

Topic Page: [Star Chamber](#)

Definition: **Star Chamber** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

English court of the 15th to 17th centuries, named after its meeting place in Westminster. It arose as a judicial branch of the Royal Council, which received petitions from subjects and tried offences against the Crown. It was efficient and well regarded under the early Tudors, but lacked mechanisms to prevent abuses. Court sessions were held in secret, without juries or witnesses, and their decision was final. Later monarchs abused its powers in an increasingly arbitrary and oppressive fashion, and it was used by Charles I simply to attack his political opponents. It was dissolved in 1641.

Summary Article: **Star Chamber**
from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

ancient meeting place of the king of England's councilors in the palace of Westminster in London, so called because of stars painted on the ceiling. The court of the Star Chamber developed from the judicial proceedings traditionally carried out by the king and his council, and was entirely separate from the common-law courts of the day. In the 15th cent., under the Lancastrian and Yorkist kings, the role of the council as an equity and prerogative court increased, and it extended its jurisdiction over criminal matters. Faster and less rigid than the common-law courts, its scope was extended by the Tudors. Under Chancellor Wolsey's leadership (1515–29), the Court of Star Chamber became a political weapon, bringing actions against opponents to the decrees and edicts of Henry VIII. Wolsey also encouraged petitioners to use the Court of the Star Chamber as a court of original jurisdiction, not as a last resort after the common-law courts had failed. Depositions were taken from witnesses, but no jury was employed in the proceedings. Although its sentences included a wide variety of corporal punishments, including whipping, pillorying, and branding, those convicted were never sentenced to death. The court remained active through the reigns of James I and Charles I. The traditional hostility between equity and common law was aggravated by the use made of the Star Chamber by the Stuarts as a vehicle for exercising the royal prerogative, particularly over church matters, in defiance of Parliament. It was abolished by the Long Parliament in 1641. In its later period the court was so reviled that *Star Chamber* became a byword for unfair judicial proceedings. The court's harshness, however, has been exaggerated.

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