THE HISTORY OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS
Key dates in the evolution of the House of Lords

11th century
Origins of Parliament in the Witans; councils consulted by Saxon Kings and attended by religious leaders, magnates and the King’s own ministers.

13th century
Attendance includes representatives of counties, cities and boroughs.

14th century
Two distinct houses emerge: one composed of shire and borough representatives became known as the Commons; the other, of religious leaders (Lords Spiritual) and magnates (Lords Temporal), became known as the Upper House.

15th century
Membership of Lords Temporal had by now become almost entirely hereditary and male, Members being summoned by writ rather than chosen by the monarch. The Lords Temporal became known as 'peers', i.e. equal among themselves but with five ranks: Duke, Marquess, Earl, Viscount and Baron.

16th century
Until the suppression of the monasteries in 1539 the Lords Spiritual consisted of bishops, abbots and priors. After 1539, only bishops attended and the Lords Temporal formed the majority for the first time.

17th century
In 1642 during the Civil War bishops were excluded from the House of Lords but returned by the Clergy Act 1661. In 1649 the House itself ceased to exist but resumed separate sittings in 1660. The Commons pre-eminence in financial matters was given an official basis in the passing of resolutions in 1671 and 1678 after attempts by the Lords to breach the convention. The Declaration of Rights established Parliament’s authority over the King. It was later embodied in an Act, initiated by the Commons—known as the 1689 Bill of Rights.

18th century
The Acts of Union (1707 with Scotland and 1800 with Ireland) entitled Scottish and Irish peers to elect representatives from among their number to sit in the Lords.
19th century

The Bishopric of Manchester Act 1847 (and later Acts), limited the number of bishops entitled to sit. Most of the Irish and all the Welsh bishops ceased to sit when their respective churches were disestablished in 1869 and 1920. Retired bishops cannot sit or vote in the House.

The Appellate Jurisdiction Act 1876 created the judicial functions of the House of Lords in its modern form and enabled the sovereign to create Lords of Appeal in Ordinary (Law Lords) to continue to sit and vote. They were, in effect, the first life peerages.

20th century

1909  The Lords rejected the Liberal Government’s budget. The Liberals then introduced a Bill to end the power of the Lords to reject legislation approved by the Commons, which was passed under the threat of the creation of a large number of Liberal peers.

1911  The Parliament Act 1911 provided that:

- Money Bills approved by the Commons became law if not passed without amendment by the Lords within one month;
- other Public Bills, except one to extend the life of a Parliament, became law without the consent of the Lords if passed by the Commons in three successive sessions providing two years elapsed between Second Reading and Final Passing in the Commons.

1922  Elections for Irish representative peers ceased.

1941  Commons Chamber destroyed by enemy action. The Lords give up their Chamber to the Commons and use the Queen’s Robing Room when they sit.

1949  The Parliament Act 1949 reduced the delaying power of the 1911 Act in respect of Public Bills other than money Bills to two sessions and one year respectively.
1958 The Life Peerages Act 1958 permitted the creation of peerages for life, with no limit on numbers, to persons of either sex. At about the same time allowances for peers’ out-of-pocket expenses and the system of ‘leave of absence’ for Members who did not wish or could not attend the House for a long period were introduced.

1963 The Peerage Act 1963 allowed hereditary peeresses to be Members of the House, hereditary peerages to be disclaimed for life and for all Scottish peers to sit.

1968 The Labour Government introduced the Parliament (No.2) Bill, which would have created a two-tier House of created Members who could speak and vote and others who could speak but not vote. The Bill was so held up in the House of Commons by both Labour and Conservative MPs that it had to be abandoned.

1999 The House of Lords Act 1999 removed the right of most hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House. An amendment to the Bill, tabled by former Commons Speaker and, at the time, Convenor of the Crossbenchers Lord Weatherill, was accepted by the Government: it enabled 92 hereditary peers to remain until the House was fully reformed.

21st century

2005 The Constitutional Reform Act 2005 removed the judicial function of the House of Lords from Parliament and set up a new, independent supreme court (from October 2009). It also changed the role of the Lord Chancellor; ending his role as a judge and indirectly as Speaker of the House of Lords.

2006 The House held its first election for a Lord Speaker and Baroness Hayman was elected on 4 July 2006. The role was previously one of the Lords Chancellor’s responsibilities.

Debate and consideration of further Lords reform continues. For the latest information, visit the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page on the House of Lords homepage at www.parliament.uk/lords.

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