

## United Kingdom parliamentary publications: proceedings of Parliament

### INTRODUCTION

The proceedings of Parliament are of two types: a record of what has been done, reported in the *Journals of the House of Lords* and the *Journals of the House of Commons*, and a record of what has been said, reported in the *Parliamentary Debates* of both Houses, commonly called the *Hansard*. In addition there are the business papers that any meeting requires and which are the minutes of the previous meeting and the agenda papers of the forthcoming one. As parliamentary meetings (sittings) are both lengthier and more frequent than normal business meetings, the necessary business papers are both bulkier and more complex.

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### 1. THE JOURNALS

The *Journals of the House of Lords* began in 1510 (1509 Old Style), and the *Journals of the House of Commons* in 1547. In both cases the *Journals* were kept in manuscript and were first printed retrospectively in the mid-eighteenth century. Since then they have been printed after each session. Early volumes cover multiple sessions. There are sessional indexes in most volumes and cumulative indexes covering decades and longer periods.

The *Journals* are basic accounts of business done such as bills read and committed, records of reports and papers received, motions submitted, resolutions and orders made, the results of divisions and so on. Apart from the speech from the throne at the opening of Parliament (reported in both *Journals* though the speech is made in the Lords only) there is no record of what is said. The language of both *Journals* is formal, even archaic, and early indexes are idiosyncratic. However they are invaluable, for example, for following the progress of a bill, and, if it failed, for discovering at least the formal reason for this. The indexes have such a level of detail that it is often unnecessary to consult the

*Journals* proper. In the eighteenth century it was not uncommon for the House to order the more important papers to be printed in its *Journals* so that papers such as government spending estimates or treaties, which in the nineteenth century would be found in the bound set of parliamentary papers, can be found at this time in the *Journals*.

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## 2. THE DEBATES

The history of the reporting of debates in Parliament is long and complex. Parliament guards its privacy fiercely and for a long time it was forbidden to report what was said within the House. Nevertheless from the seventeenth century some debates appeared, compiled in secret and published at considerable risk. Often only the record of a single debate was issued but gradually more extensive reporting occurred. Compilations held by the Library can be found most easily in the Library's printed catalogue under the heading **ENGLAND. – Parliament. – Parliamentary Proceedings. 1. - Collections.** A bibliography of such debates, annotated with the Library's pressmarks, is kept at the Reference Enquiry Desk.

However, for most purposes it is unnecessary to consult these early debates, as William Cobbett included most of them in his *Parliamentary history of England...to the Year 1803* which is on the open shelves in the Social Sciences Reading Room. Cobbett continued this work in a contemporary report of debates (*Cobbett's Parliamentary debates*) still then compiled from secondary sources such as newspapers. In 1811 Cobbett was bought out by T.C. Hansard who reprinted Cobbett's volumes to that date and continued to report current debates. The debates became known as *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* and the term *Hansard* has been used for the debates to the present day, although the firm ceased to be connected with the project in 1892. The name was restored to the title page in 1943.

The original series of Cobbett's/Hansard's debates continued to 1820 when a 'New Series' started with the reign of George IV. A third series was begun with the reign of William IV in 1830 which continued until 1892. In 1892 the contract to report parliamentary debates was put out to tender and the firm of *Hansard* lost. As a result of the tender process the 4<sup>th</sup> series (1892-1908) was described as 'authorised'. All four series are very similar. The debates of both houses are reported in the same volume, with the Lords' debates first followed by the Commons', day by day. The principal speeches are reported in full but backbenchers' speeches are generally summarised. Although the reports got fuller over time and additional matter was included such as division lists and written answers to questions, none of the first four series can be described as verbatim.

In 1909, amid growing dissatisfaction, Parliament took over its own reporting. As a result, the fifth series, now called 'official', displays two major changes. Firstly, the reported debates of the two Houses were issued in separate series. Secondly, the debates were for the first time reported substantially word for word. The reports are not literally verbatim - grammatical errors, hesitations and repetitions are silently corrected - but the substance of what was said is neither omitted nor changed. The House of Commons' debates series reached volume 1000 of the fifth series part-way through session 1980/81. At this point a sixth series was started with vol.1. The House of Lords' fifth series continues.

The permanent bound volumes of debates usually cover two weeks for the Commons and three weeks for the Lords. They take many months to be issued and so the daily Hansard is kept on the open shelves until superseded by the bound volumes.

Throughout all the series, each bound volume contains an index. There is also a cumulative index to the debates of each parliamentary session. Originally this was published in the last volume of debates held in the session, but it is now issued separately and appears some considerable time after the rest of the volumes. There is a further index covering the first two series(1803/1830) but, apart from this, there are no cumulations longer than a parliamentary session. The indexes consist of a name index with entries for the contributions of MPs or peers and a subject index with entries under the topics of debates, questions or statements. Names and topics appear together in a single alphabetical sequence. The references in the volume indexes are to the columns where the debates, etc. are to be found. *Hansard* has always been printed in two columns to the page and it is the columns, not the pages, that are numbered. The sessional indexes refer to the volume as well as the columns. Both Houses print written answers to parliamentary questions in the official report of their debates. Those questions asked and answered in the House are properly reported in the main debates but many are not reached before business moves on and many more are put down in the first place for a written answer. These are all collected at the end of the volume. The House of Commons prints them in a separate sequence with column numbers starting from 1 and printed in italics; there is only one sequence for the House of Lords. Until the end of 1983 the index indicated a Commons written answer only by printing the column reference in italics. Since 1984 a small 'w' has been added to the column number as in '123w' instead of '123'.

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### 3. STANDING COMMITTEES DEBATES

Traditionally the committee stage of a public bill was considered by the whole House which resolved itself into a committee for the purpose and this is still standard practice for the House of Lords. From the late nineteenth century the House of Commons began to establish a standing committee for the purpose. Eventually several standing committees came into existence, identified by the letters A,B, C, etc. As debates within these committees were not held on the floor of the House, they were not reported in *Hansard*. From 1919 onwards, Standing Committee Debates were published in a separate series, which is now on the open shelves. Up to session 2005/06 the debates of each Standing Committee were reported in alphabetical order followed by the other standing committees, the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees, the Northern Ireland Committee and the committees to examine statutory instruments and EU legislation. Within each committee the debates were then reported in chronological order. The bound volumes, which were slow to be published, could cover the debates of more than one committee and there were no continuous column numbers. At the beginning of session 2006/07 the standing committee system was reformed. Standing and grand committees were redesignated as general committees to differentiate them from select committees. Public bill committees were established as a type of general committee for clause by clause consideration of draft legislation. Each public bill committee is named after the bill it considers. For example, a committee considering a bill titled the Climate Bill would be called the Climate Bill Committee. Evidence sessions from public bill committees are now included in their reported debates instead of being issued as House of Commons papers as before. Transcripts of the debates at each sitting of a committee

are published under a generic title Parliamentary Debates House of Commons Official Report Public Bill Committee or Welsh Grand Committee, etc followed by the subject of the bill or topic under consideration by the general committee and the number and date of the sitting (for example: Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Official Report, Public Bill Committee, Welfare Reform Bill, 13<sup>th</sup> sitting, Tuesday 28 November 2006 (morning)). The annual bound volumes produced under the new system begin with the Public Bill Committee debates followed by the debates of the other general committees (grand committees, delegated legislation committees, European committees, etc ). The titles of the bills under consideration are prominently displayed on the spines.

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#### 4. BUSINESS PAPERS

These are the oldest continuously printed records of Parliament. The first volume covers session 1680/81 and the series continues from session 1689/90 to the present. The series was originally called *The Votes* and 'votes' in this context means records of decisions taken, which we would now call minutes. In 1817 they were reorganized and renamed *Votes and Proceedings* and both terms are used for the set. At the same date a number of agenda papers began to be issued with the set and together they are referred to as the 'Vote Bundle'. Various series are included in the Bundle (not all appear every day). They are issued to all MPs stapled together, generally in the following order:

- Order paper - detailed agenda for the day's business, including private business
- Future business. This comprises six sections: section A, business for future days; Section B, business to be taken at sittings in Westminster Hall; Section C, Remaining orders and notices; Section D, Other future business; Section E, Business to be considered in European Committees; and Section F, Notices of written ministerial statements
- Standing/Public Bill Committee proceedings - these minute the proceedings day by day of any Committees considering public bills
- Votes and proceedings - the minutes of the previous day's sittings, later cumulated to form the Journals described earlier. The series includes appendices listing papers laid before the House, members nominated to standing/general committees, and papers laid by select committees. It also included texts of petitions or government responses to them to the end of session 2006/07. These were headed '*Supplement to the votes and proceedings*' and should not be confused with the *Supplement to the votes* described below. From 2007/08 all petitions and observations on them have been printed in full in *Hansard*. The *Votes and Proceedings* for the day the petition was presented will record the petition's subject matter, a description of the petitioners, and whether the petition was submitted formally or informally.
- Private Business – a list of all Private Bills to be taken on the current day either in the House of Commons or in Committee
- Notice paper - contains notices of questions and motions given the previous day for future consideration (or notices given earlier and withdrawn the previous day). It is printed on blue paper and is often referred to as 'the blues'. It includes Early Day Motions (EDMs). These are motions set down for consideration 'at an early day' (nowadays 'for which no day has been fixed'). In either case it means 'never' and the purpose of an EDM is not to debate the issue but to test the strength of opinion within the House by gathering as much support as possible

for the motion. These are best traced electronically through the fee-based Parliament index (where they are given in full text with a list of supporters) or through the free EDM database on the Parliament web site at [www.parliament.uk/about\\_commons/early\\_day\\_motions.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/about_commons/early_day_motions.cfm)

- Public Bill List - a weekly list of bills recording stages reached and dates for next debates. A similar list of European Communities documents is also now regularly issued
- Supplement to the Votes - contains a list of proposed amendments to public bills. Amendments for consideration that day are on white paper and amendments for future consideration on blue paper.

Since 27 October 1997, the arrangement of the Vote Bundle has been simplified. It now starts with a section headed *Summary Agenda* and the remaining series have been simplified and given more meaningful headings. As the Library has shelved the Vote Bundle as a single entity from session 1994/95, the internal arrangements are no longer relevant for retrieval.

Discontinued series previously part of the Vote Bundle include:

- Written answers (1902/15) - also printed in *Hansard*
- Division lists (1836-1990/91) - also duplicated in *Hansard*
- Reports of the Select Committee on Public Petitions (1833/1974) these include only abstracts of the petition examined, but about 10% of texts were published in full in appendices to the reports. After 1909/10, as the number of petitions had dwindled, the reports of the Committee were bound with the *Supplement to the Votes* until 1974 when the Committee was abolished. Petitions were published as part of the *Votes and Proceedings* to the end of session 2006/07. From 2007/08 all petitions and observations on them have been printed in *Hansard*. Even where the full text of the petition has been printed, the lists of petitioners have never been included. Before 1833 petitions were published in another discontinued series, *Appendices to the Votes* which existed from 1803/04 to 1870 and intermittently to 1890.

The Vote Bundle, past and present, is complex and difficult to use. It is also among the rarest of parliamentary publications and the British Library is the only library in London apart from the House of Commons Library with a substantially complete set. As well as being rare and complex, the Vote Bundle is little used by the general public. Parts of permanent importance are generally reprinted - the *Votes and Proceedings* as the *Journals*, the *Division Lists* and *Written Answers* in *Hansard*, etc. Early Day Motions and material on petitions are in occasional demand; these have been dealt with in some detail previously.

For the House of Lords the equivalent to the Vote Bundle is its *Minutes of Proceedings*. This series exists in printed form only from 1824 onwards but the Library has a few manuscript volumes between 1793 and 1817. In fact the Library's holdings of the printed minutes are poor before 1843. Between 1838 and 1929 the *Minutes* were reprinted and issued as sessional papers of the House of Lords. The *Minutes of Proceedings* have little of the supplementary material associated with the Vote Bundle; indeed only one sub-series has been issued regularly. *Lists of rules, orders, etc (Statutory*

*instruments, etc.* after 1948) has appeared since 1907 and is shelved together with *Minutes of Proceedings*.

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## 5. CITATION

The *Journals* can be cited without difficulty. The *House of Commons' Journals* and the *House of Lords' Journals* can be abbreviated to HCJ or HLJ followed by the volumes and page number, e.g. HCJ Vol. 123, p.456. Citation of debates is slightly more complicated. For the first four series of the *Parliamentary Debates*, the abbreviation 'Parl. Deb' is followed by the series, the volume number and the column reference in the form Parl. Deb. 3<sup>rd</sup> S.Vol.345, col. 647-721. The original series should be given as '1<sup>st</sup> S.' and the New Series as 'N.S.' or '2<sup>nd</sup> S.' The fifth and sixth series are cited as 'HC Deb' or 'HL Deb' as appropriate followed by the series, volume and columns references. References to written answers are best given with a small 'w' after the column reference. *Standing Committee Debates* should be cited as 'SC Deb' followed by the session then the volume, e.g. SC Deb., 1989-90, Vol.3. As there is no continuous numbering of columns, if a more precise reference is required, cite the committee, the topic of debate and the date and only then, if necessary, the column number, e.g. SC.B. Police Bill, 3 June 1984, col.6. Public Bill Committee debates should be cited in the form PBC Deb, bill title, date, column (if required), eg PBC Deb, Welfare Reform Bill, 28 Nov. 2006, col. 543.

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## 6. ELECTRONIC SOURCES

Both historic and current parliamentary proceedings are now becoming available in digital form on the internet, through both free and subscription-based resources:

- British History Online - full text of Commons Journals 1547/1699; 1830 and Lords, 1509/1793; 1830/32 and various pre-*Hansard* debates at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>
- House of Commons Parliamentary Papers issued by Proquest includes Parliamentary proceedings from the "long eighteenth century" as supplementary material, offering the full text of Commons and Lords Journals 1688-1834 and selected pre-*Hansard* debates. Available free to UK higher and further education institutions and at the British Library only
- Public Information Online produced by Dandy Booksellers offers full text of Public Bill Committee and General Committee debates from 2006/07 and Commons and Lords daily *Hansard* from 2008/09. This subscription based resource is available to on-site visitors to the British Library only.
- Current and future parliamentary business at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/business-papers/commons/> . Elements of the Vote Bundle are available online including the *Summary Agenda and Order of Business*, *Future Business*, *Votes and Proceeding*, *Supplements to the Votes and Proceedings*, public and private bills lists, early day motions and questions for oral and written answer (the Question Book)

- *Hansard* - Commons full text from session 1988/89 and Lords from 1995/96 on the Parliament website at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/pahansard.htm>
- Standing Committee debates - full text from session 1997/98 2005/06 on the Parliament web site at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/othstn.htm>
- General Committee Debates - full text 2006/07- <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/othstn.htm>
- Public Bill Committee Debates, full text 2006/07 are available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/stand.htm> .
- Historic Hansard is available free of charge and offers searchable digitised full text of the Commons debates from 1803-2006 and Lords debates 1803-2005 <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons> and <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords>

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## 7. LOCATIONS

*Hansard*, the Standing/General Committee debates, and the Commons and Lords Journals are on the open shelves in the Social Sciences Reading Room. The Vote Bundle and the House of Lords' Minutes of Proceedings are shelved offsite and must be ordered 48 hours in advance. The pressmarks of the various series are:

<i>Journals of the House of Lords</i> 1509- microfilm edition (to 1960/61)	BS.Ref.5 SPR.Mic.P.58
<i>Journals of the House of Commons</i> , 1547- microfilm edition (to 1959/60)	BS.Ref.6 SPR.Mic.P.59
<i>Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England</i> microfilm edition	BS.Ref.11 SPR.Mic.A.186
<i>Parliamentary Debate</i> 1 <sup>st</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup> series 1803-1908 microfilm edition	BS.Ref.12 SPR.Mic.A.187
<i>House of Commons Debates</i> , 5th/6th series, 1909-	BS.Ref.13
<i>House of Lords Debates</i> , 5th series, 1909-	BS.Ref.14
<i>Standing Committee Debates</i> , 1919-2005/6	BS.Ref.23
<i>General/Public Bill Committee Debates</i> , 2006/07-	BS.Ref.23

The Vote Bundle 1994/95- BS.91

Individual series prior to 1995 are shelved separately as follows:

*Order Papers*

1817-47 bound with the *Votes and Proceedings* BS.91/8(3)  
 1847/48-1978/79 bound with the *Notice Papers* BS.91/4  
 1979/80-1993/94 BS.91/4(2)

*Private Business*

1817/47 bound with the *Votes and Proceedings* BS.91/8(3)  
 1847/48-1992/93 BS.91/5

*Votes*, 1680-1816 BS.91/8(3)

*Votes and Proceedings*, 1817-1993/94 BS.91/8(3)

*Notice Papers*

1817-47 bound with the *Votes and Proceedings* BS.91/8(3)  
 1847/48-1978/79 (including Order Papers) BS.91/4  
 1979/80-1993/94 BS.91/4

*Standing Committee Proceedings*

1966/67-1978/79 bound with *Supplement to the Votes* BS.91/8(3)  
 1979/80-1993/94 BS.91/8(6)

*Public Bill List*

1886-1979/80 bound with *Supplement to the Votes* BS.91/8(3)  
 1981/82-1992/93 BS.91/8(7)

*European Communities Documents List*

1990/91-1992/93 BS.91/8(8)

*Supplement to the Votes*

1837-44 bound with *Votes and Proceedings* BS.91/8(3)  
 1845-1993/94 shelved with *Votes and Proceedings* BS.91/8(3)  
 1979/80-1990/91 [Amendments in Committees] BS.91/8(4)

1979/80-90/91 [All other amendments]	BS.91/8(5)
1991/92-1993/94 [All amendments]	BS.91/8(5)
<i>Division Lists, 1836-1990/91</i>	BS.91/3
<i>Written Answers, 1902/1915</i>	BS.91/7
<i>Reports of the Select Committee on Petitions</i>	
1833-1909/10	BS.91/6
1910/11-1973/74 bound with <i>Supplement to the Votes</i>	BS.91/8(3)
<i>Appendix to the Reports</i> shelved with the <i>Reports</i>	BS.91/6
Microfiche edition of <i>Reports and Appendices, 1833/1900</i>	SPR.Mic.E.357
<i>Appendices to the Votes, ca.1803 - ca.1890</i>	
bound with the <i>Votes</i> and <i>Votes and Proceedings</i>	BS.91/8(3)
Microfiche edition	SPR.Mic.E.356
<i>Appendices to the Votes and Proceedings, 1969/70-1993/94</i>	BS.91/8(3)