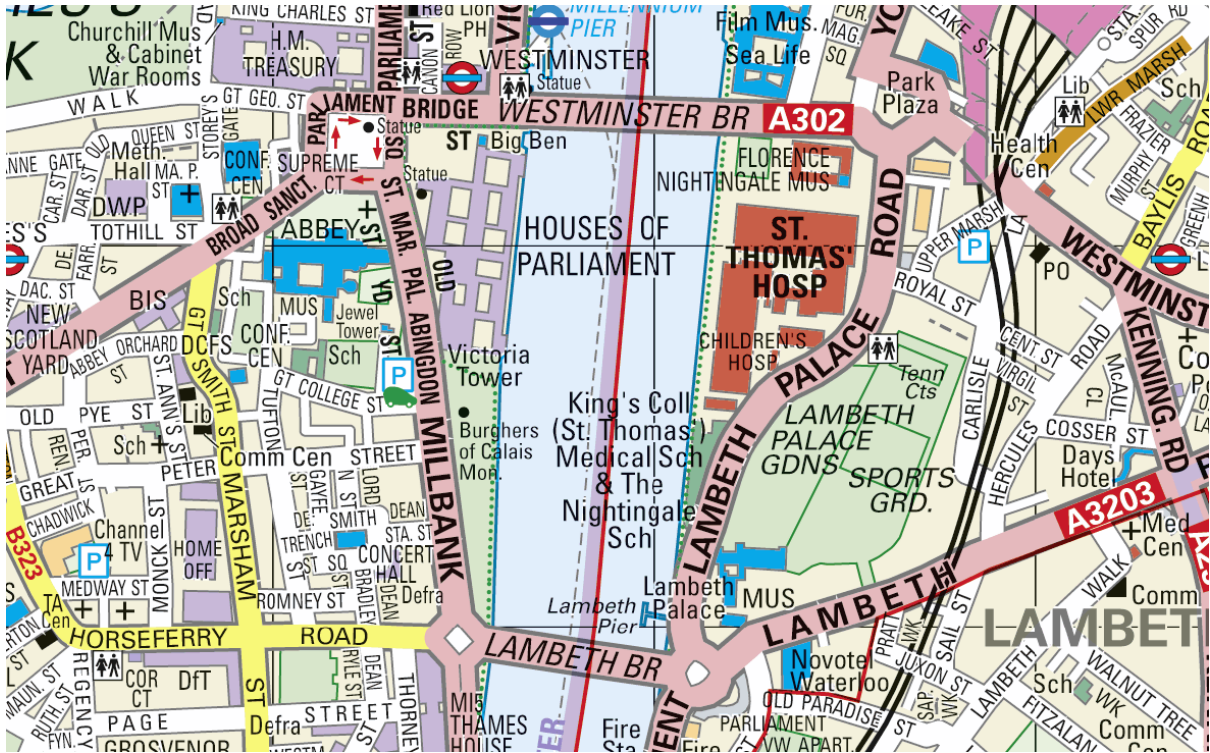




City of Westminster

# Burghers of Calais



A replica of the Burghers of Calais by Rodin in Victoria Tower Gardens, Westminster. A flag flies from the Tower when Parliament is sitting.

The Tower was completed in 1855 and holds all the records of Parliament. The original building was destroyed by fire in 1834. At the time it was claimed to be the tallest square building in the world at 323ft to the base of the flagstaff. The Burghers replica was purchased by the British Government in 1911 and placed in 1915.

*Les Bourgeois de Calais* is one of the most famous sculptures by Auguste Rodin, completed in 1889. It serves as a monument to an occurrence in 1347 during the Hundred Years' War, when Calais, an important French port on the English Channel, was under siege by the English for over a year.

The story goes that England's Edward III, after a victory in the Battle of Crécy, laid siege to Calais, while Philip VI of France ordered the city to hold out at all costs. Philip failed to lift the siege, and starvation eventually forced the city to parley for surrender.

Edward offered to spare the people of the city if any six of its top leaders would surrender themselves to him, presumably to be executed. Edward demanded that they walk out almost naked, wearing nooses around their necks, and carrying the keys to the city and castle. One of the wealthiest of the town leaders, Eustache de Saint Pierre, volunteered first, and five other burghers soon followed suit, stripping down to their breeches. Saint Pierre led this envoy of emaciated volunteers to the city gates. It was this moment, and this poignant mix of defeat, heroic self-sacrifice, and willingness to face imminent death that Rodin captured in his sculpture, scaled somewhat larger than life.

In history, though the burghers expected to be executed, their lives were spared by the intervention of England's Queen, Philippa of Hainault, who persuaded her husband to exercise mercy by claiming that their deaths would be a bad omen for her unborn child.

## Auguste Rodin



**Birth name:** François-Auguste-René Rodin

**Born:** 12 November 1840 Paris

**Died:** 17 November 1917(1917-11-17) (aged 77)  
Meudon, Île-de-France

**Nationality:** French

**Field:** Sculpture, drawing

### Works

The Age of Bronze (L'age d'airain), 1877  
The Walking Man (L'homme qui marche), 1877–78  
The Burghers of Calais (Les Bourgeois de Calais), 1889  
The Kiss, 1889  
The Thinker (Le Penseur), 1902

**Awards**      Légion d'Honneur