

# MAIN FINDING AIDS FOR THE OFFICIAL RECORDS IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS RECORD OFFICE



The official records of Parliament can be divided into three broad groups as follows:-

1. Records of the House of Lords preserved in the custody of the Clerk of the Parliaments (1497 to date). These include both legislative and judicial records, reflecting the dual function of the House of Lords.
2. Records of the House of Commons (1547 to date). However, it should be noted that all domestic records of the Commons then surviving were destroyed in the fire of 1834 except for the Manuscript Journals of the House of Commons; a few sixteenth and seventeenth century papers preserved amongst the Lords papers; some eighteenth century prints; and a few deposited plans from 1819. All printed papers are also available.
3. Miscellaneous. Various classes of documents survive which emanated from other offices at Westminster, such as those of Black Rod, the Lord Great Chamberlain and of the Chief Usher of the Exchequer. Also included is the architectural archive of original and photographic copies of drawings, prints and photographs of the Palace of Westminster from its inception to the present day.

The first points of reference for the study of any given subject are the Journals of both Lords and Commons which give a day to day record of business transacted and papers laid, but normally no account of debates or speeches. There are several versions of manuscript and draft Journals of the Lords, one manuscript version for the Commons and a printed series for each House. General indexes provide the date (expressed in regnal years) and references to the printed Journals dealing with the required subject which can be a person, place or topic.

Any actual surviving papers which were laid before the House of Lords up to 1718 can then be traced by consulting the appropriate volume of the printed **Calendar of Manuscripts**, which has its own index. These manuscripts are known as **Main Papers** or **Sessional Papers** of the House of Lords and include some strays from the House of Commons which survived the fire of 1834. A large number of the Main Papers consist of **Petitions** from private individuals or groups for redress of grievance, petitions for or against private or public Bills, petitions in Appeals or petitions in Peerage claims amongst others. Documents later than 1718 can be located in the chronological *Red Lists of Main Papers*, in the *Blue Lists of the Parchment Collection*, or the *Lists of Peerage Records*. Relevant material can also be found in the **House of Lords Committee Books** which are listed separately. A general account of the Main Papers can be found in House of Lords Record Office Memorandum No. 20, *House of Lords Papers and Petitions* (1959). From 1850 unprinted **Sessional Papers** of the House of Commons have also survived for which lists are available in the Search Room.



Increasingly from the seventeenth century certain **Sessional Papers** were ordered to be printed by each House separately and by 1801 the majority of them were regularly printed ‘by command’ and bound in sessional sets of volumes, classified into four groups for each session:- Bills; Reports from Select Committees and Joint Committees, Proceedings of Standing Committees; Reports from Commissions and non-parliamentary Committees; Accounts and Papers. The House of Commons set has become popularly known as ‘parliamentary papers’ or ‘blue books’. Various collections of the Sessional Papers prior to 1801 have been made and are kept either in the Record Office or the House of Lords Library. Since the bound sets for both Houses dated between 1801 and 1945 are now stored offsite, the Record Office has acquired microfiche copies of the **Commons Sessional Papers** for the years 1801 – 1900 for immediate availability and use. All other Sessional Papers prior to 1945 have to be ordered at least 48 hours in advance. CD Rom for the microfiche, as well as manual lists and indexes are available in the Search Room.

The **Acts of Parliament** in the House of Lords Record Office date from 1497 (the medieval Acts are in the custody of the Public Record Office). The original roll is engrossed before the third reading in the House in which the Bill was introduced, with subsequent amendments attached. From 1849 the Acts were printed in book form after the Royal Assent was given. These ‘Original Acts’ in roll and book form provide the authoritative text for all other printed versions. Public Acts are printed in *Statutes of the Realm* (to 1714) and in the official sessional volumes of Statutes. Private Acts before 1800 were not usually printed. Lists and indexes to the Acts including a list of the long titles with the chapter numbers and the equivalent Victoria Tower numbers of the Original Acts are available in the Search Room.

**Parliamentary Debates** of both Lords and Commons, popularly known as ‘**Hansard**’, are printed in six series from 1803 to date and record the major speeches and debates. By 1909 they are printed verbatim. Indexes are provided for each volume and at the end of each session. For the period before 1803 there are thirty six volumes of *Parliamentary History* edited by W Cobbett.

**Private Bill Records** in the Lords (1572 to date) will be described in another ‘Guide’ leaflet.

Lists of these records and a database are available in the Search Room.

**Peerage Claims Records** (1604 to date) include petitions; printed cases; evidence; Minutes of Proceedings before Committee for Privileges (from 1661); diaries; copies of registers; and a few original Patents which were presented to the Committee as evidence.

**Judicial Records** in the House of Lords date from 1621 and principally comprise the proceedings in cases brought to the House on Writs of Error (1621-1857) and **Appeal Cases** brought to the House on appeal from a lower Court. An index of these (in red binders) is available in the Search Room.

In addition, records are preserved for cases of Original Jurisdiction (1621-1693), Impeachments (1621-1805) and for trials of Peers (1626-1936). All these have been calendared up until 1718 and after that date they can be located through the index to the Lords Journals and the *Red Lists of Main Papers*.

**Votes and Proceedings** of the House of Commons (1680 to date) are a printed series of brief journals of proceedings with much additional material contained in Appendices (1826-1870) and Supplements (1836 to date). They include private business, notices of motions, division lists, public Bill lists, minutes of proceedings in Standing Committees, reports on and amendments to private Bills, reports on petitions and answers to questions.

**Petitions** to the House of Commons are preserved in their original form for 1621 to 1649 and from 1951. Entries concerning petitions were made in the House of Commons Journals from 1547 to date and in the Votes and Proceedings from 1680 to date. In addition, there are separately printed **Reports of the Committees on Public Petitions** with appendices and indexes (1833 to date). An index is available in the Search Room.

**Committee Papers** of the House of Commons or ‘Unprinted Memoranda’ are the papers which are not included in the printed reports of Select Committees. Copies are deposited in the Commons Library for MPs and in the Record Office for the public to see. A list is available on request to the Search Room Supervisor.

Other miscellaneous classes of records include the Parliament Office Papers, the records of the Lord Great Chamberlain, Shaw Lefevre Manuscripts (1764-1860), Serjeant at Arms Records (1788-1914), Parliamentary Press Gallery Records (from 1871), the Onslow Manuscripts (1547-1801) and deposited papers in the Libraries of the Lords and Commons which are usually available on request. The Architectural Archive of plans, drawings and photographs of the Palace of Westminster can be accessed through the architectural database in the Search Room.

*The Guide to the Records of Parliament* by M F Bond (1971) supplemented by subsequent *Annual Reports* of the Record Office gives a detailed analysis of the records and *A Short Guide to the Records of Parliament* (1980) gives a brief overview. Both are available for sale in the Record Office.

Other references are:- *Select List of Classes of Records in the House of Lords Record Office*, HLRO Memorandum No 1 (revised 1973).

*The Use of Finding Aids in the Search Room*, HLRO Memorandum No 25 E (revised 1972).

*The Journals, Minutes and Committee Books of the House of Lords*, HLRO Memorandum No 13 (revised 1957).