronation.

Coronation 2023

His Majesty The King will be crowned at Westminster Abbey on Saturday 6th May 2023. The Queen Consort will be crowned alongside him.