



Library Note

The Sovereign and Parliament

The Sovereign fulfils a number of ceremonial and formal roles with respect to Parliament, established by conventions, throughout the parliamentary calendar. The State Opening of Parliament marks the beginning of each new session of Parliament. It is the only routine occasion when the three constituent parts of Parliament—that is the Sovereign, the House of Lords and the House of Commons—meet. The Queen’s Speech during State Opening is the central element around which the ceremony pivots, without which no business of either the House of Lords or the House of Commons can proceed. Each ‘Parliament’ lasts a maximum of five years, within which there are a number of sessions. Each session is ‘prorogued’ to mark its end. An announcement is made in the House of Lords, to Members of both Houses following the Queen’s command that Parliament should be prorogued by a commissioner of a Royal Commission. At the end of the final session of each Parliament—which is immediately prior to the next general election—Parliament is also dissolved. Following the Prime Minister’s advice, the Sovereign issues a proclamation summoning the new Parliament, appointing the day for the first meeting of Parliament.

All bills must be agreed by both Houses of Parliament and the Sovereign before they can become Acts of Parliament. Once a bill has passed both Houses, it is formally agreed by the Sovereign by a process known as royal assent. Additionally, Queen’s consent is sometimes required before a bill completes its passage through Parliament, if the bill affects the Sovereign.

The usual way that either House communicates with the Sovereign is by an Address. Addresses that are presented by the whole House only take place on occasions of particular importance. The most recent example of this was an Address for Queen Elizabeth II’s Diamond Jubilee which took place in Westminster Hall on 20 March 2012.

On 9 September 2015, Queen Elizabeth II became the longest reigning sovereign in British history. This House of Lords Library briefing focuses on the Sovereign as part of the constitution of Parliament. It captures key aspects of the role of the Sovereign as it relates, in practice, to Parliament today, with an emphasis on the House of Lords. It does this through addressing a selection of the ceremonial and formal roles of the Sovereign: the State Opening of Parliament and its prorogation and dissolution; the calling of a new Parliament, in light of the Fixed-term Parliament Act 2011; Royal Commissions and royal assent; and Queen’s consent. The briefing also addresses a number of aspects of the Sovereign’s communications and relationship with Parliament more broadly, through Addresses and messages and the Palace of Westminster itself. It provides facts and figures relating to Queen Elizabeth II including: the number of Acts that have received royal assent during her reign, Addresses given by the Queen to both Houses in Westminster Hall, and the wording of Queen Elizabeth II’s first message to Parliament on her accession to the throne in 1952.

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I. Constitutional Monarchy

Erskine May explains that:

Parliament is composed of the Sovereign, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Collectively they form the legislature, and as distinct parts of the constitution they exercise functions and enjoy privileges peculiar to each.¹

Constitutional monarchy is a form of government in which the Sovereign acts as Head of State and governs in accordance with the constitution—not with his or her own free will.² The principle of constitutional monarchy had become “firmly established” in Britain by the reign of King George V in 1910 and the principle continues today.³

The reigning Sovereign does not “rule” the country.⁴ The Head of State does not, for example, have the authority to make and pass laws but, in practice, acts on the advice of ministers in relation to “almost all matters”.⁵ The Sovereign fulfils a number of ceremonial and formal roles with respect to Parliament, established by conventions.⁶

The Sovereign maintains political neutrality.⁷ Though the Sovereign is not specifically prohibited from voting, convention has it that the Sovereign never votes. It would be considered unconstitutional to do so. Following the removal of all but 92 hereditary peers from the House of Lords in 1999, the royal dukes, such as the Duke of Edinburgh, ceased to be Members of the House of Lords. They therefore became eligible to vote in elections, and to stand for election.⁸ However, members of the Royal Family do not exercise these rights as they also are required to preserve their political neutrality so as not to “embarrass” the Sovereign.⁹ Any ceremonial or official duties undertaken by the Sovereign are understood to be removed from party politics.¹⁰

2. State Opening of Parliament

The State Opening of Parliament takes place to open every parliamentary session (not only the start of a new Parliament which directly follows a general election). Historically the Sovereign was not always present for State Opening, but the physical presence of the Sovereign today symbolises the unity of the three constituent parts of Parliament.¹¹

The State Opening of Parliament typically takes place annually, though 1974 and 2011 provided exceptions to this. In 1974, two elections took place as a result of a hung Parliament after the first. Consequently, two State Openings also took place that year—the first on 12 March 1974 and the second on 29 October 1974. Queen Elizabeth II attended both.¹² In 2011, a State

¹ Erskine May, *The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 1. The ‘Sovereign’ can also be referred to as the ‘Monarch’ or the ‘Crown’.

² British Monarchy website, ‘[What is Constitutional Monarchy?](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

³ British Monarchy website, ‘[History and Background](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

⁴ British Monarchy website, ‘[The Queen and the UK](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

⁵ British Monarchy website, ‘[What is Constitutional Monarchy?](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ British Monarchy website, ‘[Queen and Voting](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Parliament website, ‘[Offices and Ceremonies: State Opening of Parliament](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

¹² [HL Hansard, 12 March 1974, cols 7–12](#); and [HL Hansard, 29 October 1974, cols 7–11](#).

Opening of parliament did not take place. This was due to the uncommon length of the 2010 parliamentary session which continued into 2012. On 13 September 2010, Sir George Young, the then Leader of the House of Commons, announced that “Her Majesty’s Gracious Speech on the occasion of the State Opening of Parliament will, in future, ordinarily take place in the spring, rather than in the autumn” subject to the passage of the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill.¹³ He noted that:

In order to ensure a smooth transition, the Government have decided that the current session of Parliament will run until around Easter 2012. The next state opening of Parliament will therefore take place shortly afterwards.¹⁴

The proposed change received some criticism, though this mostly surrounded the implications that an extended session would have for the legislative programme.¹⁵

The Fixed-term Parliaments Bill received royal assent as the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 on 15 September 2011 (see section 4.1 of this briefing) and the next Queen’s Speech thereby took place, as proposed, in 2012.

2.1 Royal Procession

Sovereign’s Entrance

Following a royal procession from Buckingham Palace to Westminster, escorted by members of the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment, the Sovereign enters Parliament through the Sovereign’s Entrance for the State Opening of Parliament.¹⁶ Previously known as the Victoria Tower entrance, the entrance was first used at a State Opening in 1852 by Queen Victoria, as recorded in the Lord Great Chamberlain’s Minute Book of that year.¹⁷ Queen Victoria’s first usage of the entrance followed the opening of the new Palace of Westminster and the same route continues to be used for the State Opening ceremony today.¹⁸ A Member of the House of Commons is ceremonially “held hostage” in Buckingham Palace while the Sovereign attends the State Opening, to ensure the Sovereign’s safe return.¹⁹

It is possible for the Sovereign to be accompanied by other members of the Royal Family for State Opening. Until recently, the Sovereign travelled to and from the State Opening of Parliament in the Irish State Coach, used for the first time in 1852 by Queen Victoria.²⁰ However, in 2014, Queen Elizabeth II, joined by the Duke of Edinburgh, travelled for the first time in the new Diamond Jubilee State Coach, and Prince Charles travelled in the Irish State Coach joined by the Duchess of Cornwall.²¹ This has been the case since. All coaches in the procession enter through Sovereign’s Entrance, including the first coach which carries the Royal Regalia.

¹³ [HC Hansard, 13 September 2010, cols 33WS–4WS.](#)

¹⁴ [ibid, col 34WS.](#)

¹⁵ See, for example, the then Shadow Leader of the House of Commons, Rosie Winterton’s speech during an urgent question on the date of the Queen’s Speech, [HC Hansard, 13 September 2010, cols 615–16.](#)

¹⁶ Parliament website, ‘[Offices and Ceremonies: State Opening—the Public Sequence of Events](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

¹⁷ Parliament website, ‘[The State Opening of 1852](#)’, 16 February 2016.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Parliament website, ‘[State Opening: Elements Unseen by the Public](#)’, accessed 2 February 2016.

²⁰ Parliament website, ‘[Offices and Ceremonies: State Opening—the Public Sequence of Events](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

²¹ Royal Collection Trust, ‘[Diamond Jubilee State Coach](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

Royal Regalia

The first coach in the procession is the Alexandra State coach which carries the Royal Regalia: the Imperial State Crown, the Cap of Maintenance and the Sword of State.²² Each item encompasses much symbolism:

- The term ‘Imperial State Crown’ derives from the 15th century when English monarchs chose a crown design closed by arches “to demonstrate that England was not subject to any other earthly power”.²³
- The Cap of Maintenance is a symbol of the authority of the Sovereign. It is carried by the Leader of the House of Lords in front of the Queen during the procession to and from the House of Lords at the State Opening of Parliament.²⁴
- The Sword of State was originally made for Charles II. It represents temporal and spiritual justice and mercy and is carried before the Queen in the procession at the State Opening of Parliament.²⁵ As with the Cap of Maintenance, it also symbolises the Sovereign’s royal authority.²⁶

When the coach has arrived at Sovereign’s Entrance, the Royal Regalia is taken to the Royal Gallery. The Imperial State Crown is only carried to the Robing Room once the Sovereign begins to travel to Parliament from Buckingham Palace. The Imperial State Crown remains in the Robing Room, awaiting the arrival of the Sovereign.

Royal Standard

On the Sovereign’s entrance to the Palace of Westminster, the Royal Standard—which represents the Sovereign and the United Kingdom—is flown from the Victoria Tower in place of the Union Flag.²⁷ In today’s Standard there are four quarterings—two are for England represented by three lions passant, one is for Scotland represented by a lion rampant and one for Ireland represented by a harp. The Royal Standard does not represent Wales as its “special position as a Principality was recognised by the creation of the Prince of Wales long before the incorporation of the quarterings for Scotland and Ireland in the Royal Arms”.²⁸ The Royal Standard is automatically flown when the Queen is present in the Palace of Westminster and the Union Flag takes its place again when the Sovereign leaves the Palace of Westminster.

Lord Great Chamberlain and the Earl Marshall

The Lord Great Chamberlain is a Great Officer of State and is responsible for all Royal matters in the Palace of Westminster.²⁹ As first laid out in a House of Lords standing order from 1720,

²² Parliament website, ‘[Offices and Ceremonies: State Opening—the Public Sequence of Events](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016; and British Monarchy website, ‘[Carriages](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

²³ Royal Collection, ‘[The Imperial State Crown](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

²⁴ Royal Collection, ‘[Cap of Maintenance](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

²⁵ Royal Collection, ‘[Sword of State](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

²⁶ British Monarchy website, ‘[The Crown Jewels](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

²⁷ House of Lords, *State Opening of Parliament*, 2014, p 3.

²⁸ British Monarchy website, ‘[Royal Standard](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

²⁹ British Monarchy website, ‘[Lord Great Chamberlain](#)’, accessed 28 April 2015. The Lord Great Chamberlain is not the same as the Lord Chamberlain who is based at Buckingham Palace and is responsible for the Queen’s Household.

when the Sovereign is present the “approaches to the House shall be kept clear from all unauthorised persons” and the Lord Great Chamberlain is “desired to take care to see this Order duly observed”.³⁰ The Lord Great Chamberlain thereby ensures that the route leading to the House of Lords is clear for the State Opening. The Earl Marshal is also a Great Officer of State and has a key role in the organisation of state ceremonies, including the State Opening of Parliament, as well as arrangements for state funerals and the coronations.³¹

The House of Lords Act 1999, which removed the majority of those Members of the House of Lords who sat by virtue of a hereditary peerage, specifically exempted the Lord Great Chamberlain and the Earl Marshal from exclusion from the House.³² May 2011 saw proposals of reform affecting the offices of the Lord Great Chamberlain and the Earl Marshal on the publication of the Government’s draft Bill and white paper on the House of Lords.³³ The white paper noted that “these office holders would not need to sit in the reformed House of Lords to fulfil their duties as members of the Royal Household”.³⁴ However, the Bill was withdrawn in 2012.³⁵

The Sovereign is met at Sovereign’s Entrance by the Lord Great Chamberlain and the Earl Marshall. Together they officiate the State Opening of Parliament and are responsible for the “wellbeing” of the Sovereign while in the Palace of Westminster.³⁶ The Sovereign proceeds to the Robing Room, which contains the chair of state, where the Sovereign receives the ceremonial dress of Imperial State Crown and the Robe of State.³⁷ The Royal Procession is then led from the Robing Room through the Royal Gallery by senior parliamentary and government officials, including the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Speaker, through the Prince’s Chamber and into the Chamber of the House of Lords. The lights of the House, which are previously dimmed, are turned up as the Queen enters the Lords Chamber.³⁸

2.2 Summons of the Commons

The Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod acts as Secretary to the Lord Great Chamberlain (see section 2.1 of this briefing). Through the latter, the Sovereign commands Black Rod to summon MPs to attend the Chamber of the House of Lords to hear the Sovereign’s speech at the State Opening of Parliament:³⁹

The Queen, seated on the Throne and attended by Her Officers of State, commanded that the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod should let the Commons know that it was Her Majesty’s pleasure that they attend Her immediately in this House.⁴⁰

³⁰ House of Lords, [The Standing Orders of the House of Lords Relating to Public Business](#), April 2010, HL Paper 116 of session 2009–10, p 7.

³¹ British Monarchy website, ‘[Earl Marshall](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016. For information regarding state funerals see House of Commons Library, [State and Ceremonial Funerals](#), 31 July 2013.

³² House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords: 2015](#), pp 17–18.

³³ HM Government, [House of Lords Reform Draft Bill](#), 17 May 2011, Cm 8077. For further information see House of Lords Library, [Principal Office Holders in the House of Lords](#), 19 March 2015.

³⁴ HM Government, [House of Lords Reform Draft Bill](#), 17 May 2011, Cm 8077, p 22.

³⁵ [HC Hansard, 10 July 2012, cols 274–9](#).

³⁶ British Monarchy website, ‘[Earl Marshal](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016; and British Monarchy website, ‘[Lord Great Chamberlain](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

³⁷ Norman Wilding and Philip Laundry, *An Encyclopaedia of Parliament*, 1972, p 626.

³⁸ House of Lords Library, [Ceremonial in the House of Lords](#), 5 March 2010, p 10.

³⁹ House of Lords Library, [Principal Office Holders in the House of Lords](#), 19 March 2015, p 29.

⁴⁰ See for example [HL Hansard, 27 May 2015, col 5](#).

The Lord Great Chamberlain then signals to Black Rod to summon Members of the House of Commons. Black Rod walks to the doors of the Commons Chamber which, on his arrival, are shut in front of him—a practice dating back to the Civil War. This symbolises the Commons’ independence from the monarchy as the elected House as distinct from the appointed House of Lords. The last time a Sovereign set foot inside the Chamber of the Commons was in 1642, when:

[A]s part of the struggle for power between Parliament and the Crown, Charles I entered the Chamber of the Commons to demand the arrest of five members but was defied and had no alternative but to withdraw. The late seventeenth century saw Parliament triumph as the supreme lawmaker [...]⁴¹

Black Rod strikes the door to the Commons Chamber with his rod three times, at which point the doors are opened to him. Black Rod delivers the Sovereign’s message to the House of Commons “to attend” the Sovereign. Following this, the Speaker of the Commons, along with Members of the House, go to attend Her Majesty.⁴² The Serjeant at Arms carries the Mace and leads the procession to the House of Lords followed by the Speaker and Black Rod, followed then by the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, MPs and senior Commons officials.⁴³ The “customary” walk from the House of Commons to the House of Lords is one where the MPs traditionally express their “disdain” and “displeasure” at “being ordered about by the Sovereign”.⁴⁴ Convention is that Members walk slowly and noisily across the Central Lobby to the doors of the House of Lords.⁴⁵ When the Members of the House of Commons have entered the doors to the House of Lords Chamber, they stand at the opposite end to the Throne, known as the Bar of the House of Lords, to listen to the Sovereign’s speech.

After the arrival of the MPs, the Lord Chancellor ascends the steps of the Throne, withdraws the Royal Speech from his purse and hands it to the Queen. As recorded in *Hansard*, only “[when Members of the House of Commons] had come with their Speaker, Her Majesty was pleased to speak”.⁴⁶

2.3 Queen’s Speech

No business of either House can proceed until the Sovereign’s speech has been delivered during State Opening of Parliament—referred to as the “Queen’s Speech” or “King’s Speech”.⁴⁷ The speech is addressed to both Houses and is particularly significant as it is the only time that the three constituent parts of Parliament meet for formal parliamentary proceedings.⁴⁸

As the Sovereign typically attends State Opening in person, the speech is usually read by the King or Queen themselves. Historically this has not always been the case. Following the death of Prince Albert in 1861, Queen Victoria attended the State Opening of Parliament less frequently and, when she did attend, the speech was delivered by the Lord Chancellor.⁴⁹ There

⁴¹ British Monarchy website, ‘[Unoccupied Royal Residences](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

⁴² See for example [HC Hansard, 27 May 2015, col 29](#).

⁴³ House of Lords, [State Opening of Parliament](#), 2014, p 3.

⁴⁴ Emma Crewe, *Rituals in Parliaments*, 2006, p 98.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ See for example [HL Hansard, 27 May 2015, col 5](#).

⁴⁷ British Monarchy website, ‘[The Queen in Parliament](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

⁴⁸ House of Lords, [State Opening of Parliament](#), 2014, p 1.

⁴⁹ Parliament website, ‘[The State Opening of Parliament—A Perspective from the Archives](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

have also been two occasions more recently that the reigning Queen, Queen Elizabeth II, has been unable to attend due to pregnancy. When the Sovereign is absent, “there is no State Opening”.⁵⁰ The Queen’s Speech is delivered by the Lord Chancellor or one of the other Lord Commissioners and the opening of Parliament takes place by virtue of a Royal Commission (see section 3.1 of this briefing). In such instances, the Lord Chancellor or a Lords Commissioner would state that “[w]e are commanded to deliver to you Her Majesty’s speech in Her Majesty’s own words”, with some variation in wording depending on whether it is the first session of parliament or a subsequent session.⁵¹

Though the speech is delivered by, or on behalf of, the Sovereign, the content of the speech is written by the Government.⁵² The speech indicates the Government’s legislative agenda for that session. The speech does not include information regarding the budget for that session. It traditionally ends with the words “other measures will be laid before you” to allow flexibility for the Government to introduce other bills not mentioned in the speech.⁵³ The speech also outlines state visits that the Monarchy will undertake. The Speech is recorded in the House of Lords *Hansard* official parliamentary records. It is later repeated in the House of Commons Chamber by the Speaker and, consequently, also recorded in the House of Commons *Hansard*.

After the Speech has been delivered, the Royal Procession returns to the Robing Room and, there, the ceremonial dress of the Imperial State Crown and Robe of State is removed from the Sovereign. The Sovereign is escorted back to the Diamond Jubilee State Coach following the same route as previously and the Procession leaves via Sovereign’s Entrance.

In both Houses a new parliamentary session can now begin. On the first sitting following the Queen’s Speech, before other business proceeds, each House asserts its right to “deliberate independently of the crown” and then agrees a humble address to the Sovereign.⁵⁴

Humble Address

Following the State Opening of Parliament, two Members of each House move that a humble address be presented to the Sovereign in their respective chambers, each delivering a speech. Convention has it that, in both Houses, one speech on the motion for the humble Address is delivered by a long-standing Member and seconded by a newer Member. Both are Government backbenchers. In the House of Lords the first speaker moves “[t]hat an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty as follows”:

Most Gracious Sovereign—We, Your Majesty’s most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, beg leave to thank Your Majesty for the most gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.⁵⁵

The first Member delivers their speech and the Member seconding the motion then follows with their speech. In the House of Commons, the same process is followed albeit with different wording for the motion of humble Address itself.⁵⁶ Prior to the two speeches in the House of

⁵⁰ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 257.

⁵¹ *ibid*, pp 257–8.

⁵² British Monarchy website, ‘[The Queen in Parliament](#)’, accessed 16 February 2016.

⁵³ House of Lords, [State Opening of Parliament](#), 2014, p 1; and see for example [HL Hansard, 27 May 2015, col 7](#).

⁵⁴ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lord](#), 2015, p 33.

⁵⁵ See for example [HL Hansard, 27 May 2015, col 8](#).

⁵⁶ See for example [HC Hansard, 27 May 2015, col 34](#).

Commons, the Speaker repeats the Queen’s Speech noting that the Speaker has to “acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy”.⁵⁷

When the speeches have concluded, both Houses debate the legislative programme presented in the Sovereign’s speech.⁵⁸ This is the first main item of business of each new parliamentary session. In total, the debates on the Sovereign’s speech usually last for approximately five sitting days, in both Houses. It is customary for a vote to take place on the Sovereign’s speech in the House of Commons but not in the House of Lords.⁵⁹

3. Prorogation

Each ‘Parliament’ lasts a maximum of five years, within which there are a number of sessions. Prorogation is the term used to refer to the formal end of a parliamentary session.⁶⁰ This is not the same as dissolution, which marks the end of a Parliament (see section 4 of this briefing). Even if prorogation has taken place, ‘Parliament’ itself still exists until it has been dissolved.⁶¹

Following prorogation, all business of both Houses is suspended. Motions and questions that have not been answered will be dropped.⁶² A bill which has not been given royal assent by the end of the session in which it was introduced usually falls (often referred to as ‘dies’), unless a carry-over motion has been passed.⁶³ A carry-over motion would allow a bill to continue its progress from one parliamentary session into the next.⁶⁴ The carry-over procedure does not apply to public bills over a dissolution.⁶⁵

Parliament is prorogued either by a commission preceded by a proclamation, or by a proclamation alone.⁶⁶ Erskine May explains:

At the close of a session, according to the usual procedure, the prorogation of Parliament is effected by an announcement made to both Houses in the House of Lords of the Queen’s command that Parliament should be prorogued by one of the commissioners of a Royal Commission. The royal functions at prorogation are now exercised by certain Lords acting by virtue of a commission under the Great Seal.⁶⁷

Parliament has not been prorogued by the Monarch in person since 1854 and, by current practice, is prorogued by commissioners acting in the Sovereign’s name.⁶⁸ A ceremony takes place in the House of Lords to mark prorogation, and consists of three key elements: the announcement of a Royal Commission, by which prorogation takes place; a command to declare royal assent on certain acts—if there are those outstanding that require agreement

⁵⁷ See for example [HC Hansard, 27 May 2015, col 31](#).

⁵⁸ Parliament website, ‘[MPs Debate the 2013 Queen’s Speech](#)’, 8 May 2013.

⁵⁹ Parliament website, ‘[Start of a New Parliament](#)’, accessed 22 February 2016.

⁶⁰ Parliament website, ‘[Prorogation](#)’, accessed 22 February 2016.

⁶¹ Parliament website, ‘[Dissolution of Parliament](#)’, accessed 22 February 2016.

⁶² Parliament website, ‘[Prorogation: Modern Practice](#)’, accessed 22 February 2016.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Parliament website, ‘[Glossary: Carry-Over Motions/Bills](#)’, accessed 1 January 2016.

⁶⁵ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 123.

For further information regarding carry-over motions, see *ibid.*, pp 122–3.

⁶⁶ Erskine May, *The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 145.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp 145–6.

⁶⁸ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 36.

from the Sovereign; and a speech by the Sovereign, albeit not customarily delivered by the Sovereign in person. The prerogative power of prorogation is not affected by the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 (see section 4.1 of this briefing) and remains with the Sovereign.⁶⁹ Therefore, Parliament, while prorogued, can be summoned by a royal proclamation according to law.⁷⁰

In 1979, 1983 and 1987, proclamation of dissolution took place without prorogation (following the previous adjournment of both Houses). Assent by notification by the respective Speakers became the accepted practice and commissions for royal assent in the Lords were no longer necessary.⁷¹ Therefore, administrative convenience told against the prorogation ceremony. However before the 1987 dissolution, the then Speaker of the Commons, Bernard Weatherill, expressed regret that the prorogation ceremony would not be taking place. He pointed out that many Members would not be standing again, and the ceremony would have given them and himself the opportunity to bid farewell to others. He hoped that a lack of prorogation ceremony would not become a precedent, stating:

Such ceremonies have good historical reasons and act as a reminder of many of the past struggles of those who have been before us in this place. It would be a matter of regret if one were to let them go.⁷²

From 1992 onwards, prorogation continued with the exception of 2001.⁷³

3.1 Royal Commission

A Royal Commission consists of at least three, but usually five, commissioners, who are Privy Counsellors, appointed to perform certain functions on the Sovereign's behalf. These functions include:

- proceedings at the opening of a new Parliament in connection with the election of a Speaker by the Commons [...]
- proceedings at the Opening of Parliament when the Queen is not present [...]
- proceedings in relation to the giving of royal assent to bills [...]; and
- proceedings at the prorogation of Parliament [...]⁷⁴

Royal Commissions differ in the details of their proceeding but share common characteristics. The following focuses on a Royal Commission as part of a prorogation ceremony with royal assent.⁷⁵

The Sovereign formally prorogues Parliament on the advice of the Privy Council.⁷⁶ The presiding commissioner commands Black Rod to: “[I]et the Commons know that the Lords

⁶⁹ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 36.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p 37.

⁷¹ House of Lords Library, [Ceremonial in the House of Lords](#), 5 March 2010, p 13.

⁷² [HC Hansard, 14 May 1987, col 416](#).

⁷³ House of Lords Library, [Ceremonial in the House of Lords](#), 5 March 2010, p 13.

⁷⁴ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 249.

⁷⁵ For full account of proceedings for commissions and their different occasions see *ibid*, pp 249–61.

⁷⁶ Parliament website, [‘Prorogation’](#), accessed 23 February 2016.

commissioners desire their immediate attendance in this House to hear the Commission read”.⁷⁷ Black Rod summons the Commons as with State Opening. Members of the Commons proceed from their Chamber and advance to the Bar of the House of Lords, bowing three times during their approach. When the Commons Members are present at the Bar, the presiding commissioner continues:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, Her Majesty, not thinking fit personally to be present here at this time, has been pleased to cause a commission to be issued under the Great Seal, and thereby given Her Royal Assent to divers Acts, the Titles whereof are particularly mentioned, and by the said Commission has commanded us to declare and notify Her Royal Assent to the said several Acts, in the presence of you the Lords and Commons assembled for that purpose; and has also assigned to us and other Lords directed full power and authority in Her Majesty’s name to prorogue this present Parliament. Which commission you will now hear read.

A commission for royal assent and prorogation is read. Royal assent is signified if there are any bills or measures passed by both Houses of Parliament that require royal assent (see section 3.2 of this briefing), otherwise proceedings move straight onto the Sovereign’s prorogation speech.⁷⁸

Prorogation Speech

Following royal assent, which may have been given to bills during the prorogation ceremony, a speech is delivered on behalf of the Sovereign to both Houses of Parliament.⁷⁹ The speech contains a summary of the Government’s legislative progress in that session. Since 1855, the prorogation speech prepared by the Government has been read by a Lords commissioner, in the absence of the Sovereign. In 1867, Disraeli introduced the custom of having the prorogation speech read in the first person, as if Queen Victoria was speaking the words herself and this practice continues at Royal Commissions for prorogation today.⁸⁰ After the speech has been read by the presiding commissioner, the presiding commissioner announces the date for prorogation in keeping with the following format:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons, by virtue of Her Majesty’s Commission which has now been read, we do, in Her Majesty’s name, and in obedience to Her Majesty’s Commands, prorogue this Parliament to [...] the [...] day of [...] to be then here holden, and this Parliament is accordingly prorogued to [...] the [...] day of [...].⁸¹

Parliament stands prorogued until the new parliamentary session begins, marked by the State Opening of Parliament (see section 2 of this briefing).⁸²

3.2 Royal Assent

A bill which has completed its stages in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and is formally agreed to by the reigning Sovereign becomes an Act of Parliament.⁸³ The formal

⁷⁷ House of Lords, *Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords*, 2015, p 250.

⁷⁸ Erskine May, *The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 146.

⁷⁹ See for example [HL Hansard, 26 March 2015, col 1589](#).

⁸⁰ House of Lords Library, *Ceremonial in the House of Lords*, 5 March 2010, p 11.

⁸¹ See for example [HL Hansard, 26 March 2015, col 1589](#).

⁸² Parliament website. ‘[Prorogation](#)’, accessed 25 February 2016.

agreement to a bill by the Sovereign is known as royal assent. For a bill or measure to become law it must be approved by all three strands. This can be seen in the words at the start of each Act:

Be it enacted by The Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows [...]⁸⁴

Royal assent originally occurred only on the final day of a session and was immediately followed by the prorogation or dissolution of Parliament.⁸⁵ The Sovereign used to be present for the granting of royal assent. However, the last occasion that a Sovereign granted royal assent in person was in 1837, when Queen Victoria attended to approve the civil list.⁸⁶ Since 1660, royal assent has been given at regular intervals during each session. Royal assent to bills is notified to both Houses by their respective Speakers, while sitting separately, as provided by the Royal Assent Act 1967.⁸⁷ This is now usual practice, except at prorogation where royal assent becomes part of a formal prorogation ceremony and the Commons are summoned to the Lords.

If royal assent is granted during a formal prorogation ceremony, one commission is issued for both royal assent and prorogation.⁸⁸ The Commons proceedings are interrupted by Black Rod and MPs are summoned along with the Speaker to attend the Lords Chamber to hear the Lords commissioners announce royal assent for the bills which have not yet received royal assent.⁸⁹ Any supply bills that may be ready for royal assent are brought to the Lords by the Clerk of the Commons. The Clerk of the Parliaments receives them from the Speaker at the Bar, and brings them to the table, bowing to the commissioners. After the Commission has been read, the Lord Chancellor, remaining seated, says to both Houses:

My Lords, in obedience to Her Majesty’s Commands, and by virtue of the Commission which has now been read, We do declare and notify to you, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons in Parliament assembled, that Her Majesty has given Her Royal Assent to the several Acts in the Commission mentioned; and the Clerks are required to pass the same in the usual Form and Words.⁹⁰

The Clerk of the Crown reads out a short title of each bill in turn. The Clerk of the Parliaments turns towards the Bar where the Commons are assembled and pronounces the appropriate formula in Norman French one by one until all the bill titles are read and ‘disposed of’:

- For a supply bill: “La Reyne/la Roy remercie ses bons sujets, accepte leur benevolence, et ainsi le veult” [ie “the queen/the king thanks her/his good subjects, accepts their bounty, and wills it so”];

⁸³ Parliament website, ‘[Royal Assent](#)’, accessed 25 February 2016.

⁸⁴ Robert Rogers and Rhodri Walters, *How Parliament Works*, 2015, p 38.

⁸⁵ House of Lords Library, [Ceremonial in the House of Lords](#), 5 March 2010, pp 10–11.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, p 10.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, p 11.

⁸⁸ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 261.

⁸⁹ Parliament website, ‘[Royal Assent](#)’, accessed 25 February 2016.

⁹⁰ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 258. For a full description of the ceremonial traditions that take place during royal assent at prorogation, see *ibid*, pp 258–9.

- For other public or private bills and Measures: “La Reyne/le Roy le veult” [ie “the Queen/the King wills it”];
- For a personal bill: “Soit fait comme il est désiré” [ie “Let it be done as it is desired”].⁹¹

Although the Sovereign has the right to refuse royal assent “nowadays this does not happen and the royal assent is a formality”.⁹² The last time that royal assent was refused by a Sovereign was in 1708 when Queen Anne used her prerogative power to refuse her assent to a bill for settling the militia in Scotland.⁹³

4. Dissolution of Parliament

4.1 Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011

The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 received royal assent on 15 September 2011 and came into force with immediate effect. Prior to the Act, the dissolution of Parliament was a prerogative of the reigning Sovereign, exercised on the advice and consent of the then Prime Minister and subject to the Sovereign’s right to refuse dissolution.⁹⁴ By virtue of these prerogative powers, the Sovereign could dissolve Parliament at any time, up to a maximum term of five years—albeit in practice, it was the Prime Minister’s decision as to when dissolution would take place.⁹⁵ However, as a consequence of the Act, Parliament automatically dissolves at a fixed time in accordance with section 3 of the Act as amended:

- (1) The Parliament then in existence dissolves at the beginning of the 25th working day before the polling day for the next parliamentary general election as determined under section 1 or appointed under section 2(7).
- (2) Parliament cannot otherwise be dissolved.

March 2015 was the first time that dissolution automatically took place under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.⁹⁶ Section 1(2) of the Act provides that “[t]he polling day for the next parliamentary general election after the passing of this Act is to be 7 May 2015” and section 1(3) that “[t]he polling day for each subsequent parliamentary general election is to be the first Thursday in May in the fifth calendar year following that in which the polling day for the previous parliamentary general election fell”. Section 2(7) makes provision for certain circumstances under which early parliamentary elections may take place, in all instances by motions laid in the House of Commons.⁹⁷ Commentators have noted, therefore, that “if not expressly then at least by implication, the prerogative power of dissolution has been extinguished by the 2011 Act”.⁹⁸

⁹¹ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 258.

⁹² Parliament website, ‘[Glossary: Royal Assent](#)’, accessed 25 February 2016.

⁹³ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 163.

⁹⁴ Neil Parpworth, *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 2014, p 60.

⁹⁵ House of Commons Library, [Dissolution of Parliament](#), 28 January 2015, p 3.

⁹⁶ Parliament website, ‘[State Opening of Parliament to take place on 27 May 2015](#)’, 26 March 2015.

⁹⁷ Were this to take place, the polling day for the election “is to be the day appointed by Her Majesty by proclamation on the recommendation of the Prime Minister (and, accordingly, the appointed day replaces the day which would otherwise have been the polling day for the next election determined under section 1)”. See section 2(7) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011.

⁹⁸ Neil Parpworth, *Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 2014, p 60.

The Act provides that the Prime Minister is to establish a review of the Act in 2020 (section 7(4)). However, there have been attempts to repeal the Act. On 12 June 2014, Lord Grocott introduced the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 (Repeal) Bill in the House of Lords which sought to repeal the Act.⁹⁹ On 23 October 2014, some Members of the House of Commons also expressed concerns about the Act when debating the motion “[t]hat this House believes that the Government should bring forward proposals to repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011”.¹⁰⁰ In evidence to the House of Commons Public Administration Committee’s inquiry in 2004 regarding the Royal Prerogative, a memorandum from the Treasury Solicitor’s Department noted that “it is not altogether clear what happens where a prerogative power has been superseded by statute and the statutory provision is later repealed”.¹⁰¹ This being said, the Department suggested that it would be “likely” that the prerogative would only revive if the repealing enactment made specific provision to that effect.¹⁰²

4.2 Calling of a New Parliament

Writs for an Election

According to section 3(3) of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, the Lord Chancellor and, in relation to Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State, hold the authority to have the writs for an election sealed and issued. The writs are legal documents which, in this case, authorise a general election. The writs for an election were previously issued by the Sovereign but the Act removed the power of the Monarch to issue these writs.¹⁰³ Section 3(4) of the Act provides that:

Once Parliament dissolves, Her Majesty may issue the proclamation summoning the new Parliament which may—

- (a) appoint the day for the first meeting of the new Parliament;
- (b) deal with any other matter which was normally dealt with before the passing of this Act by proclamations summoning new Parliaments (except a matter dealt with by subsection (1) or (3)).¹⁰⁴

Proclamation

Following the Prime Minister’s advice, the Sovereign issues a proclamation summoning the new Parliament.¹⁰⁵ The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 does not contain any provision on how soon after an election the new Parliament should meet. A royal proclamation will name a date for the summoning of a new Parliament. The date is an earlier date than the State Opening of Parliament, in order to allow time to elect a Speaker and to swear in Members to both Houses.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Parliament website, ‘[Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 \(Repeal\) Bill \[HL\] 2014–15](#)’, accessed 26 February 2016.

¹⁰⁰ [HC Hansard, 23 October 2014, cols 1069–114](#).

¹⁰¹ Public Administration Committee, [Taming the Prerogative: Strengthening Ministerial Accountability to Parliament](#), 16 March 2004, HC 422 of session 2003–04, EV 15, para 11.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Parliament website, ‘[Glossary: Writs](#)’, accessed 25 February 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, section 3(4).

¹⁰⁵ Parliament website, ‘[Dissolution of Parliament](#)’, accessed 29 February 2016.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

On 26 March 2015—the same date that Parliament prorogued—the Prime Minister, David Cameron, issued a press release which included the following statement:

The Prime Minister will ask Her Majesty to summon the new Parliament to meet on Monday 18 May, when the business will be the election of the Speaker and the swearing-in of members.

The State Opening of Parliament will follow on Wednesday 27 May.¹⁰⁷

The 2015 royal proclamation was published five days later in the *London Gazette* and the *Edinburgh Gazette*:

By the Queen a Proclamation for Declaring the Calling of a New Parliament Elizabeth R.

Whereas We, by and with the advice of Our Privy Council, being desirous and resolved, as soon as may be, to meet Our People, and to have their Advice in Parliament, do publish this, Our Royal Proclamation, and do hereby make known to all Our loving Subjects Our Royal Will and Pleasure to call a new Parliament to be holden at Westminster on Monday the eighteenth day of May next: And We do hereby also, by this Our Royal Proclamation under Our Great Seal of Our Realm, require Writs to be issued by Our Chancellor of Great Britain for causing the Lords Spiritual and Temporal who are to serve in the said Parliament to give their Attendance in Our said Parliament on the said date.

Given at Our Court at Buckingham Palace, this thirtieth day of March in the Year of our Lord two thousand and fifteen and in the sixty-fourth year of Our Reign.

God Save the Queen.¹⁰⁸

5. Queen's Consent

Queen's Consent is a process which is “entirely distinct” from royal assent (see section 3.2 of this briefing), as noted by the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in 2014:

When Bills have been passed by both Houses of Parliament, they await only royal assent to be declared Acts of Parliament. By contrast, Consent is required before a Bill completes its passage through Parliament, but is required only if the Bill affects the Crown.¹⁰⁹

The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) has stated that Queen's consent for a bill is “merely a consent for Parliament to debate the bill” and is entirely a matter of House procedure.¹¹⁰ It does not effect the “theoretical right” of the Sovereign to withhold royal assent to the bill, though the OPC adds that royal assent “is of course never refused for a bill that has

¹⁰⁷ Parliament website, [‘State Opening of Parliament to Take Place on 27 May 2015’](#), 26 March 2015.

¹⁰⁸ *The Gazette*, [‘Proclamations’](#), 31 March 2015.

¹⁰⁹ House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [‘The Impact of Queen's and Prince's Consent on the Legislative Process’](#), 26 March 2014, HC 784 of session 2013–14, p 3.

¹¹⁰ Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, [‘Queen's or Prince's Consent’](#), July 2015, p 20, paras 7.13–7.14.

successfully negotiated its way through Parliament”.¹¹¹ The OPC has set out guidance with regard to when Queen’s consent should be signified to a bill:

Queen’s consent needs to be considered in the case of—

- provisions affecting the prerogative; and
- provisions affecting the hereditary revenues, the Duchy of Lancaster or the Duchy of Cornwall, and personal property or personal interests of the Crown.¹¹²

The exact form of words for Queen’s consent varies in relation to whether it is the prerogative or the interests of the Sovereign, or both, that are affected.¹¹³ In essence though, Queen’s consent is expressed in terms to the effect that “Her Majesty, having been informed of the purport of the bill, has consented to place her prerogative or interest, or both, at the disposal of Parliament for the purposes of the bill”.¹¹⁴

Queen’s consent is signified in both Houses of Parliament. In the House of Lords, consent is signified immediately before the motion for third reading. It is signified orally by a Privy Counsellor who must be a serving Minister.¹¹⁵ In the House of Commons, consent is signified by a Privy Counsellor, who is usually a serving Minister, by nodding in response to a request from the Chair on the order for third reading being read.¹¹⁶ When the Queen’s consent is signified, the Queen has “placed her prerogative and interest at the disposal of Parliament”.¹¹⁷ The department sponsoring a bill is responsible for writing to the Palace at an early stage, prior to the introduction of the bill, to obtain Queen’s consent, if it is required.¹¹⁸ Erskine May has explained that the Government’s usual practice is to advise the granting of consent even to bills of which it disapproves:

The understanding is that the grant of consent does not imply approval by the Crown or its advisers, but only that the Crown does not intend that, for lack of its consent, Parliament should be debarred from debating such provisions.¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, [Queen’s or Prince’s Consent](#), July 2015, p 20, para 7.13.

¹¹² *ibid*, p 2, para 2.1. The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel also includes information regarding ‘Prince’s consent’—which is an extension of Queen’s consent and is also needed in certain circumstances for provisions affecting the Duchy of Cornwall and, very occasionally, certain other cases. Very occasionally “the Queen’s interest may be too remote to justify Queen’s consent but the Prince’s interest may be pressing enough to require Prince’s consent”, see *ibid*, pp 8–9. Erskine May defines ‘prerogative’ as “being powers exercisable by the Sovereign for the performance of constitutional duties” (*The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 165). For further information on the Royal Prerogative, see House of Commons Library, [The Royal Prerogative](#), 30 December 2009.

¹¹³ Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, [Queen’s or Prince’s Consent](#), July 2015, p 15, para 5.22.

¹¹⁴ Erskine May, *The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 166.

¹¹⁵ This has been the procedure following approval by the Commons on 24 February 2015 of its Procedure Committee’s [4th Report of Session 2014–15](#), and the approval by the Lords on 30 October 2014 of its Procedure Committee’s [3rd Report of Session 2014–15](#). The change for the Lords was dependent on the Commons making the same change, and so did not take effect until the later of these dates. See Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, [Queen’s or Prince’s Consent](#), July 2015, pp 13–14, paras 5.5 and 5.17.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, pp 13–14, paras 5.4 and 5.16. This procedure has been in place since 24 February 2015. See also footnote 115 above.

¹¹⁷ Erskine May, *The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 166.

¹¹⁸ The Palace must be given as much time as possible but it must never be given less than 14 days (Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, [Queen’s or Prince’s Consent](#), July 2015, p 17).

¹¹⁹ Erskine May, *The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 167.

Lack of Consent

According to Erskine May:

If the Queen's consent has not been obtained or is not signified, the question on the relevant stage of a bill for which consent is required cannot be proposed. Similarly, where a bill affecting the interests of the Crown has been allowed, through inadvertence, to be read the third time and passed without the Queen's consent being signified, the proceedings have been declared null and void.¹²⁰

In 2013, the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee held an inquiry into the impact of Queen's and Prince's consent on the legislative process. The Committee report was published on 26 March 2014. The Committee noted that, as consent was a matter of parliamentary procedure, if the two Houses of Parliament wished to abolish consent, legislation would not be needed. Rather, they could do so by means of addresses to the Crown, followed by a resolution of each House.¹²¹ Among other conclusions and recommendations, the Committee stated that:

When the Queen or the Prince of Wales grant their consent to bills, they do so on the advice of the Government. We have no evidence to suggest that legislation is ever altered as part of the consent process. [...] the process of consent is complex and arcane and its existence, and the way in which the process operates, undoubtedly do fuel speculation that the monarchy has an undue influence on the legislative process. The fact that consent is sometimes characterised as a veto underlines this point. In reality, it is a veto that could be operated by the Government, rather than the monarchy.

[...]

The United Kingdom is a constitutional monarchy. The Queen has the right to be consulted, to advise and to warn. But beyond that she should have no role in the legislative process. Consent serves to remind us that Parliament has three elements—the House of Commons, the House of Lords, and the Queen-in-Parliament—and its existence could be regarded as a matter of courtesy between the three parts of Parliament. Whether this is a compelling justification for its continuance is a matter of opinion.¹²²

The Government published its response to the Committee's report on 16 June 2014. In its response, the Government noted that “the Queen's and Prince's consent is a longstanding parliamentary requirement for certain bills and is therefore a matter for Parliament to decide upon” and that the Government will “actively cooperate with Parliament and its requirements in relation to the legislative process”.¹²³

¹²⁰ Erskine May, *The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 167.

¹²¹ House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee [The Impact of Queen's and Prince's Consent on the Legislative Process](#), 26 March 2014, HC 784 of session 2013–14, p 21.

¹²² *ibid*, pp 21–2.

¹²³ House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [The Impact of Queen's and Prince's Consent on the Legislative Process: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2013–14](#), 16 June 2014, HC 224 of session 2014–15, p 2.

6. Communications to and from the Sovereign

6.1 Addresses

The ‘ordinary’ way that either House communicates with the Sovereign is by an Address.¹²⁴ It is most common that an Address is agreed by both Houses and presented separately, but it is possible for an Address to be agreed by both Houses and jointly presented, or agreed separately but presented together.¹²⁵ Addresses from the House of Lords may be presented by certain designated Members, by Members who are members of the Royal Household or who are Privy Counsellors, or by the whole House.¹²⁶

Addresses by the whole House are presented with the House assembled in the Palace of Westminster and only take place on occasions of “particular importance”.¹²⁷ Until the 1897 Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s accession, such Addresses were presented at Buckingham Palace or another royal residence. Thereafter, Addresses by the House of Lords have been presented, together with Addresses from the House of Commons, within the Palace of Westminster.¹²⁸ The most recent example of this was an Address for Queen Elizabeth II’s Diamond Jubilee which took place in Westminster Hall on 20 March 2012. The format for such occasions, with regard to proceedings, is as follows:

After prayers on the day appointed for the presentation of the Address, the House proceeds to the designated place. The motion that the House do now proceed to the designated place also provides that the House do thereafter adjourn during pleasure and meet again in the Chamber at an appointed time. The Lord Speaker and the Commons Speaker either lead their respective Houses or arrive with their processions after the members of both Houses are seated. The Commons Speaker usually arrives last. Both Houses sit facing the Queen, the Commons on Her left and the Lords on Her right. As soon as the Queen has arrived, the Lord Speaker reads the Lords’ Address and then presents it to the Sovereign. The Commons Speaker likewise reads and presents the Commons’ Address. The Queen delivers Her reply to the Addresses and withdraws. The Lords withdraw followed by the Commons. By virtue of the terms of the motion moved earlier in the Chamber, the House then adjourns during pleasure and resumes its sitting at the appointed time.¹²⁹

The most common form of Address in the House of Lords occurs at the beginning of every session, moved in reply to the Queen’s Speech. There are other forms of Address, such as Addresses of condolence, or of congratulation to the Sovereign regarding family or public occasions. When the Sovereign is not present to reply to such an Address in person, the Sovereign’s reply is communicated to the House of Lords on the “first convenient occasion”.¹³⁰ On such instances, at the beginning of business the Sovereign’s reply is reported to the House, usually by the Lord Chamberlain or another member of the Royal Household.

¹²⁴ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 39.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, p 40.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ For information about other forms of Addresses, see *ibid.*, p 39.

Congratulations or condolences of either House can be communicated to other members of the Royal Family as well as the Sovereign.¹³¹ However, unlike when communicating to the Sovereign, this would be done by a message and not by an Address. Certain Members of the House of Lords are ordered to present the message from the Lords and one reports the answer.

Visits without an Address

There are occasions where the Sovereign may undertake a visit to Parliament without giving or receiving an Address. The most recent example was when Queen Elizabeth II viewed the Diamond Jubilee Window in the large stained glassed window over the North Door of Westminster Hall on 6 December 2013. The window was a gift from Members of both Houses of Parliament to mark Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee, in March 2012.¹³² The Queen was accompanied by the Speakers of both Houses and met those who were closely involved with the project. It was a private and informal visit.¹³³

6.2 Messages

Messages from the Sovereign other than in reply to an Address have been described as “rare”.¹³⁴ They are formal communications relating to important public events that require the attention of Parliament, for example, the declaration of a state of emergency. A message from the Sovereign has precedence over other business, with the exception of introductions, oaths and the Lord Speaker's leave of absence.¹³⁵

A message from the Sovereign is usually in writing and is brought by a Member of the House of Lords who is either a minister or one of the Royal Household. The Member bearing the message announces to the House that s/he has a message that the Sovereign has commanded him/her to deliver to the House. S/he reads it at the Table, and then gives it to the Lord Speaker at the Woolsack, who hands it to the Clerk of the Parliaments.¹³⁶ It is usual for a later day to be appointed for consideration of the message—such as those received following the end of the debate on the Queen's Speech or replying to an Address to annul a statutory instrument. However, once the message has been read, it is possible for it to be considered immediately on motion.¹³⁷ An Address is then moved in reply, usually by the Leader of the House. The House takes no further action on messages from the Sovereign that are in reply to an Address from the House of Lords.¹³⁸

7. Royal Palace of Westminster

The Palace of Westminster ceased to be a royal residence in 1532 after St James' Palace was built.¹³⁹ However, it remains a Royal Palace. Entrusted by the Sovereign, the Lord Great Chamberlain has jurisdiction for the Royal Robing Room—along with the staircase and ante-

¹³¹ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 39.

¹³² Parliament website, [‘HM The Queen will visit Westminster Hall on Friday 6 December’](#), accessed 25 February 2016.

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 40.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p 41.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Norman Wilding and Philip Laundy, *An Encyclopaedia of Parliament*, 1972, p 517.

room adjoining—and the Royal Gallery.¹⁴⁰ He also has joint control with the Speakers of both Houses for the Crypt Chapel and Westminster Hall.¹⁴¹ The Lord Great Chamberlain used to formally have control of the entire Palace. However, on 23 March 1965, the Queen granted control of the Palace and its precincts, except those areas mentioned above, to the House of Lords and the House of Commons.¹⁴²

8. Queen Elizabeth II and Parliament: Facts and Figures

Longest Reigning Monarch

On 9 September 2015, Queen Elizabeth II became the longest reigning sovereign in British history.¹⁴³ To commemorate this, Members of both Houses gave tributes to the Queen in their respective Chambers. The Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Stowell of Beeston, noted:

We join millions of people across the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and, indeed, the rest of the world who will mark this historic moment and thank her for the extraordinary service she has given to our country for more than six decades.

Throughout her reign, her commitment to public service has been beyond question. Her sense of public duty is as steadfast today as it was when she declared, aged just 21, that she would devote her whole life to the service of her people. She continues to demonstrate that commitment every single day. That is why I think she is so highly respected by all those she serves. All of us who seek to play a part in public life can have no better example than her.¹⁴⁴

In the House of Commons, the Prime Minister, David Cameron said:

Today, Her Majesty the Queen becomes the country's longest reigning monarch. It is of course typical of her selfless sense of service that she would have us treat this day just like any other. While I rarely advocate disobeying Her Majesty, least of all in her own Parliament, I do think that it is right that today we should stop and take a moment as a nation to mark this historic milestone and to thank Her Majesty for the extraordinary service that she has given to our country over more than six decades. [...] For all of us in this Chamber who seek to play our part in public service, it is truly humbling to comprehend the scale of service that Her Majesty the Queen has given to this country.

¹⁴⁰ British Monarchy website, '[Lord Great Chamberlain](#)', accessed 25 February 2016; and Erskine May, *The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 2011, p 10.

¹⁴¹ British Monarchy website, '[Lord Great Chamberlain](#)', accessed 25 February 2016.

¹⁴² Harold Wilson, the then Prime Minister, announced this to the House of Commons, see [HC Hansard, 23 March 1965, cols 328–9](#). The Lord Privy Seal, the Earl of Longford, made a statement to the same effect in the House of Lords, see [HL Hansard, 23 March 1965, cols 524–60](#).

¹⁴³ Guinness Book of Records News, '[Queen's Diamond Jubilee: Record-Breaking Facts about Elizabeth II](#)', 1 June 2012. Born in 1926 and Queen at age 25, Queen Elizabeth II is the 40th sovereign since William the Conqueror obtained the crown of England. Only five other kings and queens in British history have reigned for 50 years or more: Edward III (50 years); Henry III (56 years); James VI of Scotland—James I of England—(58 years); George III (59 years); and Victoria (63 years). Queen Victoria became queen on 20 June 1837 at the age of 18 and reigned until her death on 22 January 1901 aged 81, with a reign of 63 years 7 months and 3 days (British Monarchy website, '[60 Facts about the Queen](#)', accessed 25 February 2016; Meredith Veldman and Edgar Trevor Williams, '[Victoria: Queen of United Kingdom](#)', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (updated 9 September 2015); and British Monarchy website, '[Victoria \(r. 1837–1901\)](#)', accessed 25 February 2016).

¹⁴⁴ [HL Hansard, 9 September 2015, col 1419](#).

The reign of Queen Elizabeth has been a golden thread running through three post-war generations. She has presided over more than two thirds of our history as a full democracy with everyone being able to vote. When I was born, Her Majesty had already been reigning for 14 years. When the Father of this House—our longest-serving Member—was first elected to this Chamber, Her Majesty had already been Queen for 18 years. [...] She opened up the royal collection and palaces, and she invented the royal walkabout, so that she could meet more people on her visits. People who meet the Queen often talk about it for the rest of their lives, and I am sure that I speak for all of my 11 predecessors when I say that going to see the Queen to form a Government and then meeting her once a week is one of the most enjoyable, inspiring and humbling honours of this office.¹⁴⁵

The 64th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne was marked on 6 February 2016.

State Opening of Parliament

- Queen Elizabeth II has attended every State Opening during her reign with only two exceptions: one in 1959, when pregnant with Prince Andrew; and the other in 1963 when pregnant with Prince Edward.¹⁴⁶
- Queen Elizabeth II delivered her first speech at State Opening on 4 November 1952.¹⁴⁷
- State Opening of Parliament took place twice in 1974. This was due to two elections taking place that year, following a hung Parliament after the first. Queen Elizabeth II therefore delivered a Queen's Speech to both Houses on two occasions in that year. The first State Opening was on 12 March 1974 and the second took place on 29 October 1974.¹⁴⁸
- The Queen has walked alone twice at a State Opening of Parliament ceremony. The first was in 1964 when the Queen walked alone for a usual State Opening of Parliament ceremony. In March 1974, the entire ceremony was scaled-down and this was the second time that the Queen walked alone.¹⁴⁹
- The Queen has been accompanied by her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, in all but nine of the State Opening ceremonies that she has attended during her reign. Those where he was not present were: 1956, 1964, 1968, 1969, 1973, 1982, 1991, 1994 and 1996.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ [HC Hansard, 9 September 2015, cols 387–8.](#)

¹⁴⁶ Parliament website, '[Offices and Ceremonies: State Opening of Parliament](#)', accessed 25 February 2016.

¹⁴⁷ [HL Hansard, 4 November 1952, cols 1–5.](#)

¹⁴⁸ [HL Hansard, 12 March 1974, cols 7–12](#); and [HL Hansard, 29 October 1974, cols 7–11.](#)

¹⁴⁹ British Monarchy website, '[Statement Regarding the State Opening of Parliament in May 2013](#)', accessed 25 February 2016.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Royal Assent

- Queen Elizabeth II has given royal assent to 3,618 public bills since 1952.¹⁵¹
- Queen Elizabeth II has never refused royal assent to a bill.
- Queen Elizabeth II has never given royal assent in person.

Parliamentary Calendar

- In 1974, during a tour of Australia and Indonesia, the Queen was called back to the UK when a general election in the UK was suddenly called.¹⁵² In her absence, the Duke of Edinburgh continued the programme in Australia, and the Queen later re-joined the tour in Indonesia. The only other time that Queen Elizabeth II has interrupted an overseas visit was while in Kenya on 6 February 1952, on receipt of the news of her father's death and her succession to the throne.

Prime Ministers

Since 1952, twelve Prime Ministers have served Queen Elizabeth II:

- Winston Churchill 1951–55
- Sir Anthony Eden 1955–57
- Harold Macmillan 1957–63
- Sir Alec Douglas-Home 1963–64
- Harold Wilson 1964–70 and 1974–76
- Edward Heath 1970–74
- James Callaghan 1976–79
- Margaret Thatcher 1979–90
- John Major 1990–97
- Tony Blair 1997–2007
- Gordon Brown 2007–10
- David Cameron 2010–present

Royal Addresses to both Houses

Queen Elizabeth II has addressed both Houses in person in the Palace of Westminster on six occasions, other than at the State Opening of Parliament. Table 1 below shows the date and location that each address took place, as well as the occasion it related to.

¹⁵¹ House of Commons Library, [Acts and Statutory Instruments: the Volume of UK Legislation 1950 to 2015](#), 21 December 2015, pp 7–8. There were 64 public bills that were given royal assent in the year 1952, of which nine were given royal assent prior to the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Since the publication of the House of Commons Library briefing sited in this footnote, two further bills have been granted royal assent, as at 5 February 2016: Parliament website, [Complete List of Public Bills before Parliament this Session](#), 5 February 2016.

¹⁵² British Monarchy website, ['60 Facts about the Queen'](#), accessed 26 February 2016.

Table 1: Address from Queen Elizabeth II to both Houses

Date	Occasion
20 March 2012	Diamond Jubilee address to Parliament
30 April 2002	Golden Jubilee address to Parliament
6 May 1995	50th Anniversary of Victory in Europe Day
20 July 1988	Tercentenary of the Revolution of 1688–89 and the Bill of Rights
4 May 1977	Silver Jubilee address to Parliament
22 June 1965	700th Anniversary of the Parliament of Simon de Montford

(Source: House of Commons Library, [Addresses to Both Houses of Parliament Since 1939](#), 12 November 2014)

Sovereign Visits: No Address

There have been seven occasions where Queen Elizabeth II has undertaken a visit to Parliament without giving an address to both Houses. Table 2 shows the date and occasions which Queen Elizabeth II has attended, as at February 2016:

Table 2: Occasions Queen Elizabeth II has visited the Palace of Westminster without an Address:

Date	Occasion
6 December 2013	Viewing of the Diamond Jubilee Window
5 June 2012	Diamond Jubilee Lunch
22 September 2000	Opening of the 46th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
26 June 1995	Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter
25 September 1986	Opening of the 32nd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
5 June 1959	Opening of the Atlantic Congress
12 September 1957	Opening of 46th Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference

(Sources: House of Lords Journal Office up to 2002; Parliament website, British Monarchy website, and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association 2002 onwards)

First Communications with Parliament

In 1944, soon after Princess Elizabeth's 18th birthday and during the absence of her father, King George VI, while he was on a tour of the Italian battlefields, the Princess was appointed a Counsellor of State.¹⁵³ Counsellors of State are members of the Royal Family who temporarily undertake some of the Sovereign's official duties in their absence.¹⁵⁴ This was the first time that the Princess carried out some duties of the Head of State.¹⁵⁵ In August that year, Parliament presented an address to King George VI, to which the Princess—along with her mother Queen Elizabeth—replied on behalf of the Throne.¹⁵⁶

First Message from the Queen as Recorded in *Hansard*

The first official communication that Queen Elizabeth II had with Parliament as Sovereign was on the news of the death of her father and her accession to the throne. A message from the Queen was presented to the House of Commons by the then Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, and read out by the Speaker on 11 February 1952:

I know that the House of Commons mourns with me the untimely death of my dear Father. In spite of failing health he upheld to the end the ideal to which he pledged himself, of service to his Peoples and the preservation of Constitutional Government. He has set before me an example of selfless dedication which I am resolved, with God's help, faithfully to follow.

ELIZABETH R.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ British Monarchy website, '[Early Public Life](#)', accessed 26 February 2016.

¹⁵⁴ British Monarchy website, '[Counsellors of State](#)', accessed 26 February 2016.

¹⁵⁵ British Monarchy website, '[Early Public Life](#)', accessed 26 February 2016.

¹⁵⁶ [HC Hansard, 2 August 1944, col 1355](#) and [HL Hansard, 3 August 1944, col 113](#).

¹⁵⁷ [HC Hansard, 11 February 1952, col 957](#).

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