



Westminster Hall: Nine Hundred Years of History

Dorian Gerhold

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'Many shires whose labour was due at London were hard pressed because of the wall that they built about the Tower, and because of the bridge that was nearly all carried away by a flood, and because of the work on the King's Hall, that was being built at Westminster, and many a man was oppressed thereby.' Thus, in 1097, the first mention of Westminster Hall, whose walls still stand after nine centuries, though altered and re-roofed in the 1390s and much restored subsequently. William Rufus's vast building (impossible to heat adequately even today) has never been enlarged, and none of his successors felt a need to build anything similar; then, as now it was useful mainly for occasional great events, such as royal feasts. What makes the Hall such an astonishing building is not simply its great size and the magnificence of its fourteenth-century roof but its central role in English (and later British) history. The Hall has witnessed the gradual transition from autocratic monarchy to the rule of law, representative government and eventual democracy. Nowhere else in the world is there a building which has been so closely involved in the life of a nation for such a long period.

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