



Library user guide

British official publications

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June 2016

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Introduction

British official publications are the publications of, or for, the British government and its departments. They are important primary sources of information for many university subjects, especially the Social Sciences, many Sciences, and History. The Templeman Library has extensive holdings of British official publications, both in print and via online subscriptions. In addition, many official publications are now freely available online.

To find out exactly what's available, and to access online material directly, visit our British official publications web page:

- www.kent.ac.uk/library/resources/official/british.html

This guide gives an overview of the different types of British official publications and what they may be useful for.

Help with official publications

For help accessing official publications, please visit the IT & Library Support Desk on Level 2 Centre of the Templeman Library, or email helpdesk@kent.ac.uk.

For more in-depth assistance email officialpublications@kent.ac.uk.

Parliamentary publications

Parliamentary publications are those papers needed by Parliament to conduct its business and which result from its proceedings. Parliamentary papers fall into three groups: sessional papers, debates and legislation.

Sessional papers

These are the working papers of Parliament used in each session. They fall into the following categories:

Bills

Bills are drafts of legislation, to be reviewed through various parliamentary stages. Depending on who has proposed a Bill, they are called Public Bills (initiated by Government), Private Members' Bills (proposed by individual MPs), or Private Bills (from outside Government). If a Bill passes through all stages of acceptance, it will become an Act of Parliament.

- **House of Commons Bills**
- **House of Lords Bills**

House papers

House papers are documents resulting from the work of the House and its Committees:

- **House of Commons papers**
- **House of Lords papers**
- **British Parliamentary Papers**: the Library holds the reprint set containing about 4500 19th century documents on issues like the colonies, the slave trade, the industrial revolution, health and education ((1000 vols., Irish University Press, published 1968-71). See an index of the documents included in British Parliamentary papers: www.britishparliamentarypapers.com

Command papers

These are Government papers (from Ministers) conveying information or decisions the Government wishes to draw to the attention of the House, presented 'by Command of Her Majesty'. They include major statements of government policy (also known as 'white papers'), some departmental annual reports, and the reports of Royal Commissions.

- **Command papers**

Debates

Hansard

Hansard is the report of the proceedings of Parliament. Between 1803-1903 some important speeches were printed in full but the remainder were reported as third party abbreviated accounts. Since 1909 they have been recorded verbatim. The debates are extremely useful for tracing the passage of a Bill through Parliament, and for establishing Parliament's feelings on political issues of the day.

Debates in the House of Lords have been recorded separately since 1909.

- **House of Commons debates**
- **House of Lords debates**

Online archive

The Parliamentary archive covers the debates from the Hansard years and has been produced from digitised editions of Commons and Lords Hansard, the Official Report of debates in Parliament (1803-2005). It is available via:

- **Historic Hansard web pages**
- **House of Commons Parliamentary Papers**

Standing Committee Debates/Public Bill Committees

These Committees were known as Standing Committees up until the 2005-2006 Parliamentary session. They discuss and report on Bills going through both the Commons and the Lords. The reports are published when the Committees complete their reports and they have been added to the Parliament website (www.parliament.uk) from November 1997.

- **current debates**
- **archive from 1997**

Legislation

Acts of Parliament

Public General Acts are the Acts most commonly quoted. These are Public Bills which have received the Royal Assent.

- **Public General Acts**

Statutory Instruments

These are the most common form of delegated legislation. Historically they were known as Statutory Rules & Orders.

- **Statutory Instruments and Statutory Rules & Orders**

Non-Parliamentary papers

Many documents are produced by government departments for use outside the Parliamentary context. These may be published by the department or by The Stationery Office (TSO).

Most government departmental publications in print are listed on LibrarySearch (<http://librarysearch.kent.ac.uk>), but are not always easy to find. Before running a catalogue search you can browse a list; visit the 'How to access print holdings' web page and open the 'list of holdings by department (pdf)':

- www.kent.ac.uk/library/resources/official/print-access.html

Historic research

House of Commons Parliamentary papers from 1801 onwards are available online in full text via:

- **House of Commons Parliamentary Papers**

The 18th century Parliamentary Papers digitisation project makes available a comprehensive collection of over one million pages of Parliamentary papers, bills and journals of a momentous century of achievement, upheaval and Empire: www.parl18c.soton.ac.uk