

Commissioner: Dave Musgrove [<mailto:davemusgrove@originpublishing.co.uk>]  
Deadline: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007  
Author: Stuart Burch [<mailto:stuart.burch@ntu.ac.uk>]  
Image: 96.OPAR ref. DS1322 © London Metropolitan Archives  
Topic: 400 word commentary to accompany aerial view of Parliament Square prior to the coronation; explaining what's going on and offering very briefly your thoughts on the past and future of the square

### **Draft text**

This photograph was taken from the Clock Tower of the Houses of Parliament in the Spring of 1953, shortly before Queen Elizabeth II's coronation. It shows the large stands that were being erected to enable as many people as possible to get a glimpse of the royal cortège as it passed by on its way to Westminster Abbey (the twin towers of which are visible to the left). The smaller tower beneath is that of St. Margaret's church (often referred to as 'the parish church of the House of Commons'). Part of its former churchyard is today known as Parliament Square – visible at the centre of the photograph. This space was originally laid out in the 1860s by E.M. Barry – son of Sir Charles Barry, the architect of the Houses of Parliament. The square was redesigned by George Grey Wornum to mark the Festival of Britain (1951) and the statues of prime ministers Peel, Palmerston, Derby and Disraeli were moved to the periphery. As part of the 1953 coronation celebrations, Parliament Square was planted with flora from different places in the Commonwealth according to designs by Constance Spry. This was in keeping with the numerous contemporaneous references to Parliament Square as the 'heart' or 'hub' of the British Empire.

Today, Parliament Square is marooned in a sea of traffic. Norman Foster has proposed pedestrianising the side closest to the Abbey (as he has done with Trafalgar Square). It is indeed a perilous business to cross the busy road and, as a result, the square tends to be empty most of the time. However, it still remains an important place to celebrate (as in 1953), mourn (as with the Queen Mother's funeral in 2002) or protest (as in 2000 when 'guerrilla gardeners' gave Churchill a grass mohican). In 2006 the 'Serious Organised Crime and Police Act' curtailed demonstrations within a one kilometre radius of parliament. Despite that, Brian Haw remains in the 'peace camp' he set up in Parliament Square in 2001 in response to Britain's involvement in Iraq. Copies of his anti-war placards removed under last year's legislation are currently the focus of Mark Wallinger's *State Britain* exhibition (Tate Britain until 27 August). This suggests that Parliament Square continues to play an important role in shaping Britain's heritage – something that would no doubt be bolstered should a statue of the 'Iron Lady' one day appear alongside Ivor Roberts-Jones' bronze effigy of Winston Churchill (1973).