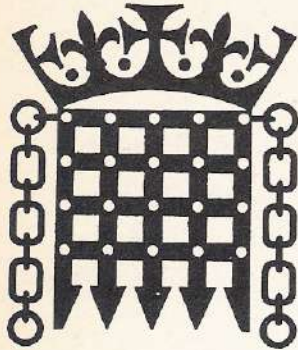


The House of Lords



A GUIDE FOR VISITORS TO THE GALLERIES



THE CHAMBER OF THE HOUSE

The Chamber of the House of Lords was first used in 1847. A fire in 1834 had destroyed the greater part of the old Palace of Westminster, in which most Parliaments had sat since the 13th century. The new Palace, designed by Sir Charles Barry, assisted by Augustus W. N. Pugin, was begun in 1840, and finally completed in 1860. The Chamber has been used continuously by the House of Lords since 1847, except between 1941 and 1951, when the Lords gave it up to the Commons (whose own Chamber had been destroyed by enemy action) and met in the Queen's Robing Room, at the southern end of the building.

The Chamber is 80 feet long, 45 feet wide, and 45 feet high. At its southern end, facing the Strangers' Gallery, is the Throne, designed by Pugin. The Canopy above the Throne represents the Cloth of Estate, to which Lords bow on entering. When the House is sitting, the eldest sons of Peers, Bishops who are not members of the House, Privy Counsellors and certain other distinguished persons may sit on the steps of the Throne. For the Opening of Parliament the brass rail around the Throne is removed and the Queen reads the Gracious Speech from the Throne. The members of the House of Commons then stand behind the Bar of the House – a barrier, situated below the Strangers' Gallery, which marks the boundary of the House.

In front of the Throne is the Woolsack, which is stuffed with wool from England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the countries of the Commonwealth. The Lord Chancellor or his deputy sits on the Woolsack as Speaker of the House of Lords (see p.7). The Lord Chancellor is not only Speaker, but also a Minister and Head of the Judiciary.

Before each day's sitting, the Lord Chancellor walks in procession to the Chamber down a Division Lobby and through the Peers' Lobby, with the Mace borne in front of him. Bystanders bow to the Mace, the emblem of Her Majesty's authority, as it passes. It is then placed on the Woolsack.

In front of the Lord Chancellor's Woolsack are two other woolsacks and the Table of the House. Two Despatch Boxes are placed on the Table, at which Front Bench speakers stand when addressing

the House. Seated at the Table, facing the Throne, are the Clerks, whose responsibilities include the calling and recording of the business of the House.

Shorthand writers preparing copy for Hansard (the *Official Report* of the Proceedings) sit behind the Clerks, and behind them, just in front of the Bar of the House, are the Cross Benches. On these sit those Lords (apart from Bishops) who are Independents. They also sit on the three back benches nearest to the Bar of the House on that side of the House on which the Government or Opposition supporters are estimated at the beginning of a new Parliament to be less numerous. The benches on the left (as seen from the Strangers' Gallery) are for supporters of the Government, and those on the right for supporters of the Opposition. Liberal Peers normally occupy the two front benches on the right nearest the Woolsack. The leading members of each party traditionally sit on the front benches.

The Government side of the House, where the Leader of the House and Ministers of the Crown sit, is known as the 'Spiritual Side' and the Opposition side as the 'Temporal Side'. This is because originally one side was reserved for Bishops, 'the Lords Spiritual', and the other side for Peers, 'the Lords Temporal'. The House has never followed the practice of some countries in seating its members in a semi-circle. The two benches nearest the Woolsack on the Government side are still reserved for the Bishops, the front bench being furnished with elbow-rests.

In addition to the two Archbishops and twenty-four Bishops of the Church of England the House has over a thousand Lords Temporal. More than 300 of these are Life Peers (including Lords of Appeal in Ordinary) and about 50 Peers of first creation. Since 1958 the membership of the House has included women – at present there are about fifty women Peers. Members of the House are summoned by writ from the Crown to attend; those who are unable or unwilling to do so may apply for leave of absence. The average daily attendance is about 290, but in the course of a year some 700 take part in proceedings.



THE BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Lords normally sit simultaneously with the Commons, but either House may sit without the other. The Lords meet on about 140 days in a year, normally on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, frequently on Mondays, occasionally on Fridays. Business usually begins at 2.30 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, at 3.00 p.m. on Thursdays and at 11.00 a.m. on Fridays. The proceedings open with prayers, read by a Bishop. When prayers are over members of the public are admitted to the galleries.

On certain days the House sits in the morning in its Judicial capacity as the ultimate Court of Appeal in the United Kingdom. It then gives judgment after previous hearings before an Appellate Committee of the House (in each case only Peers with the appropriate judicial qualification participate in the proceedings). During Recesses the hearings themselves may take place in the House. When the House sits in its Judicial capacity in the morning prayers are said then and are not repeated at the afternoon sitting.

Order of Business

The white sheet of Notices and Orders of the Day, given to all visitors, sets out the day's business in the order in which it is to be taken. On certain days, however, business arises without notice or at short notice (e.g. Ministerial Statements). Here five main types of business are described in the order in which they are normally taken; some general notes on rules of procedure are appended on p.7.

(1) **Introductions.** Newly created Peers, and Bishops summoned to the House either for the first time or for the first time after appointment to a new diocese, have to be formally introduced. An Introduction takes place immediately after prayers. The ceremony for Peers opens with a procession into the House led by Black Rod and a Herald. The new Peer and his two 'supporters' wear their Parliamentary robes. The Peer's Patent and

Writ of Summons are read by the Reading Clerk (one of the Clerks at the Table), and the Peer takes the oath which all Peers take in each new Parliament. Peers succeeding to a title merely take the oath, provided that a previous holder has sat in the House.

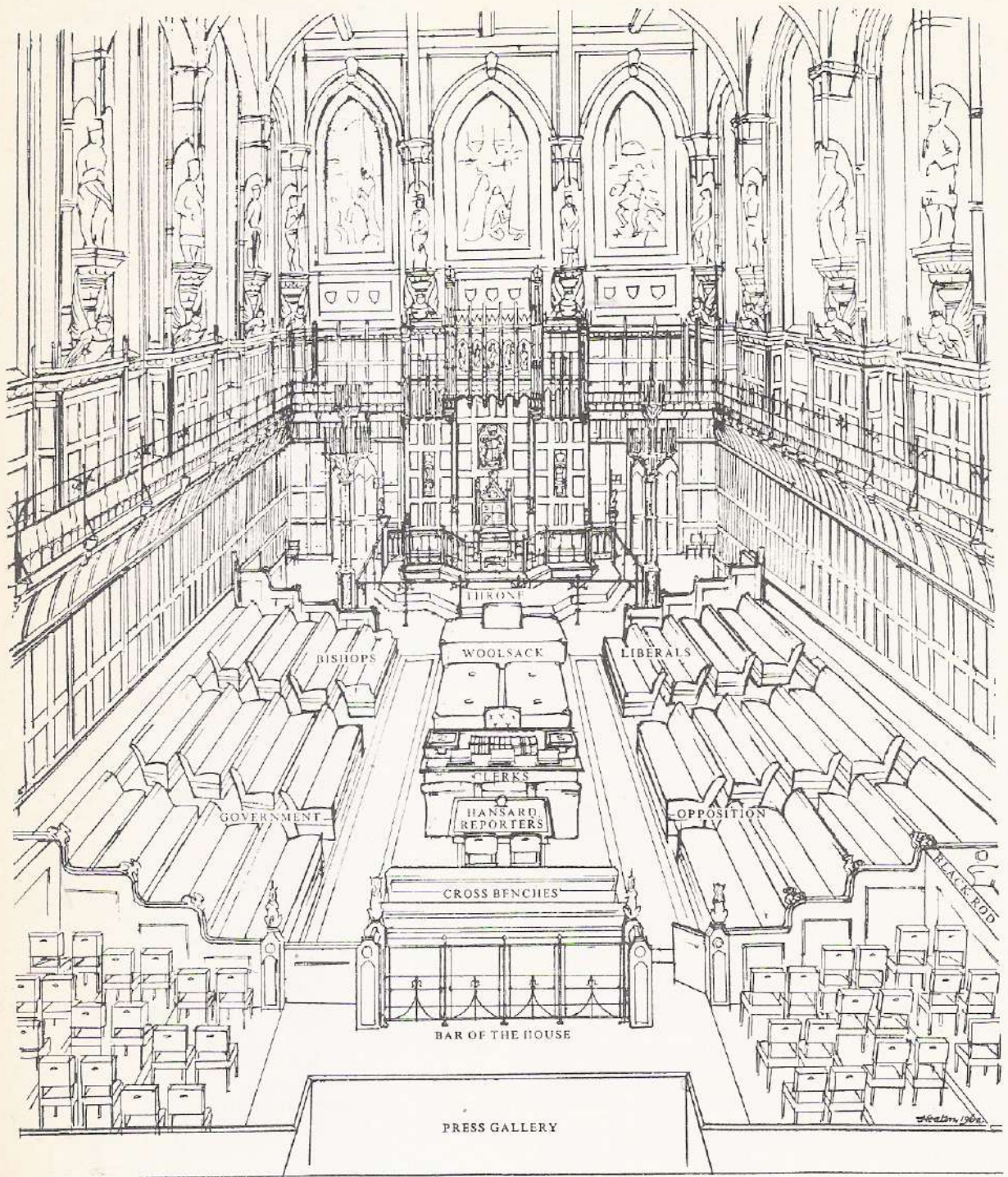
(2) **Question Time.** On most days the first business taken is the asking of 'Starred Questions'. These Questions, so called because they are marked with an asterisk on the Order Paper, are asked for information only, whereas Unstarred Questions are intended to lead to a short debate and are taken at the end of the day's business. Questions are addressed to the Government and not to any particular Minister. Supplementary questions may be asked, by other Lords as well as by the Lord who asks the original question. Not more than four Starred Questions (and not more than two by any one Lord) may be asked on any one day; but an unlimited number of questions requiring a written answer may be asked, the answers to which are published in Hansard.

Starred Questions may occasionally be followed by Private Notice Questions, which generally relate to matters of urgency. These are not listed on the Order Paper. Questions in all normally occupy up to half an hour, but there is no set time allotted to them.

(3) **Ministerial Statements.** A Government Statement is usually made at about the same time as the corresponding Statement is made in the Commons (shortly after 3.30 p.m.). Business is interrupted for the Statement and questions on it, after which the interrupted business is resumed.

(4) **Debates on Bills.** At this point, the way a Bill passes through its various stages in Parliament should be explained. All Acts of Parliament begin as Bills. Those applicable to the general body of citizens are called Public Bills and those promoted by local authorities and private bodies or individuals are

THE CHAMBER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS



From an original drawing by Peter Heaton

STRANGERS' GALLERY

called Private Bills. Bills become Acts, with the force of law, when they have received Royal Assent. The Royal Assent is given only when the Bill has been agreed to by the House of Commons and (except under the terms of the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949) by the House of Lords. Most Bills are considered first by the House of Commons, but an appreciable number start in the House of Lords. Consideration of a Bill in the Lords is divided into the following stages which are normally taken on separate days:

The *First Reading* is almost always purely formal – if the Motion ‘that this Bill be now read a First Time’ is agreed to, the Bill is then normally printed. Lords have the right to introduce Bills without notice.

The *Second Reading* provides the opportunity for a wide-ranging debate on the principles of the Bill. Amendments to the Bill’s provisions are not made at this point, but the Bill can be rejected altogether by being refused a Second Reading. If the Bill is given a Second Reading, it is usually committed to a Committee of the Whole House sitting in the Chamber of the House for detailed consideration. This is in contrast to the procedure used in the House of Commons, where Bills are more often considered by a Standing Committee sitting in a Committee Room than by a Committee of the Whole House.

For the *Committee Stage* on Public Bills the House resolves itself into Committee and the Lord Speaker leaves the Woolsack. The Lord Chairman of Committees, or a deputy, takes the Chair, sitting at the Table of the House, facing the Clerks. During the Committee Stage the Bill is considered in detail. Each clause is voted affirmatively into the Bill after all amendments to that clause have been disposed of. The Committee Stage may take several days if the Bill is lengthy or controversial. At the conclusion the House is resumed and the Lord Speaker returns to the Woolsack. The Lord Chairman then announces to the House that the Committee have gone through the Bill and directed him to report it

with or without amendments, as the case may be. (For Private Bills the Committee Stage is held in a Committee Room.)

Next comes the *Report Stage* when the motion ‘that this Report be now received’ is put to the House. On this being agreed to, further amendments may be moved, but the Bill is not considered clause by clause.

Finally there is the *Third Reading and Passing*, when the motions ‘that this Bill be now read a Third Time’ and ‘that this Bill do now pass’ are put to the House. Amendments may be moved and general debate take place at third reading. A Bill is ready for the Royal Assent when it has been agreed to by both Houses of Parliament.

(5) **Debates on Motions.** Not all of the debates in the House deal with legislation – Lords may also initiate debates by putting a motion before the House. The pressure of Government business limits the frequency of such debates, but Wednesdays are usually set aside for them, and the recent introduction of Short Debates, limited to two-and-a-half hours (which also usually take place on Wednesdays) has enabled two to be taken on one day. Debates are normally on a motion ‘for papers’. In form this is a request to the Government to lay before the House papers on the subject under discussion. In fact it is merely a technical device, for when there is a motion before the House the mover has a right of reply. So the Lord who initiated the debate gets the opportunity to speak a second time, after a Government spokesman has told the House what is the Government’s position on the matter. It is the usual practice to withdraw the motion at the end of the debate.

At the end of the sitting a further, though usually quite brief, debate may be initiated by an Unstarred Question (i.e. one not marked with an asterisk in the Order Paper), but since there is no motion before the House the Lord who raises the matter can only speak once.



SOME RULES OF PROCEDURE

(1) **Debate.** The Lord Chancellor is the Speaker of the House of Lords but he does not have the powers of the Speaker of the House of Commons to control proceedings. His main function as Lord Speaker is to 'put the question' on each occasion that the House needs to take a decision. A number of deputies are appointed to act as Lord Speaker in the absence of the Lord Chancellor.

Matters of order and procedure which arise are, if necessary, decided by the House as a whole, often following the guidance of the Leader of the House, who has an important role in expressing the sense of the House. Lords are not called on to speak by the Lord Chancellor; if two or more Lords rise to speak at the same time, the House decides whom it will hear first. The order of speaking in a debate is arranged in advance by the Party Whips and the convenor of the Cross Benches, and a list of speakers issued, but Lords may and often do take part in a debate without giving advance notice of their intention to do so.

Speeches are addressed to the House in general, and not to the Lord Chancellor. Lords are referred to according to their degrees, thus: The Noble Duke, The Right Reverend Prelate, The Noble Baroness. Those who hold the highest rank in the armed forces are referred to as The Noble and Gallant Lord, and those who are or have been Lord Chancellors, Judges or Law Officers as The Noble and Learned Lord.

When the Lord Chancellor takes part in debate, he does not do so as Speaker of the House but as a High Officer of State. He leaves the Woolsack, steps to its left, and speaks from the place appointed by an Act of 1539.

Certain rules and conventions prevent debates from becoming merely a sequence of set speeches. Speeches should not be read although notes may be referred to, and Lords taking part in a debate are expected to attend as much as possible of it, since otherwise they may repeat what an earlier speaker has said, or may fail to hear later speakers' answers to the points they raise. Long speeches are

discouraged. The House resolved in 1965 'That speeches in the House should be shorter'. Speeches are timed by clocks visible in the Chamber.

The proceedings are taken down in shorthand by a team of reporters and are published in the *Official Report* (known as Hansard) the following morning.

(2) **Divisions.** When debate on a motion or an amendment is ended then, unless the motion or amendment is withdrawn, the House needs to come to a decision. The question is put by the Lord Chancellor (or, if the House is in Committee, by the Lord Chairman) who says: 'As many as are of that opinion will say "Content". The contrary "Not-Content"'. If only one side responds, he says 'The Contents (or Not-Contents) have it'. If both sides respond, he judges which is the more numerous and says 'I think the Contents (or Not-Contents) have it'. If this is not challenged he says 'The Contents (or Not-Contents) have it' and the question is decided. If, however, both sides persist in their challenge, he calls a Division, by saying 'Clear the Bar'. The Division bells are rung and the House then divides, after two Tellers have been appointed for each side, the Contents going through the lobby on the Spiritual side of the Chamber, the Not-Contents through the lobby on the Temporal side. The result is then announced.

(3) **Adjournment of the House.** When the day's business in the Chamber is completed a member of the Government Front Bench moves 'That the House do now adjourn' and the Lord Speaker puts the question. Recently the average length of a sitting has been something over five hours; later sittings usually end between 10.00 and 11.00 p.m.

(4) **Further reading and information.** This description of proceedings is necessarily brief; the main printed authority on all matters of procedure is Sir T. Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, first published in 1844, now in its 19th edition, and available in libraries. Since 1621 the principal rules

SOME RULES OF PROCEDURE

of order in the Lords have been formulated in a code of 'Standing Orders', and these are now available from Her Majesty's Stationery Office in two booklets, devoted respectively to *Public Business*, and to *Private Business*. A booklet dealing with *Appeals* to the Lords is available from the Judicial Office of the House. A general guide to procedure is provided in the *Lords Companion to the Standing Orders*, a weekly summary of the business transacted and forthcoming of the House, and of changes in its membership, is included in the *House of Lords Weekly Information Bulletin* and a brief description of general Parliamentary procedure and history is provided by the Central

Office of Information's pamphlet 33, *The British Parliament*.

Enquiries concerning administration should be addressed to the Office of the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, procedural enquiries should be addressed to the Information Office, and historical enquiries to the Record Office – in each case the address is "House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW" (telephone 01-219 3000). Members of the public may also consult the original records of Parliament, which date from the 15th century to the present day. These records are available throughout the year in the Search Room of the Lords Record Office, which is approached by the Chancellor's Gate.

A Message from the Lord Chancellor

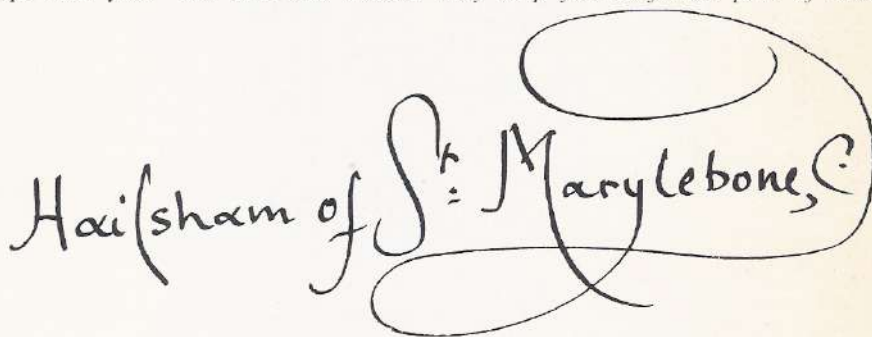
As Speaker of the House of Lords, I welcome your visit to see the House at work.

The House of Lords has been an important part of Parliament for some seven hundred years, and there are many sides to its work. The House spends much of its time in the detailed consideration of bills, which it sometimes revises extensively; and many of the less controversial but necessary Government bills start their passage through Parliament in the House of Lords. Debates in the House of Lords help to decide national policy; and Lords are also able to question the Government on its policies.

Not all the work of the House is done in the Chamber. Committees sit in other parts of the building to deal with a variety of matters, including the consideration of private bills, the scrutiny of European Community legislation and the hearing of judicial business. Many of these committees are open to the public, and you may wish to spend some time in the Committee Corridor during your visit to the House.

In these and other ways, the House of Lords makes its own substantial contribution to the work of Parliament. I hope that your visit and this booklet may help you to follow part of that continuing work.

May 1979

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hailsham of St Marylebone, C". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative flourish at the end.

Lord Chancellor
Speaker of the House of Lords