Westminster Abbey
Learning

The Liber Regalis

This highly decorated manuscript is an instruction book for coronations.

Written around 1382, the Liber Regalis, or Royal Book, was designed to help people organise and run a coronation. Although the Liber Regalis itself may not be seen during a coronation, it will have acted as an instruction book for those putting together this Christian ceremony. Details of coronations have changed over the years, but the basic running order remains the same, as explained in the Liber Regalis. This incredible document can be found at Westminster Abbey and was probably also made locally to the Abbey too.

While we don't know exactly who the Liber Regalis was made for, we know it was created before the coronation of King Richard II and Queen Anne of Bohemia. The illustrated pages, or illuminations, include a step-by-step guide for the coronation of a king alone, a queen alone and a king and queen together, including the words that must be spoken by the monarch and the music that should be included.

Over to you …

- What do you notice about this illumination?
- What role do you think these people have?
- Imagine the conversations which might be happening.

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Cosmati Pavement

This great pavement (below) has been part of the coronation theatre for over 700 years.

Westminster Abbey has been the Coronation Church for nearly 1,000 years, since the coronation of William the Conqueror in 1066. When rebuilding the Abbey from 1245 onwards, King Henry III was influenced by its important role in coronations and planned a large space or "theatre" between the Quire and the High Altar which could be used for this purpose. This coronation theatre has been an important space for coronations ever since.

King Henry III was also responsible for the Cosmati Pavement being made. It can be found in front of the High Altar. The pavement is over 700 years old and is a mosaic, made up of hundreds of stones, some semi-precious, of different sizes, shapes and colours set into a beautiful abstract pattern.

Monarchs (kings and queens) are crowned on the High Altar, facing east, as this is the holiest part of the church and coronations are part of a Christian service. Although many have been crowned within the coronation theatre some monarchs, like Queen Elizabeth II, would have been unable to see the Cosmati Pavement as it was covered with a carpet, as can be seen in this photograph.

Over to you ...

- What shapes and patterns can you see on the Cosmati Pavement?
- Do you think the design is telling any kind of story?
- Imagine who might have stepped on the pavement over the last 700 years.

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Westminster Abbey
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The Coronation Chair

The Coronation Chair has been the centrepiece of coronations for over 700 years.

Made on the orders of King Edward I, the Coronation Chair has been used at every coronation since the crowning of his son, King Edward II, in 1308 – that's over 700 years.

For much of that time it held the famous Stone of Destiny, also known as the Stone of Scone, which King Edward I took from Scotland. The Stone rested on the shelf beneath the seat of the Chair, which you can see in the photo. In 1996 it was returned to Scotland but it will be used in future coronations.

During the coronation ceremony, the Chair is placed in the centre of the Abbey, facing the High Altar. This is to symbolise the link between the monarch (king or queen) and God.

Most of the graffiti on the back was made by Westminster schoolboys and visitors in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, visitors can see the Chair in the Abbey but it is kept behind glass for its protection.

Over to you ...

- Take a close look at the Coronation Chair. What different things do you see?
- The chair would have been decorated when it was first made. What do you think it might have looked like and why?
- How might it feel to sit on this chair?

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Ampulla and Coronation Spoon

The most sacred part of the coronation ceremony uses one of oldest of the Crown Jewels.

Part of the coronation ceremony is called the anointing. The Archbishop of Canterbury pours holy oil into a spoon and uses the oil to make the sign of a cross on the monarch's (king or queen's) forehead, hands and heart.

This is the most important part of a coronation, which is a Christian service, and it takes place before the investiture and crowning. It's a sign to show that the monarch has been marked out for this sacred role and has been blessed by God.

These objects are part of the Crown Jewels, and specifically the Coronation Regalia; sacred (holy) and special objects used during coronations. The Ampulla (shaped like an eagle) holds the holy oil while the Coronation Spoon, dating from the 12th century, is actually one of the oldest objects in the Crown Jewels. Did you know that until 1649 the Coronation Regalia were kept at Westminster Abbey? Now they are kept in the Tower of London.

The tradition of anointing goes back to the Old Testament in the Bible, when King David and King Solomon were both anointed. At Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, this part of the service was considered so holy and important that it wasn't filmed.

Over to you ...

- How you can tell that this spoon was not made to be a regular spoon for eating or stirring?
- Do you or your family have any ordinary objects which you have given special meaning to?

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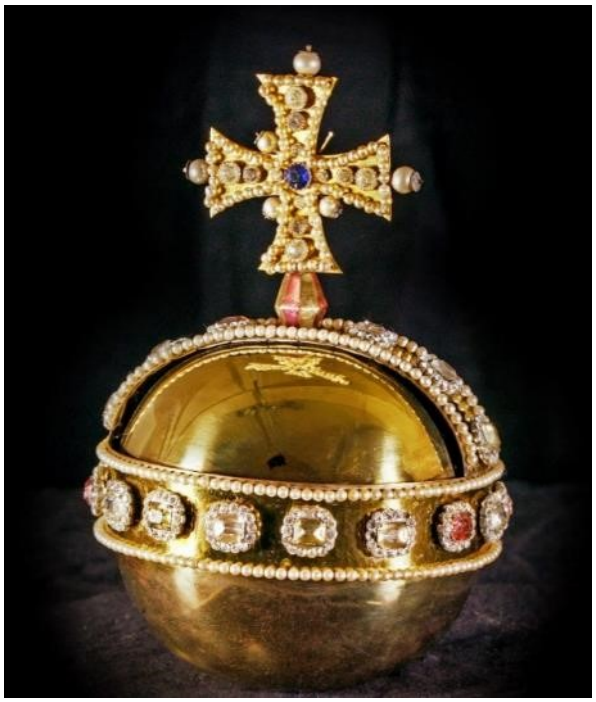
Orb and Sceptre

These special objects represent the responsibilities and power of the monarch.



After the anointing comes the investiture, when the monarch (king or queen) is presented with the Coronation Regalia. These are special objects used during the coronation which act as symbols to communicate to everyone the different powers and responsibilities that the monarch has.

The monarch is first given, or invested with, objects representing the chivalric nature of being a king or queen, objects you might imagine on a knight: spurs, swords and armills (a type of bracelet worn on the arm). They are then handed the orb (left) which is a symbol of God's power over the world, shown by the cross above the globe. Next, they receive a ring representing their 'marriage' to the country.

Lastly, they are presented with two sceptres (a staff or rod). One is the Sovereign's Sceptre with Cross (below), a symbol of the monarch's power. The other is the Sovereign's Sceptre with Dove, a symbol of mercy and showing the monarch's spirital or religious role, as the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Westminster Abbey has a set of replica Coronation Regalia. These were made for King George VI to practice receiving them before his coronation in 1937.

Over to you ...

- Can you think of any other objects which represent an idea or responsibility?
- What other qualities do you believe a monarch should have? What object would you use to represent them?

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St Edward's Crown

The coronation crown, named after a saint, used at the moment of crowning.

St Edward's Crown is used by the Archbishop of Canterbury to crown the new monarch (king or queen) during their coronation. This part of the ceremony is called the crowning.

St. Edward's Crown is very heavy – 5lb or about the weight of a 2L soda bottle – and is only worn for this part of the service. Later, the monarch will remove it and wear the lighter Imperial State Crown.

The crown was made in 1661 for King Charles II to replace the original medieval crown which had been destroyed during the English Civil War. The lost crown is thought to have belonged to St Edward the Confessor, a king who was later canonised (made a saint). The original crown was a relic, a special object associated with a holy person, and was kept at Westminster Abbey, which is where St Edward the Confessor is buried. The newer crown is named after him.

Although seen as the official coronation crown, only a few monarchs have actually been crowned using the St Edward's Crown.

Over to you ...

- What different symbols and shapes can you see on the St Edward's crown?
- How do you think it would feel to wear this crown?
- If you were designing your own crown what special symbols, jewels or colours would you use and why?

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