



HOUSE OF LORDS

BRIEFING

WESTMINSTER HALL

A brief history and description

Westminster Hall is the only major part of the ancient palace which survives in its original form. The original Hall, built by William Rufus, probably had two rows of pillars to support the roof; Richard II completed the magnificent hammer-beam roof in 1399. The Hall was the Great Hall of the Palace. Coronation feasts were held here from Stephen to George IV and the Royal Courts of Justice sat here until 1882, when they were removed to the Strand.

All the great State trials took place here, including those of Sir William Wallace, Sir Thomas More, John Fisher, Guy Fawkes, the Earl of Strafford, Charles I, the rebel Scottish Lords of the 1715 and 1745 uprisings and Warren Hastings.

Westminster Hall was not the normal meeting place of Parliament, but it was used by the assemblies of the Estates which deposed Edward II and received the abdication of Richard II. A tablet on the wall in the south-east corner marks the position of the arch which was, until 1680, the principal means of entry to the House of Commons.

During extensive repairs undertaken between 1914 and 1923 following an infestation of death-watch beetles, the entire hammer-beam roof was reinforced by concealed steelwork and the decayed portions replaced with new oak.

Major state occasions and other events in Westminster Hall

Parliament formally consists of three parts (the Sovereign, the House of Lords and the House of Commons). During certain ceremonial occasions, and like the Lords Chamber during State Opening, Westminster Hall becomes a point of convergence for all three of these components. The Queen attends parliamentary occasions in her capacity as the ceremonial head of state.

In 2005-06 the Hall underwent major work to floor, steps and roof beams.

Occasions when the Queen was present in Westminster Hall (not including any lying-in-state of relatives)

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|-------------------|---|--|
| 12 September 1957 | - | Opening of Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference |
| 5 June 1959 | - | Opening of the Atlantic Congress |
| 22 June 1965 | - | Commemoration of the 700 th Anniversary of Simon de Montfort's Parliament |
| 4 May 1977 | - | The Queen's Silver Jubilee |

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- 25 September 1986 - Opening of the 32nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
- 20 July 1988 - Tercentenary of the Glorious Revolution
- 5 May 1995 - 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II (VE Day)
- 26 June 1995 - Commemoration of the Signing of the United Nations Charter
- 30 April 2002 - The Queen's Golden Jubilee
- 2 September 2002 - Opening of the 46th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

Addresses by visiting Heads of State to both Houses in Westminster Hall

- 23 March 1939 - President Lebrun of France
- 7 April 1960 - President de Gaulle of France
- 11 July 1996 - President Mandela of South Africa

Lying-in-state

Westminster Hall is traditionally the place where monarchs, and sometimes former prime ministers, lie-in-state before their funerals.

- 1898 - William Ewart Gladstone
- 1910 - King Edward VII
- 1936 - King George V
- 1952 - King George VI
- 1953 - Queen Mary
- 1965 - Sir Winston Churchill
- 2002 - Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother

Tablets on the floor commemorate these occasions.

Who is responsible for Westminster Hall?

The Lord Great Chamberlain (on behalf of the Queen) and the Lord Speaker and the Speaker (on behalf of the two Houses) share responsibility for Westminster Hall. Black Rod, as Secretary to the Lord Great Chamberlain, is responsible for and participates in major ceremonial events in the Palace of Westminster. Westminster Hall events are organised by Black Rod together with the Commons' Serjeant-at-Arms.