

FREQUENTLY ASKED LEGAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS



Creative Commons image via Flickr courtesy UK Parliament

RESEARCHING PARLIAMENTARY PUBLICATIONS



INNER TEMPLE LIBRARY

Frequently Asked Questions: Researching Parliamentary Publications

This guide aims to answer questions frequently asked of the staff at the Inner Temple Library about the different kinds of Parliamentary publications. Sources are identified that will help in locating bibliographical details of publications, and in some cases the full text. The sources suggested are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather they are sources that the staff have found to be most useful and which are likely to be found in an Inn Library or a public library with a law collection. The sources include free web-based sources, hard copy materials and subscription-based databases. Details of the coverage of the subscription-based databases and other websites can be found at the end of the contents.

All the Inns of Court Libraries hold some categories of Parliamentary material, however Lincoln's Inn Library has the main specialist collection.

The Inns of Court Libraries are open to members of the Inns of Court only and the subscription-based databases mentioned in this guide are only available for use in the Inner Temple Library by members of the Inns of Court. These databases cannot be accessed remotely because of restrictions in our licence agreements.

There are several public libraries in London which have collections of Parliamentary publications. The British Library, Guildhall Library and Westminster Reference Library hold good collections. It is always advisable to contact the libraries before you visit to check that they hold the material you need.

What are Parliamentary Publications?

What are House of Commons and House of Lords Papers?

What are Command Papers?

How are Command Papers, House of Commons and House of Lords Papers cited?

What are Green and White Papers?

What are Bills?

What are Public General Acts (PGAs)?

What are Local Acts?

What are Church Measures?

What is Hansard?

What are the House of Commons and House of Lords Journals?

What are Standing Committees or Public Bill Committees?

How do I find details of Parliamentary Publications?

How do I find details of House of Commons and House of Lords Papers?

How do I find details of Command Papers?

How do I find information on the progress of Bills?

How do I find a Private Bill?

How do I find the text of Debates?

How do I find House of Commons and House of Lords Journals?

How do I find Standing Committee/Public Bill Committee Debates?

Database Coverage

Details about the databases are available on the [website](#).

What are Parliamentary Publications?

They are those publications required by Parliament to carry out its business. Included within this category are:

- House of Commons (HC) and House of Lords (HL) Papers
- Command Papers
- HC and HL Bills
- HC and HL Debates
- HC and HL Journals
- Public General Acts
- Local Acts
- Church Measures

The term Parliamentary Papers usually refers to House of Commons Papers, House of Lords Papers and Command Papers only.

What are House of Commons and House of Lords Papers?

House of Commons and House of Lords Papers provide the respective Chambers of each House with information for their consideration. They can also deal with matters that arise out of the work of the two Houses. The papers include Bills, reports, minutes, evidence taken by committees, Estimates and appropriations.

What are Command Papers?

A Command Paper is a document issued by the British government and presented to Parliament. White Papers, treaties, reports from Royal Commissions and various government bodies are all examples of Command Papers. The name Command Paper derives from the fact that they are formally presented to Parliament 'by command of His (or Her) Majesty'.

How are Command Papers, House of Commons and House of Lords Papers cited?

Command Papers are cited by a serial number, preceded (except for the first series) by an abbreviation of the word 'Command'. The form of the abbreviation has changed whenever a new series has begun, as follows:

1833 – 1869	1 – 4222
1870 – 1899	C.1 – C. 9550
1900 – 1918	Cd 1 – Cd 9239
1919 – 1956	Cmd 1 – Cmd 9889
1957 – 1986	Cmnd 1 – Cmnd 9927
1986 – 2018	Cm + running number
2019 - to date	CP + running number

House of Commons Papers are cited with the sessional year and serial number but without brackets e.g. HC (1990-91) 7.

House of Lords Papers are cited with the sessional year and serial number in brackets e.g. HL (1984-85) (244).

What are Green and White Papers?

Green Papers are consultation documents which set out government proposals on a topic before they are fully formed. They are often published with green covers. Some are published as Command Papers and may be traced in the same way as any other Command Paper. Others are published as individual documents by the relevant government department or agency, in which case the best starting point may be the department's website.

White Papers are issued by the government and set out fully considered statements of policy or proposals for legislative change. They are normally published as Command Papers, and often precede the introduction of a Bill to Parliament.

What are Bills?

There are 3 types of Bill:

- **Public Bills** are the drafts of new legislation and are promoted by the government. They are debated in Parliament.
- **Private Members' Bills** are introduced to Parliament by an individual MP or Peer and not by a government minister.
- **Private Bills** are presented to Parliament as petitions by those groups who will benefit by the legislation.

What are Public General Acts (PGAs)?

PGAs are Acts of Parliament that apply to the whole country. For more in depth coverage see [Frequently Asked Questions: Researching UK Law](#).

What are Local Acts?

Local Acts are Acts of Parliament that apply to particular individuals or to organisations such as local authorities.

What are Church Measures?

Church Measures are a form of legislation passed by the General Synod of the Church of England and having the same force and effect as Acts of Parliament.

What is Hansard?

Hansard (the Official Report) is the edited verbatim report of proceedings of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

What are the House of Commons and House of Lords Journals?

The House of Commons Journal is the corrected, archive edition of Votes and Proceedings, which is the formal record of House of Commons business for a given day. The House of Lords Journal is the formal record of House of Lords business for a given day.

What are Standing Committees or Public Bill Committees?

Public Bill Committees are committees of the House of Commons which consider Bills in detail clause by clause, and may make amendments between the Second Reading and Report Stage of their passage through the House of Commons. They were known as Standing Committees before the 2006/07 parliamentary session.

How do I find details of Parliamentary Publications?

Free web sources

- **GOV.UK: Publications** - is now the primary source for new Command Papers, with coverage there from January 1993 onwards.
- **Official Documents** - this site, formerly administered by The Stationery Office (TSO) and now archived by the National Archives, covers all Command Papers and departmentally sponsored House of Commons Papers (HCPs) from 17 May 2005 (the beginning of the 2005/06 parliamentary session) to January 2014. Texts are provided in pdf format. There is also a selection of earlier Command Papers, HCPs and other key government papers going back to 1994.
- **TSO Daily Lists** - for recent daily lists and archive back to 2008.
- **TSO Shop** - The Stationery Office bookshop sells many official publications and their site is useful for checking for bibliographical information.
- **UK Parliament Website** - provides access to a range of Parliamentary publications. Full text is available for many of the publications listed.

Hard copy sources

- HMSO/TSO annual catalogues - these can be used to find bibliographical information on the publications. There are numerical sequences for the different types of material. In addition in the annual catalogues there is an alphabetical index covering keywords, chairmen, departments and personal authors. Use the Daily Lists for recent publications. The Inner Temple Library holds HMSO/TSO catalogues 1931 onwards.
- Index to Chairmen - these cover the period 1800 to 2008. These indexes are useful because sometimes reports are referred to by the Chairman's name rather than the title of the report. The Indexes give the bibliographical references needed to locate the full text. The HMSO/TSO annual catalogues also list names of chairmen.
- Parliamentary Papers sessional indexes - these can be used to find details of Command Papers and House of Commons and House of Lords Papers. There are subject lists and lists of material by category.

How do I find details of House of Commons and House of Lords Papers?

Free web sources

- **House of Commons Sessional Information Digest** - can be used to track details of House of Commons Papers. You need to select the session you are interested in and then look at the **Contents** page to link to the section containing the information required. House of Commons Papers may be listed under **Work of Committees** or **Documentation** on the Contents page. Coverage is from 1995/96 to 2010/12.
- **Official Documents** - this site, formerly administered by The Stationery Office (TSO) and now archived by the National Archives, covers all Command Papers and departmentally sponsored House of Commons Papers (HCPs) from 17 May 2005 (the beginning of the 2005/06 parliamentary session) to January 2014. Texts are provided in pdf format. There is also a selection of earlier Command Papers, HCPs and other key government papers going back to 1994.
- **TSO Daily Lists** - for recent daily lists and archive back to 2008.
- **UK Parliament Website** – click on the **Business** tab; then **Publications and Records**. Includes selected House of Commons and House of Lords Papers. Some House of Commons Papers are in full text.

Hard copy sources

The following sources can be used to find bibliographical details. These are all held by the Inner Temple Library.

- Parliamentary Papers sessional indexes - most of these have alphabetical and numerical lists. The Inner Temple Library holds annual sessional indexes from 1940/41 to 1979/80; a General Index to Parliamentary Papers 1900-1949 and a set of 4 volumes which provide an alphabetical subject index to Parliamentary Papers. The volumes cover 1929-1949; 1950-1958/59; 1959/60-1968/69; 1969/70-1978/79.
- HMSO/TSO annual catalogues - the annual catalogues have numerical sequences for the different types of material and there is an alphabetical index of subject terms. The Inner Temple Library holds the annual catalogues from 1931 onwards.
- House of Commons Sessional Information Digest - this can be used to trace details of House of Commons Papers from 1992/93 to 2008/09.

How do I find details of Command Papers?

Free web sources

- **GOV.UK: Publications** - is now the primary source for new Command Papers, with coverage there from January 1993 onwards.
- **Law Commission** - provides details of government consultations and law reform projects. The site includes current and closed consultations in full text. Publications can also be found on the **BAILII website**.
- **Official Documents** - this site, formerly administered by The Stationery Office (TSO) and now archived by the National Archives, covers all Command Papers and departmentally sponsored House of Commons Papers (HCPs) from 17 May 2005 (the beginning of the 2005/06 parliamentary session) to January 2014. Texts are provided in pdf format. There is also a selection of earlier Command Papers, HCPs and other key government papers going back to 1994.
- **TSO Daily Lists** - for recent daily lists and archive back to 2008.
- Government department websites can be useful for locating consultation papers (both current and closed consultations). Many are available in full text.

Hard copy sources

The following sources can be used to find bibliographical details of Command Papers. These are all held by the Inner Temple Library.

- **Current Law Statutes** - the notes may indicate if there was any preceding White Paper to the originating Bill.
- **Explanatory Notes to Acts** - these may give an indication if there were any White or Green Papers preceding the Bill.
- **Hansard second reading Debates on a Bill** - can be checked for references to Green and White Papers. The Minister who is introducing the Bill will mention the background to it.
- **Parliamentary Papers sessional indexes** - most of these have alphabetical and numerical lists. The Inner Temple Library holds annual sessional indexes from 1940/41 to 1979/80; a General Index to Parliamentary Papers 1900-1949 and a set of 4 volumes which provide an alphabetical subject index to Parliamentary Papers. The volumes cover 1929-1949; 1950-1958/59; 1959/60-1968/69; 1969/70-1978/79.
- **HMSO/TSO annual catalogues** - these cover the period 1931 onwards and can be used to find bibliographical details of Command Papers. There are numerical sequences for the different types of publications. Also in the annual catalogues there is an alphabetical index covering keywords, chairmen, departments and personal authors. The Inner Temple Library holds the annual catalogues 1931 onwards.
- **Law Under Review** - this was a journal produced by the Law Commission which gave details of law reform projects. It is useful for finding references to Green and White Papers. The Inner Temple Library holds this journal from 1987 to 1997.

How do I find information on the progress of Bills?

Free web sources

- **House of Commons Sessional Information Digest** - these indexes cover 1995/96 to 2010/12. You need to select the session you are interested in and then look at the **Contents** page. Information on Bills can be found via **Section B** which covers Legislation.
- **UK Parliament Website** - select **Business** and then **Bills & legislation**. Under this heading there are various options: Bills before Parliament; Bills in previous sessions; Progress of Public Bills this session. All these can help track the progress of Bills.

Hard copy sources

- Current Law Monthly Digest - use the section headed **Progress of Bills**.
- House of Commons Sessional Information Digest - gives details of the progress of Bills 1992/93 to 2008/9.

Subscription-based databases

- Lexis+ - there is a **Bill Tracker** facility for tracing the progress of Bills in the current Parliamentary session with links to the full text. This can be found in the **Content** tab under Current Awareness.
- Westlaw - within the **Legislation** database there is a **Bills & Drafts** heading. Select **Westminster Bills** and then the appropriate session. Each Bill has a **Bill Details** tab. This will indicate the stage it has reached in Parliament.

How do I find a Private Bill?

- Private Bills are presented to Parliament as petitions by individuals or groups who will benefit by the legislation. They are printed at the promoter's expense and are not considered to be parliamentary or official publications.
- The British Library has extensive holdings.
- The promoters of the Bill may also have copies.

How do I find the text of Debates?

Free web sources

- [Hansard](#) - for access to records of debates from as far back as the early 19th century.
- [TheyWorkForYou.com](#) - includes the full text of HC Debates back to the General Election of 1935; full text of Commons written answers and written ministerial statements back to the General Election of June 2001. It also covers HL Debates from 1999 onwards.
- [UK Parliament Website](#) - select **Business** and then **Publications and Records**. Select View and search Commons and Lords Hansard.

Hard copy sources

The following sources can be used to find bibliographical details of Debates. They are all held by Inner Temple Library.

- Hansard sessional indexes - these give references to volumes and column numbers. You can then find the Debates in the relevant bound volumes. The Inner Temple Library holds bound volumes of Debates from 1803 onwards.
- Current Law Statutes Annotated - the introductory section for Acts gives details of the Debates that preceded the Act.
- Halsbury's Statutes - the notes that accompany the Acts may sometimes give Hansard references.
- House of Commons Sessional Information Digest (SID) - gives references to dates of Debates. The Inner Temple Library holds SID from the 1992/93 session to 2008/09.
- Textbooks - it may be worth checking practitioners' textbooks as some may have Hansard references in footnotes. The Blackstone's guides to new Acts often have such references.
- For early eighteenth century sources use *Debates and proceedings of the British Parliaments: a guide to printed sources* by David Lewis Jones. This is held at the Inner Temple, Lincoln's Inn and Middle Temple Libraries.

Subscription-based databases

- Lexis Library - when you have found the legislation you need in the **Legislation database**, there will be a link to **Annotations** on the right of the screen. These notes are taken from the bound volumes of Halsbury's Statutes and may give references to Debates.

How do I find House of Commons and House of Lords Journals?

Free web sources

The following are all sections of the UK Parliament Website.

- [House of Commons Journal](#) - coverage is 1837 onwards. This can be found by selecting **Business** and then **Publications and Records**. Full text is available.
- [House of Commons Votes and Proceedings](#) - contains the full text of the formal record of House of Commons business from October 1997 onwards.
- [House of Lords Journal](#) - contains the full text of the House of Lords Journals 1997/98 onwards.
- [House of Lords Business Papers](#) - select **House of Lords Business** to access recent as well as archived content back to June 1998.

Hard copy sources

- The Inner Temple Library holds House of Lords Journals 1510–1867 and 1939–1977; House of Commons Journals 1547–1867 and 1939–1977.

How do I find Standing Committee/Public Bill Committee Debates?

Free web sources

- [UK Parliament Website](#) - for the Public Bill Committee debates archive 1997-2016. For the latest Public Bill Committee debates, go to Hansard.

Hard copy sources

- Lincoln's Inn Library holds Standing Committee Debates and Public Bill Committee Debates. Click [here](#) to see details of their holdings. This Library is open to barrister members of the four Inns of Court and to student members of Lincoln's Inn.