

MINISTRY OF WORKS PRESS NOTICE

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P.I.233/27CORONATION PRESS CONFERENCE - 21st NOVEMBER 1952Summary of the Speech by the Rt. Hon. David Eccles, M.P.,
Minister of Works

The Ministry of Works is the builder, electrician, engineer, decorator and furnisher for the Coronation Ceremonies which are to take place next June. My job is to prepare Westminster Abbey for the solemn rite of the Coronation; to build stands where the Procession passes through the Royal Parks; and to decorate and floodlight public buildings.

This is a very big job and I can tell you that very few of my staff had much of a summer holiday. We set ourselves to get our designs and plans ready to go out to tender early in the autumn. None too soon. For almost everything we want has to be specially made and fine craftsmen ought not to be hurried.

You may like to have some of the starting dates of our biggest jobs. Here is the time-table:-

Abbey Stands	1.12.52
Annexe	(Hoarding 1.12.52 (Building 15.12.52)
Hyde Park	1. 1.53
Green Park	1. 1.53
Hamilton Gardens	1. 1.53
Cromwell Green	1. 1.53
St. Margaret's	1. 1.53
Colonial Office	1. 1.53
Parliament Square	1. 2.53
New Palace Yard	1. 2.53
Canning Enclosure	1. 2.53
Whitehall Gardens	1. 2.53
Mall	In course of erection
Victoria Gardens	1. 3.53
Mounding	After erection of Stands
Marlborough Gardens } Clarence House } Buckingham Palace }	March, 1953.

We have to begin this work early because the more we spread it out the fewer men we take away from normal building. We cannot take any risks with the weather, and judging by the number of red berries on the hedgerows we might well have a hard winter. Costs are high compared with 1937 but I have made most satisfactory arrangements with the contractors that if the actual expenditure works out lower than the tender price they will share the difference with the Ministry of Works.

The Government decided that the price for these seats should cover the cost. We felt, - and we have been supported by public opinion - that the taxpayer should not be asked to subsidise those who are fortunate in getting one of the places in our stands. We cannot be quite sure yet what the exact cost will be but we want to end the uncertainty about the price of seats and have settled on £4 for an uncovered seat

and £6 for a covered seat. I can tell you that high though these figures may seem, there is no likelihood of any profit to the Government.

I have taken care to see that the stands do not restrict the traditional standing-room of the people. I am doing more than this. In front of some of the stands the standing-room will be doubled by building gently sloping platforms. These will provide an extra 24,000 places.

I have seen a report that the public will have to pay for these extra standing places. It is not true. They will be free and will not be reserved.

I have told the House of Commons that we are reserving places for disabled ex-servicemen. These will be at the vantage points of Queen Victoria Monument and in Parliament Square. These men who have served their country so well will either come in their own chairs or will have chairs provided for them. There will also be reserved places for Youth Organisations. You will want to know what we are doing for school children. These plans are very much under consideration, and I am certain that before long we shall be able to give you more details.

The total number of seats in all our stands will be about 100,000. Of these, a third will go to the Commonwealth and Colonies. A proportion of the overseas representatives will be in specially decorated stands in Parliament Square. Here we are aiming to lay out a grand design to represent all the realms and territories of which the Queen is head. The decorations will include the flags and emblems of our sister countries. Mrs Constance Spry, who is advising me on flowers, is very keen that we should try and get foliage and plants from the Commonwealth to bring a touch of overseas beauty into Parliament Square.

The other two-thirds of the 100,000 seats will be allotted to National Organisations representing the most important aspects of British life. There is no country in the world that has so many clubs, groups and associations as we have. It is one of the best features of our life, but it does mean that we shall have to make some selection even from the National Organisations. Each of the organisations which receives a block of tickets will be free to choose their representatives in the way they think best.

This is a big and most interesting job which, if we are to do it well, is bound to take a little time. And of course nobody seems to believe that this method means that Ministry of Works cannot provide any seats for individuals. Every morning I find a pile of letters asking for tickets - from the members of a rabbit club, from six girls in a Scottish textile mill, from a High School in British Columbia, from a man in New Zealand who says he knew my father before I was born. It is rather wonderful to get this daily evidence of the intense desire of all sorts of people from all the corners of the earth to come and see the Queen crowned.

It is often said that our method of allocating through organisations will give too many places to government people and too few to the ordinary public. This will not happen. The government people are likely to get many less than last time and there is no fairer way of collecting 60 or 70,000 truly representative men and women than through their organisations.

With all its difficulty I think allocation through national organisations is the fairest method.

There is one other point on seats which has been in the news. We are allotting 4,000 seats to the Ticket Agencies which are intended for the benefit of overseas visitors. We did not do this last time and I was glad to see that Sir Alexander Maxwell in a speech this week said,

"I understand that this is the very first time that official seats have been allocated for this purpose and one might be forgiven for assuming that the travel trade would be reasonably grateful."

The prices which the Agencies will charge were fixed by my Ministry on the advice of the British Travel and Holiday Association, who consulted those engaged on the travel business.

I am also arranging with the Duke of Wellington for a stand to be put up in the garden of Apsley House. These seats will be handled by Messrs. Thomas Cook & Son.

Let me turn to Westminster Abbey. After the most careful examination we find we cannot get more people into the Abbey than last time. This is about 7,500. Thank goodness it is not my job to decide who gets these seats.

The work at the Abbey will start next week with a hoarding going up outside behind which materials will be collected for use on the work inside.

In due course I shall receive my official warrant from the Earl Marshal giving me authority to do the work in the Abbey as from the 1st January. But the Dean and Chapter are allowing me to start some preliminary work in the nave next month. This will not disturb the religious services.

During the summer we spent much time and thought on designs and colours for carpets and other fabrics. The orders for these are now placed and I hope soon to be able to show you samples of the materials.

I think very highly of the blue and gold brocade that will cover the frontals of the stands and boxes in the Abbey. For this design I engaged as my artist Professor Robert Goodden of the Royal College of Art. The stuff is being made by Messrs. Warners of Braintree.

The carpets are two blues in the nave, the same as last time, and a paler gold than in 1937, for the theatre. They are being woven by Messrs. Templeton of Glasgow.

The Annexe to Westminster Abbey

We wondered whether for the sake of economy we could do without an Annexe next year. But the fact is that ever since William IV's Coronation an Annexe has been found essential to provide both a hall for the Grand Procession to assemble and also robing and retiring rooms for those taking part in the ceremony.

I am glad of this because the Annexe is a first-class opportunity for an imaginative design. At each Coronation the architects of my historic Department have expressed their generation's idea of a temporary structure, serving this great ceremonial purpose, and built in the shadow of the Medieval Abbey.

When we were here in July I promised you we would let you have the design of the exterior. Here it is. You will judge how the Chief Architect, Mr. Eric Bedford, has met the most severe challenge presented to him in the Coronation preparations. He is not only a very good architect but a very patient man. Here are a few points about this design.

The cost is about £50,000.

The frame will be steel tubes, supporting a steel and tube framed roof. The roof will be covered with asbestos units and felt. The external walls will be of timber and building board with a spray paint finish.

You will notice the entrance. How the rising lines harmonise with the Abbey. Here the Queen will alight from her golden coach. We have taken pains to give the cameramen every chance - much more than in 1937. The roof over the doorway will be in transparent material.

You will see a line of sculptured animals sitting upright, six feet in height, I hope with expressions of ferocious loyalty on their aristocratic faces. These are the Queen's beasts. Henry VIII had a series of beasts supporting the arms of himself and his wife Jane Seymour. I have commissioned a well-known sculptor Mr. Woodford, to design a series of Queen's beasts:-

The Lion of England, the Unicorn of Scotland, the Falcon of the Plantagenets, the Griffin of Edward III, the Bull of Clarence, the White Lion of Mortimer, the Greyhound and the Dragon of the Tudors, the Yale of the Beauforts and the White Horse of Hanover.

Above the Beasts you will see on the wall of the Annexe the arms and emblems of the Commonwealth nations and countries. These will be modelled by Mr. Woodford and painted in the bright colours of heraldry. They will add a great deal to the decorative value of Mr. Bedford's fine design.

The tall window at the west end of the Annexe will be engraved with emblems appropriate to the Coronation.

Flowers will be arranged by Mrs. Constance Spry on each side of the entrance.