

# **British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association 11th Conference, 2013**

## **Session one: Reporting developments in the past 12 months—A year in the life**

### **Houses of the Oireachtas**

A busy year. A highlight was taking in-house publishing direct to web (cheaper by 400,000 euro a year). Publishing is done incrementally throughout the day, with 15-minute updates. PDFs for books/bound volumes are created by the team of seven in Admin.

PDFs are also created by Admin for parliamentary questions (more than 40,000 last year), but these are proving problematic due to difficulty with formatting tables, etc. A template has been given to departments in the hope that this will solve the problems; other possible solutions include separating writtens from debates and departments publishing direct to the website.

Reporters are now able to do better indexing (responding to customer demand) by creating tags/codes for every item of business, including PQs. This had led to an improved search facility.

A bill on a referendum to abolish the upper house was passed earlier in July. The referendum will be held in the autumn, and if the Seanad is abolished, the committee system will be extended.

The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill was notable for a number of reasons, not least the impact of lobbyists on members. For the Debates Office, the bill took up a huge amount of effort, requiring 29 days in total, including six days of committee hearings, eight days in the Dáil (including one sitting lasting until 5 am) and five post-committee days.

A parliamentary inquiry into the banking collapse is mooted for the autumn. If this happens, the Debates Office will need to recruit both reporters and editors.

### **Scottish Parliament**

This has been the editor's first full year in post. She had had a great welcome from her new colleagues, but also faced a steep learning curve. She brought with her an understanding of how people use information.

The referendum on independence to be held on 18 September 2014 is filtering into every debate. There will be an impact on our summer recess next year, which is being split into two, with a three-week sitting period in the middle. The purdah rules may have an impact, with the Official Report being prevented from publishing reports during the purdah period.

There has been a huge increase in workload, plus new private bill committees. Costs, including staffing costs, have been a major constraint. There have been various innovations, such as different approaches to logging, different section lengths, and a desire to build capacity. The OR's strategy aligns with the corporate strategy, and has been broken down into portfolios for each sub-editor.

There have been on-going problems with technology, including a new website that has led to staff having to do a lot more manually, and links to reports being broken when they are archived. Given limited availability of IT support, the focus is on the search function and improving accessibility.

The OR will be included in phase 1 of the digital Parliament project, concentrating on the search function.

## **House of Lords**

The year started with a look at Lords reform. Both Houses had geared themselves up for long sittings so breathed a sigh of relief when the coalition failed to move forward with reform. The Lords is now the second biggest chamber in the world, with 822 members. Lords reform was replaced by Leveson amendments to four bills.

The joint project with the Commons—HRS 2, an authoring tool—has, unfortunately, folded.

It was noted that there had been negative publicity around zero hours reporters.

The balance of work has shifted: the decline in chamber work has been matched by an increase in committee work.

The Lords would be recruiting both reporters and subs in the autumn.

## **National Assembly for Wales**

Another busy year, with the most significant development probably the move to produce an XML version of the Record of Proceedings on the Assembly's website.

The most important feature is the use of hyperlinks that connect each Member contribution with the relevant audio-visual footage on the streaming website, Senedd TV. The XML Record also carries bilingual tags to the personal biographies of Assembly Members who contribute to debates, and to the details of votes cast in the Chamber.

There is a new, customised Word template for Plenary turns that is compatible with the demands of XML publishing and specific product requirements. The XML links and tags are created via a series of customised macros in the Word document, and editors must use a series of identifiers typed in cells to render them.

For some time, there has been a drift towards a more verbatim approach to transcribing the Record. Inevitably, the introduction of a system whereby readers can directly and immediately compare the written version of Member contributions with video footage of the actual contributions seems to have accelerated this trend. This change has been particularly emphatic with Welsh-language contributions, given that editors now have far greater latitude to keep the colloquialisms and loan words used by many Welsh-speaking Members and witnesses, as opposed to rewording them in the ultra-formal register used in the past. Exercising a level of restraint not to 'tidy up' is an on-going challenge.

Staff have been involved in the review of support for committees by Assembly staff, focusing on briefing provided to Members and supporting Members to work bilingually. As part of the review, TRS staff have had constructive meetings with individual AMs, who said that they were extremely satisfied with the quality of the transcripts, but the issue of timely publication was raised on a few occasions. The next step is to look at what tailored support can be given to individual committees, Chairs and Members.

The Human Transplantation (Wales) Bill was recently passed by the Assembly in its longest-ever sitting (continuing until ten to ten – minutes before the lighting system was due to plunge the Chamber into darkness).

Staffing changes: long-term secondments, as well as shorter ones, by our members of staff have meant new faces appearing from other service areas in return. We have also

had the pleasure of welcoming our first apprentice – Zoe - through the Assembly's new apprenticeship scheme.

Staff provided summaries for the Presiding Officer's 'Women in Public Life' series of events; became ILM-accredited coaches and mentors working with other Assembly staff; and proofread the 75 or so Plenary transcripts with contributions that hadn't been translated from English into Welsh between September 2010 and December 2011. We have also successfully recruited one new permanent editor and three permanent translators.

## **Northern Ireland Assembly**

**Business Efficiency:** Office Manager post and two sub-editor posts were lost, with staff moving to other jobs in the Assembly. Two other posts in Admin were also given up, but they were vacant.

**Organisation redesign:** suggests Hansard will lose its standalone place and will join with Research and Library under one head, with the possibility that job titles will go. **Digital audio and workflow:** these have bedded in. Workflow does not do everything that Hansard wants it to yet but will eventually. Because it is an in-house solution, Hansard depends on in-house IT people, who are also busy.

The year has been busier than anticipated. The Scottish Parliament helped out in October with some committee copy, and Hansard was on standby to do the same for them.

There have been some interesting debates. There were three recalls during recess, and late sittings (eg on the Planning Bill). Among the recent Bills passed was one relating to the appointment criteria for special advisers.

Keen eye is being kept on the money side of things. There is still an embargo on recruitment. The Assembly has more or less reached its target of 375 posts.

Paul Hadlow visited to conduct an interesting experiment, which was essentially auditing a book.

Bound volume working group with membership from Oireachtas, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland and Westminster decided to retain hard-copy volumes until end of next mandate and review then.

Twitter activity is building up nicely.

The Assembly is looking at electronic Committee packs and at how Committees work. The Hansard report became a critical media issue over the "nuttergate" news story concerning MLA Jimmy Spratt and the Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, Mike Nesbitt.

## **Isle of Man**

With great sadness, the conference heard that Adrian Pilgrim, a former editor of 20 years, had died earlier in the year.

During quiet periods, Hansard takes on work from other jurisdictions. For example, staff work on proceedings from Gibraltar, working from the audio only, with no log. However, early in July, the head of Hansard retired, another editor was replaced by a trainee and one post overall was lost. There are two home transcribers and two temps. With an increasingly heavy workload, the capacity to do that work is becoming difficult to find.

Hansard has had a Twitter feed since October.

## **House of Commons**

It has been a relatively quiet year. House of Lords reform did not happen, but the gap was filled by the banking commission, which needed transcriptions produced as soon as possible for 75 sittings. This work was done in-house.

There have been a number of HR proposals relating to annualised hours replacing discretionary leave and pay for unsocial/additional hours, with a revalorisation of pay grades exercise. There was also a proposal to reintroduce performance-related pay, but this has been sent back to the drawing board.

The post-graduate diploma in parliamentary reporting has got off the ground—staff are very pleased with it and proud of its success. Staff have also got involved in producing parliamentary guidebooks, demonstrating that they are creators, not just interpreters.

A couple of memorable moments included “feartygate”, with the editor being interviewed on the Today programme, and an incident when a microphone operator got himself locked out, leading to the loss of 10 minutes of audio. The audio was reconstructed through the use of reporters’ and members’ memories and video.

Ministerial private secretaries were rather less help.

The year ahead holds the prospect of closer working with broadcasting colleagues, with steps towards all AV contracts being held in the same place, with the Official Report in charge. Electronic logging will also be examined, as will the Dutch reporting system, which is impressive. The bound volume is only being printed for the archive, written answers will no longer be printed, to be replaced by a database, and admin staff involved in the production of procedural papers will be merged into one unit. There will be another PG diploma course early next year, hopefully run jointly with House of Lords colleagues. Finally, appropriate work for recess will be examined.

## **Session Two: Address by Lord Davies of Oldham**

Conscious of his audience, as ever, Lord Davies expressed his respect and admiration for Hansard. He told us that he never writes a speech in full but uses bullet points as a guide. When he was a Minister, that practice would put the civil servants on tenterhooks as he spoke. He was then often surprised if the Doorkeepers approached him for his notes.

He talked about the variety of voices that one used to hear in Parliament, especially in the House of Commons, and recalled sharing an office with Bob Woof, a former miner from County Durham, who made one speech a year (the office was wrecked by an IRA bomb in April 1974).

Lord Davies took the view that political debate is about interaction, rather than reading speeches into the record, and contrasted the length of time it takes to make a ministerial opening speech on Second Reading in the Lords, where the Minister is largely uninterrupted, and in the Commons, where interventions come thick and fast. He told us of one occasion in the Lords when a Division was called during Question Time after a Peer had been challenged for taking too long to ask a question (Lord Trefgarne had moved that the Member be no longer heard and Lord Hailsham, on the Woolsack, had immediately called a Division—there were no Tellers for the Not Contents).

Lord Davies recalled, with great fondness, Michael Foot's formidable ability as a speaker. On one occasion, Michael Foot had had to make a speech defending the closed shop and thus square the circle between his two great passions—the rights of organised labour and the right to freedom of speech. Lord Davies said that, despite losing his notes partway through, Michael Foot had made a characteristically subtle and clever speech.

One of the things that Hansard cannot do is convey the atmosphere in the Chamber. Lord Davies told us of the time that Michael Heseltine had picked up the Mace in the Commons, which was simply recorded in Hansard as [Interruption.] (as was the throwing of purple powder from the public gallery). Lord Davies also recalled the Earl of Manchester climbing on to the Woolsack to protest against the 1999 House of Lords Bill, which would remove most of the hereditaries from the Lords—this was another occasion when Hansard was not able to convey what it was like to be there.

There are also times when Hansard does not record sedentaries. At Questions the day before, Lord Howell of Guildford had suggested that the north-east was “desolate” and might be a suitable place for fracking. A Peer had called out, “What about Guildford?” That had not been recorded in Hansard, but Baroness Farrington of Ribblesdale had ensured that, in her supplementary question, the point was made\*.

Responding to questions from delegates, Lord Davies talked about perceptions of changing behaviour in the Lords and the role of the Cross-Benchers. When asked whether he had ever changed his mind during a debate, he said that he was a party man, but admitted that he had had mixed feelings during the recent Lords debate on

the Premier League (he looked back with some nostalgia to the days when fathers would take their sons to see the local team).

\*[Official Report, House of Lords, 30/7/13; cols. 1641-42.]

### **Session Three: Training—“From black art to black gown - Parliamentary reporting training in the House of Commons”. Lorraine Sutherland, Editor of Debates, House of Commons**

#### *Past practice*

Lorraine started the session by looking back at how reporters used to train, with a particular focus on past practice in the House of Commons. The most common means of training reporters at the House of Commons was to sit next to an experienced reporter and observe them at work. In 1979, the Pitman shorthand school was established, which led to the establishment of the stenograph school. When computer-assisted transcription was introduced, it was heralded as the ‘saviour’ of reporting; it was said that the number of reporters could be reduced to six. However, this was not the case. It didn’t work – it was an expensive way of producing reports and CAT reporters were harder to find.

In 1997, there was a move to audio-only reporter training, which meant that the House of Commons could widen the pool from which it recruited reporters and could train reporters in only six months.

#### *Why the move to validation?*

Restructuring at the House of Commons meant that the Hansard department was merged with another to form ‘The Department of Chamber and Committee Services’, which would include clerks and serjeants.

This led to concern among Hansard reporters, who were keen not to lose their identity. They sought to codify an existing successful scheme. Potential further use includes short tailored courses and accredited sub-editor courses. They are now looking at providing language-skills training for colleagues from other departments. As language experts within the House of Commons, Hansard staff are well placed to do so.

#### *Finding a partner*

The next step was to find a suitable partner to provide the training. The sub-editor who first mooted validation was “volunteered” to undertake this task. Various providers were considered, but in September 2008, City University was chosen. It has an excellent school of journalism, but a decision was taken to use the law school instead – there was a desire to move away from the association with journalism.

#### *The preparatory work*

The preparatory work involved:

- a submission document, which was over 20 pages long and was revised many times;
- consideration of assessment methods; and
- descriptors of grades, detailing how to distinguish between merit and distinction.

The course content was agreed in April 2010. There were hopes for a May 2010 training group, but it did not work out. Unfortunately, the Dean of Validation at City University fell ill and there was too much on the shoulders of one sub-editor; therefore, a committee was formed. There were further rewrites of the submission document and surprise demands from the university, which included formal terms of reference, an external examiner and assessment regulations.

#### *The ‘Eureka’ moment*

27 April 2012 - A meeting was held with the validation committee at the House of Commons. The committee met with trainers and former students, who spoke to the panel about their learning experiences. There were more discussions about the assessment criteria and finally they came to an agreement. The class of 2012 was made up of four students.

### *Recruitment*

The recruitment process at the House of Commons includes tests, an interview and submitting a personal specification. Candidates must demonstrate good general knowledge, the ability to check references, team-working skills, keyboard skills and experience of using Windows.

### *The tests*

The written test involves correcting an A4 sheet, comprising vague sentences, poor grammar and some obvious mistakes.

The transcription test involves transcribing five minutes of proceedings.

In the last recruitment round, 800 candidates applied for four posts. 60 candidates were invited to undertake the tests. 12 were invited to a 30-minute interview.

### *Course content*

It is a six-month course.

Module 1 – full-time course over six weeks, comprising various types of instruction (coaching, shadowing, independent study etc). Students have monthly one-to-one meetings with tutors and are given presentations on procedure and so on by Hansard experts. Different reporting styles are studied – for example, how to report committee evidence and speeches. Evidence is not as heavily edited. Assessment includes a written exercise and multiple-choice test. Candidates must also make a presentation based on individual research. An example topic is ‘Potential reform of the House of Lords’.

Module 2 – Trainees are embedded in teams. Final assessment is undertaken by course tutors and the director.

### *Outcomes*

All four trainees passed all tests and graduated. One passed with distinction. The ceremony took place in the Speaker’s House.

The next training course will be held over the next few months. Perhaps it will include House of Lords trainees this time.

### *Q&A*

Mair Parry-Jones (National Assembly for Wales) asked how much the course costs. Lorraine said that she had not considered how much it would cost for external trainees, as House of Commons trainees are on a salary but that City University overheads are £5,000 over three years.

John Vice (House of Lords) said that the estimated cost was around £26,000, which was calculated on the basis of the trainee-level salary and staff time.

Deborah Pilkington (Tynwald) asked whether the course was compulsory and was told that it would be for new staff.

Carl Lombard (Houses of the Oireachtas) asked what the relationship was with City University and was told that they provide the trainers. They agree on content with City University and an external examiner reports to the university.

Gareth Wigmore (House of Lords) asked who the external examiner was and was told that the examiner was from the London School of Economics.

Susan Mansfield (Scottish Parliament) asked whether there were any plans to extend it to a Masters course. She was told that there were no such plans as yet. The aim is to run a second course, perhaps involving other legislatures in the future. They are also looking at the CPA scholarship.

Mair Parry-Jones asked about the duration of the second module and was told it was a three-month module.

Fiona Shaw (SP) asked whether the course could be applied to editors/senior editors and was told that that was a possibility.

Cai Evans (NAfW) asked about the provision of language skills training for other departments. He was told that a course is currently being developed and that a proof-reading course used to be provided externally, but they are now doing it internally.

Rhys Morgan (NAfW) asked whether there are plans to expand the qualification to current staff. He was told that it is thought that it could not be applied retrospectively as it would devalue the qualification.

Meleri Perkins (NAfW) asked whether there would be changes for the second group of trainees and was told that there would be no major changes.

*Conclusion*

Leah thanked Lorraine for her presentation and congratulated the House of Commons on the success of its new course.

## **Session Five: Voice Recognition—Håvar Ellingsen, Reporter, House of Lords Official Report**

Susan Mansfield (Scottish Parliament) introduced Håvar Ellingsen and Siu Lee from the House of Lords, who were going to demonstrate the use of Dragon, a voice recognition programme.

Håvar explained that some reporters use the Dragon software to help them deal with severe repetitive strain injury. It works well for those with “Radio 4” voices, not so well with others. It had its problems, such as a tendency to try to post sentences to the internet or to tweet them when it misunderstood a command. However, it was strongly worth trying out dictation to Dragon as a means of reporting parliamentary debate.

The vast majority of copy taken down by Dragon is accurate, although glitches and mishears do happen. It has a higher error rate than typing and reporters, in particular, need to look out for homonyms. If reporters are thorough, editors should be able to read the turn as they do a typed turn.

Håvar started by explaining how different offices dealt with the need to accommodate those who use VR. In the Lords, the VR reporters are on a separate floor from those who type at desks. Other people in the office are not distracted by the noise of dictation, but the dictation rooms are very small so reporters need another machine for editing. In Wales, three sides of a reporter’s desk are shielded by a booth. In Scotland and Ireland, all reporters work in the same office. Paul O’Brien (Oireachtas) said that his colleagues did not mind his dictating.

In Scotland, there had been some teething problems but on the whole the arrangement worked well. Simon Eilbeck (Scottish Parliament) said that dictating took time to get used to, but that as most reporters were good at speaking softly it was easy to adjust. There was a risk of one’s voice rising in sympathy with the turn and dynamic changes if the reporter moved could result in a loss of cohesion in the report. All reporters in Scotland use VR in some way. John Vice (House of Lords) asked about ambient noise, and Fiona Shaw (Scottish Parliament) replied that it was not a problem, as most tried to lower their voices. On the whole, it was a quiet office as the widespread use of VR meant that there was less chatting. Cara Clark (House of Commons) confirmed that that was her impression when in Scotland on secondment from the Commons, where VR is not commonly used.

The discussion moved on the mechanics of dictation. Some reporters found that it encouraged a conversational approach, particularly as Dragon worked more accurately if dictated to quickly and quietly. It can be hard to judge the rhythm of a sentence when one is repeating others’ words. Reporters have to decide whether to dictate the turn verbatim and then edit it, or to dictate an edited turn.

Carl Lombard (Oireachtas) asked whether Dragon could be used in real time to dictate a turn. Håvar thought that that would be a bold move. It would be okay if the reporter could keep up, but it is easy to get thrown off course. The end of sentences could also be lost. Juliet Levy (House of Commons) said that reporters are trained to revoice phrases in the US. As the reporters in the Lords sit in the Chamber, it could scare the Members if they were dictating along with them. Carl suggested that a real-time turn could be used as an initial draft. In principle, it might work, but there were caveats. Håvar asked who would use such a draft, which would be full of holes.

Susan asked whether a rough verbatim draft might help the media while waiting for the edited report to appear within our production time frames. They could use the draft for quotations, for example. Håvar pointed out that there was room for

misinterpretation. It would be easy for things to go wrong very easily and for members to be misquoted, so perhaps it would be better to liaise with the media rather than provide an uncorrected transcript. Susan pointed out that it also depended on the broadcast.

Mair Parry-Jones (Welsh Assembly) said that there had been some discussion about having VR in the interpretation booth but that its use would depend on the translator and the translation. Håvar thought that that was an interesting idea that would add to the complexity of simultaneous translation. Mair said that it would be up to the editors and translators whether to use it, and Håvar added that it was important to remember that one speaks differently to VR from how one speaks to listeners.

Gareth Wigmore (House of Lords) asked about the risk of reporters getting a form of RSI of the voice. Håvar said that that was a known problem among teachers and could be mitigated by the style of dictation used. Gareth asked whether dictating for eight hours at a time caused problems. Siu said that some people found their voice got croaky and that that meant that the transcript was less accurate. Colds had the same effect. Susan said that just like with physical RSI, exercises could help to build up resilience. Paul mentioned the dangers of whispering, which could lead to voice strain. Gareth asked whether good dictators could perhaps provide copy for others to edit and Håvar said that they would need to be trained, particularly in using their diaphragm properly while speaking.

Tes Stranger (House of Commons) asked whether the audio could be put straight through VR without the need for an intermediary. Håvar said that that method was used in the Isle of Man, where each Member has built up a voice profile. Deborah Pilkington (Tynwald) built on that: the clarity of the copy depended on who was speaking. They almost never get a good transcription to work from and if a Member turns away from the microphone, accuracy is lost. If there is background noise, or an interruption caused by, for example, a sneeze, there is no transcript. The main benefit for the editorial staff was that they had something on the page to work on, but they often had to listen through. Håvar pointed out that although the system works in principle, the flaws would only multiply along with the number of Members.

Deborah gave a little more information about how transcription by VR worked in the Tynwald. There are only 34 Members and four reporters. When the Members are first elected, they build up a voice profile and the fact that there is a seating plan in the chamber means that the speaker can be identified and the correct voice profile used. It would be almost impossible to build up such a profile in the Lords or Commons, Håvar added, as most Members would simply refuse to do so. For example, in 2012 only 70 Members turned up to take part in a fire drill in the chamber. Juliet said that that was a slightly different situation and asked why, if the Members understood, they would not take part in building up their voice profiles. Håvar acknowledged that that would be the common sense approach, but added that requests that were inconvenient often fell by the wayside. Gareth felt that the likelihood was that Members would be happy to come in and take part. Susan asked whether the recording could be used to build a profile, but John said that the turns would have to be typed out to do that. Håvar added that the size of the Chamber, the variety of accents and the clarity of the recording would mean that the quality of the transcript overall would be lower than that in the Isle of Man.

Deborah said that the best transcriptions came from evidence sessions using the voice profiles “generic male” and “generic female”. A small room was used for such sessions and the speakers were very close to the microphones. The programme used was based on Dragon, but had been created for use by the Tynwald.

Håvar summed up the last part of the discussion, adding that the size of a Parliament affected how VR transcribed a debate. His feeling was that revoicing produced a more valuable transcript than that which would be produced by VR of a member's voice. John asked whether VR sped up reporters' production of copy. Mark Wyman (House of Lords) and Paul both felt that it did.

Carl asked whether "dictator" could perhaps be used as a job description, with one person dictating a transcript for sub-editors to edit. Håvar thought that that was an interesting proposal that had not yet been considered. In principle, he could not see any flaws in it, but it could lead to less Hansardised copy because of the time constraints SEs were under.

Siu said that Dragon 12 was 20% more accurate than previous versions, but that female and accented voices were less likely to be recognised. The programme was more accurate with male voices than female. It has an accuracy centre that allows the system to be trained to accept certain words and there is also a correction window that can be used to teach Dragon new words and how to interpret others.

Gareth said that the big negative for a sub-editor reading VR-transcribed copy was that it introduced errors that a human reporter would not make. If they manage to get past the reporter and the sub, it can make us look dumb. Håvar gave some examples of homonyms and mishears, such as Lord Gnome of Gorleston, which should have been Lord Low of Dalston. Gareth pointed out that if such a mistake went in, it could lead to trouble. An early VR system had learned the name "Lord Carter", which meant that Magna Carta went in the book as "Magna Carter". Peter Hitchens picked it up, rather than the reporter or sub. Fortunately, the book was corrected in time for the bound volume.

Susan felt that over time, editors become accustomed to a different type of error.

Fiona said that subs learned to review copy for such errors. Håvar gave an example of a more innocuous error that could be easy to miss—the phrase "lead the debate" had been transcribed as "leave the debate". Such errors can lead to paranoia about copy. Like with freelance work, subs had to be aware that they were looking for landmines and that they might need to listen to the recording. Fiona said that that was becoming a bigger issue, with subs often on edge about these mistakes.

Discussion turned to whether there was a trick to identifying these errors. It was generally acknowledged that there was not. Håvar said the best approach was to assume that the transcript would be wrong and to read with that in mind. John added that you needed to read for sound, rather than meaning. Gareth pointed out that a sub would not necessarily notice a mistranscription of the word dead as debt, for instance. Mark said that the system's vocabulary was very good, but it did not necessarily infer context. Håvar agreed that it was surprising what Dragon did know.

Stephen Farrell (House of Commons) said that general conversation in an office could be disruptive and wondered whether dictation would be less so. The practice in the Commons is to exchange information verbally, and he wondered whether that would be another complication. Håvar's solution would be to hive off the VR reporters and have them rejoin their teams to edit. In Scotland, reporting practices have evolved—more e-mails are sent, for example, rather than people shouting or playing out. Paul said that such disruption could happen, but it was not a problem. Any mistakes could be changed. Gareth pointed out that there were also problems with communication when a reporter was separated from the team, particularly as a conflict between Dragon and Outlook meant that they sometimes were not even on e-mail. Simon said that in Scotland, some reporters even used VR for e-mails, and it was clarified that the Outlook problem was specific to the Lords.

Gareth wondered whether there was potential to use VR and revoicing to report Select Committees.

Voice commands can also be used within macros. Siu is the contact for in-house work in the Lords and for PICT, too. You need a fair amount of IT knowledge to be able to work across the different departments and contacts.

Paul asked about accents and symbols. The version of Lotus Notes used in the Republic of Ireland to report cannot cope with accents. The Lords have little need for accents, but Håvar felt it would be a case of training the system to remember. Paul said that common Irish words are often removed and you have to trick the system. Siu suggested adding them to the dictionary.

## **Session Six: Quality v Austerity—Presentation by Sarah Lowe and Victoria Conder, Merrill**

A presentation entitled *Maintaining the Highest Standards of Parliamentary Reporting in the Prevailing Economic Climate* was given by Sarah Lowe and Victoria Conder, Director of Business Development and Business Manager (Contracts) of Merrill Corporation, one of the two external suppliers used by the House of Lords to report Select Committees, and one of the three used by the House of Commons for the same task.

The theme was the pressure to reduce costs while maintaining quality of service, which was obviously relevant to everyone present. There was much in the presentation about public sector procurement processes and avoiding problems with outsourcing after the award of a contract. Sarah and Vicky provided case studies and suggested, ultimately, that the challenge set out in the title of their presentation could be met by: improving the procurement process if outsourcing transcription; improving the performance management process; keeping up-to-date with changes in the market and technology; and considering alternative solutions.

We split into four breakout groups, discussing: "What changes has austerity brought to my department?"; "How do cuts affect accuracy and quality?"; "What can my department do to maintain accuracy?"; and "What is the role of third parties in the reporting process?" A brief summary of each group's findings was given in plenary.

## **Session Seven: Internet Research—Susan Mansfield, Editor of Debates, Scottish Parliament**

Carl Lombard opened the session by noting how the Internet has revolutionised the work of Official Reports in recent years, but, as Susan Mansfield explained, efficient use of the Internet is key, given the time restrictions we face and the demand for accuracy. The aim of the session was to help delegates learn how to use the Internet faster; search the Internet more effectively; and get better results from our Internet searches.

The first question we should ask ourselves when researching a particular topic is: “Should I use a search engine?” Users should get familiar with good sources, bookmark them and share them with colleagues for future reference. However, we should always be aware of commercial websites, because their sources may not always be reliable.

When searching the Internet, our automatic, default choice of search engine tends to be Google, but Susan pointed out that there are many different options available. Keyword search directories include Google, Yahoo Search and Bing. It is also possible to search by index directory (Yahoo Directory and Exalead) and to do meta searches (Mamma and Forelook), and a comprehensive list of search engines can be found at: <http://www.philb.com/webse.htm>.

Specialist search engines include: <http://www.acronymfinder.com/> and <http://www.abbreviations.com/> (for abbreviations and acronyms); <http://www.synonyms.net/> (for synonyms and antonyms); <http://www.definitions.net/> (for definitions and translations); <http://www.phrases.net/> (for phrases and idioms); <http://www.quotes.net/> (for quotes and sayings); <http://www.lyrics.net/> (for music and lyrics); <http://greatpdf.com/> (for PDFs and e-books); and <http://www.taforum.org.uk/> (for associations and organisations). Susan also recommended the book, *Know It All, Find It Fast*, by Bob Duckett, Peter Walker and Christina Donnelly.

Susan went on to explain how search engines work and that we should always be careful about which sources we trust. Google, for example, is far from perfect. Search results can vary and can often lead nowhere. Wikipedia often gets a high ranking in Google searches, but its sources are not always reliable, so we should be wary of using it as an authoritative source. We should also not forget that Google is a commercial, advertising company: it targets advertising and collects data in order to do so.

Susan then explained how best to use Google. She advised users to start broad and narrow down by using key words; not to use too many words; to use words that the website will use; and to be aware that Google can go its own way. Users should take control of their search by using search operators (a list of Google search operators can be found at [http://www.googleguide.com/advanced\\_operators\\_reference.html](http://www.googleguide.com/advanced_operators_reference.html)) and the advanced Google search tool, which enables users to filter their searches by content type.

Susan ended by sharing a link to a useful Google “cheat sheet” on Internet searches (<https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/136861>) and a link to the PowerPoint slides that accompanied her presentation:

<http://www.slideshare.net/susanmansfield1/bipra-symposium-2013-internet-searching>.

In the question and answer session, Carl Lombard mentioned the difficulties involved in finding court judgments online, especially those of the European Court. The European Union and United Nations websites are not particularly accessible in this regard. Susan said that the British and Irish Legal Information Institute (<http://www.bailii.org/>) is a useful source for complex legal issues.

Gareth Wigmore (House of Lords) wondered whether books were actually better than online sources for some areas of information. He noted that The Gazetteer is a better resource for searching for British place names than any online resources. The Northern Irish delegates said that, because so many place names in Northern Ireland have different spellings, they have their own resource (“Pointer”) to ensure consistency.

The session ended with a discussion about technological overkill: there are so many sources available online that it is difficult to tell whether there is any one true authority available on the Internet. Moreover, some news sources, such as The Times, now operate behind a paywall, meaning that some information is not freely available online.

## **Session Eight: The Future of Publishing—Andrew Allen and Dave Burchell, TSO**

The final presentation on the Thursday came from Andrew Allen and Dave Burchell of TSO, once the major part of HM Stationery Office. This office has been the provider of Hansard in hard copy for more than 100 years but, as Andrew explained, although hundreds of such copies are still available daily in Parliament, almost no one actually buys hard copy Hansards any more. Similarly, the print run of bound volumes is one-seventh of what it was 25 years before.

TSO now provides xml-based versions of Official Reports for the House of Lords, the House of Commons and the Northern Ireland Assembly, producing well structured data from the proceedings. A month's worth of proceedings from those three Hansards would refill an empty box of photocopier paper, but were now available digitally through TSO's iPad app. This new app was developed by TSO from its experience of providing an app for the Driving Standards Agency, with the Hansard context incorporated.

The app, released on 8 May 2013 at the start of the parliamentary Session, is intended to be developed into a central app for all Official Reports in the UK and beyond (the next client being the Bermudan Parliament). Content is updated daily at 6 am and, as with many apps, can be read offline after downloading. Built-in features for accessibility include scrolling and bookmarks, with an in-app dictionary and search function being developed. The app is free to Members at Westminster and Stormont, and to staff with parliament.uk email accounts.

TSO was aiming to find some paying customers beyond Parliament. It would be prepared to develop for other platforms, such as Android, if the market develops for them but assumed Apple and iPad to be the default platform for now.

## **Session Nine: The History of Parliamentary Reporting—Stephen Farrell, Reporter, House of Commons Official Report**

*[This is a full report of Stephen's talk but sadly it lacks the accompanying illustrations.]*

Thank you, Will. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, and I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about this subject—and so on... Perhaps we can take as read all the other pleasantries with which parliamentarians habitually begin their speeches (and that we for some reason always report), but I cannot resist beginning with the words that strike fear into every true parliamentary reporter: “I will be brief.” In fact, I do not intend to be that brief, but perhaps you will not mind as today you only have to listen and do not have to report me—except, that is, for Jonny, to whom I shall of course be providing my speaking notes.

Two weeks ago, I was at the Intersteno congress in Ghent at which a 90-minute presentation on the history of shorthand began with the speaker taking us back as far as the Sumerians. It may be no surprise to learn that that session over-ran. Do not worry: I do not intend to go back further than the 18th century. I am hoping to finish my presentation by about 11 am to leave time for questions and a general discussion, but please do interrupt me if anything is unclear or if you have any questions.

I should say that this paper is very much an anecdotal run-though of some of the main features, as I see them, of the history of parliamentary reporting. It is not meant to be a definitive account, but an introduction to the period that most interests me, which is the late 18th and early 19th centuries—when extensive and sustained reports of proceedings in Parliament started to be published continuously in London and Dublin newspapers, and when Hansard first originated. However, I first want to talk about some of the similarities and differences of reporting in the past.

### **B. Similarities and differences**

I spent much of my career as a historian at the History of Parliament, and I started being a reporter only about three or four years ago, first as a freelancer in the Lords and then full-time in the Commons.

I am tempted to say that my introduction to parliamentary reporting was not entirely dissimilar to that of the Scot William Jerdan in the first decade of the 19th century. Jerdan later noted in his Autobiography that, raw as he was, he speedily discovered that he had a curious set of colleagues. He explained that his colleagues “were not bad fellows, but they were old in the trammels, and apt for any manoeuvre which would lighten their labours”. Jerdan gave the example of their contriving things so that he would have to report the Chancellor's speech introducing his budget, when he was not used to handling even simple debates. I am sure that such a thing would not happen now, of course.

Before long, Jerdan was displaying the reporter's typical world-weariness: “In a little time”, he wrote, “the sameness of the work, notwithstanding its varieties, becomes exceedingly unsatisfactory and irksome.” Despite the occasional brilliant affair, he felt that “the tedium of a long continuance of mediocrity to deal with is wearisome beyond endurance.” He went on that it was therefore “most natural for the reporter to seek some relaxation and amusement, and this induces a habit of tavern recreations”. That would certainly not happen either nowadays—of course not, judging from this week's proceedings, at least.

One of the main differences 200 years ago was that in the old Palace of Westminster—before the fire in 1834—reporters had to compete for places with the public. By convention, they sat on the back row of the Public Gallery facing the Speaker's Chair, as Jerdan recorded, "not only as the best for hearing but as having no neighbours behind them to help the motion of their pencils with their knees and elbows." Unlike us, reporters had no automatic right of admission in the early 19th century. Although in 1803, Speaker Abbot ordered the Serjeant at Arms to allow reporters to use the back row, they still had to fight for their seats on popular occasions, and they had to see and hear what was happening through the crowd in the seats in front of them.

This illustration does not show that part of the Gallery, which was about four or five rows deep, but it gives some idea of how the Chamber looked at the time, and you can see how difficult it might be for reporters to identify Members beneath the Gallery. There were certain similarities to today, as is demonstrated by the account of a visitor in 1824 who found himself sitting in front of the reporters and listening to their repartee, which included the reporters "complimenting the anticipated speakers of the night in the inverse ratio of [the length of] their anticipated speeches." The visitor wrote of being amazed that reporters, whom he thought looked so intelligent, "should treat not with indifference only, but with absolute dislike, that which you have come so far, and wished so fondly to hear". He seemed to have some understanding of the reporters' job, however, because he continued: "but you will be pleased to bear in mind that their eyes and fingers must ache at the writing of speeches...that their memories must be on the rack recollecting, and their judgments untwisting and piecing together the bones and muscles of this body of eloquence". That is still a pretty good description of what we do.

Like Jerdan, many of the reporters at the start of the 19th century were young men—and they were, of course, all men until the 20th century—who at the beginning of a legal or literary career. One of the most famous is Charles Dickens, who was a reporter in the early 1830s (as we heard on our walking tour earlier this week). He later made this well-known statement: "I have worn my knees by writing on them in the old back row of the old gallery of the old House of Commons, and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pen in the old House of Lords, where we used to be huddled together like so many sheep—kept in waiting, say, until the woolsack might want re-stuffing." That is a typical Dickensian description, but it conjures up what it must have been like for the reporters crowded into a small space below the Bar in the Lords.

According to a later reporter William Maxwell, one of the aristocratic women who sat in this crowded pen to listen to debates was the leader of fashionable society, Lady Jersey, who sat for hours on a small stool and "on more than one occasion, invited a reporter to lay his note-book on her knee in order that he might the better perform his trying duties." At least, the Lords reporters are now provided with a table to work at. The other thing to say about Dickens, who was apparently a very fast and accurate reporter, is that he was a genuine practitioner of the art of parliamentary reporting and knew all about its difficulties. He drew on his experiences in his novel *David Copperfield*, which includes a wonderful account of trying to practice shorthand while listening to his friend Traddles declaiming from reports of parliamentary debates: "My aunt and Mr. Dick represented the Government or the Opposition..., and Traddles...thundered astonishing invectives against them...while I used to sit, at a little distance, with my note-book on my knee, fagging after him with all my might and main."

I shall come back to shorthand and what we now call speech capturing in a moment, but the biggest difference between Dickens's time and our own is of course that we now have audio recordings. The hardest part of a parliamentary reporter's job is hearing what a member says, but at least we can usually rely on excellent digital audio equipment. In the past, not only was there no recording, but also no amplification, at least not until well into the 20th century.

As is well known, the Commons refused to move permanently back into its new Chamber in the rebuilt Palace of Westminster until 1852, when a new ceiling was installed that made it easier for Members to hear what was said. The reporters at least now had proper places in the Gallery above the Speaker's Chair and, providing that the Member speaking turned to address the Speaker, as they were supposed to do, they were reasonably audible in the Reporters Gallery.

This illustration, which is of course of the Gallery in the Chamber that was destroyed by enemy action in 1941, shows the seating for reporters that was available before the late-19th century alterations which extended the seating round to the left and right into the side galleries and therefore made it look more like the current appearance of the Reporters Gallery in the Commons.

The new Gallery can also be glimpsed in this cartoon from 1916, which is one of the few cartoons that I have been able to find about reporting. It refers to the Commons having been cleared of strangers for a secret sitting during the first world war. Punch commented that, "All we know is that in the course of some seven hours no fewer than sixteen Members addressed the House." It added, I assume sarcastically, that "From this it may be inferred that the absence of reporters has at least the negative advantage of conducing to brevity of utterance." However, that still works out at 25 minutes per speaker, which we would consider long nowadays. The cartoon is a reminder that in earlier times it was common for reporters regularly to be cleared out of the Gallery on the cry of "I spy strangers". To add to the inconvenience, they also had to leave the House every time there was a Division.

In the new House of Lords Chamber, where nothing could be done about the very high, decorative ceiling, the acoustics were (and still are) astonishingly bad, even in the seats provided for reporters at the front of the Gallery.

Giving evidence to a Lords Select Committee on reporting in 1880, George Callaghan of the Morning Post said that the chief difficulty of accurate reporting was the difficulty of hearing, which meant that reporters had to cobble up speeches or tinker them as best they could. Asked what he meant by speeches being "tinkered", he replied: "I mean that you have got broken sentences and a fragmentary note; you then compare with a man who has been sitting next to you, and who has perhaps heard something better than you have, and in that way you make out a fairist or readable report, and in that sense they are tinkered". He was careful to add that he did not mean that speeches were tampered with.

As a result of its inquiry, the 1880 Lords Select Committee report on reporting proposed moving reporters to:

beneath the Floor of the House—we know our place! It was pointed out that that might make it hard to know who was speaking, but the proposal in fact came to nothing because it would have meant altering the huge ventilation spaces beneath the Chamber;

further to the front of an extended Gallery, with the Woolsack repositioned below the Gallery—the idea was that if peers addressed the Lord Chancellor on the Woolsack (although, unlike in the Commons, peers address the House generally, not the Chair as

such), they would be looking towards the reporters in the Gallery, which would give them a better chance of being heard;

raised seats on either side of the Bar—rather like the current position in the Lords, but, without any amplification, peers were just as inaudible there as in the Gallery; and

seats in the enlarged side Galleries, with reporters changing sides so as to be opposite whoever was speaking—apparently, the idea was that reporters could scurry round the corridors from one side Gallery to the opposite one each time a speaker got up on the other side of the Chamber below.

In fact, of course, the Lords reporters really wanted to be on the Floor of Chamber, and that is where the Hansard reporters were eventually allowed to operate from about 1890 (till relatively recently).

The various Commons Select Committees on reporting in the late 19th century give a fascinating insight into the nature of reporting at the time. One thing that they make clear is that the official reporters in the Commons also wanted a desk on the Floor, somewhere near the Mace. Nothing ever came of that, although by the end of the 19th century, they had secured the two central seats in the Gallery, directly above the Speaker's Chair.

Amplification was used for the first time in the Lords Chamber in 1925, and following the wartime bombing, the Commons used the Lords Chamber (with the orientation of the Chamber reversed, so that MPs addressed the Speaker in a Chair that faced the throne). The microphones were kept on, but even then, it was not easy to hear. Winston Churchill's private secretary, John Colville, several times records in his diaries having to spend hours going through a speech with one of the Hansard reporters. Thereafter, MPs accepted the need for amplification, which was included in the reconstructed Commons Chamber opened in 1950.

C. Main historical questions:

I hope that I have given you an introduction to the kind of difficulties, not all of them unfamiliar, that reporters faced in the past. To explain what I will cover in the remainder of this presentation, I want to show you a list of the main questions that historians ask on this subject:

First, how was Parliament reported and by whom?—In many ways, I am most interested in the practical questions of what methods were used to report Parliament, so I will go on to talk about that in a moment, as well as to summarise how Hansard fits into the general picture of parliamentary reporting.

Secondly, how well was Parliament reported?—That question obviously follows from the first and is fairly straightforward, in that we know from comparisons of different versions of the same debates that some accounts were less full or less accurate than others, and it is certainly clear that they were much less full and less accurate than parliamentary reports are today.

There is also, however, the related question of how accurately reports represented the political drama of parliamentary debates—Historical reports often pulled in elements that we would now exclude, such as “stage directions” and subjective comments, but such elements perhaps gave a better impression of the drama of the parliamentary occasion. I would also argue that we need to supplement historical, and indeed current, accounts of debates with other evidence if we are fully to understand certain parliamentary episodes.

A third question is how reporting altered the speaking practices of parliamentarians—The whole question of how reporting was “read” by the politically engaged as well as the wider public beyond Westminster is too large to deal with today. The only point I

would make is that, contrary to what Punch might think, Members were normally extremely reluctant to speak if they were not going to be reported, and they often spoke precisely because they knew that they would be reported, for instance on constituency business—we cannot just blame TheyWorkForYou; this is not a recent phenomenon.

#### D. Forms and methods:

The main purpose of my presentation is to go through some of the main developments between the late 18th and early 20th centuries, and particularly to give you an idea of the normal methods used to write accounts of parliamentary debates.

I said that I would not go back before the 18th century, but I wanted to show you a common type of 17th-century parliamentary publication, which was the one-off woodcut news-book or pamphlet giving a digest of political news. They were particularly common during the civil war—this one is from 1642—and often did not cover more than the texts of motions and similar information, although the 17th century was also the period which saw the start of the great parliamentary diaries. The most notable was the diary of Simonds D'Ewes, who was an MP during the Long Parliament of 1640. Such diaries or letters are a valuable source for the study of parliamentary history.

The early 18th century saw the beginning of more regular reports in monthly political magazines, the first being Abel Boyer's *Political State of Great Britain*. Periodic attempts were made by the House of Commons to assert its ancient privileges against the reporting of Parliament, but publishers usually evaded these restrictions, for instance by holding back publication until the recess and/or by using thinly disguised formats, such as purporting to give an account of the debates in the Senate of Lilliput. One of the most notable figures employed as a reporter was Samuel Johnson, who may never have actually attended Parliament or perhaps did so only once. It is important to understand that this type of reporting was really a form of literary composition. Johnson sometimes received little or no indication of what had happened, and he certainly used his own words in his reports for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the early 1740s. There is a celebrated anecdote of how, at a literary party, when the assembled company were praising an example of the elder Pitt's oratory, Johnson sheepishly admitted: "I wrote that speech in a garret in Exeter Street." In his defence, Johnson appears to have given up parliamentary reporting when he realised that people were taking the printed accounts as verbatim reports of proceedings. One of the real pioneers of parliamentary reporting was an Irishman called James Caldwell, who in 1766 published two volumes of proceedings of the Irish House of Commons. John Almon, who is often considered one of the main originators of the publishing of parliamentary debates in Britain—I shall say a bit more about him later—pointed out that Caldwell was in fact "the first person who wrote a regular series of Parliamentary Debates, from memory and a real attendance".

Caldwell was not an MP, but he attended the Irish Commons and wrote his accounts "entirely from memory" after each sitting, rather like "Memory" Woodfall in London a few years later. In his preface, Caldwell boasted that "the deliberate Recollection which Writing made necessary, brought back the Ideas in a slow but regular Succession, and generally in the very Words which had been used to express them." You can make of that remark what you like. Of course, it now seems ridiculous to think that reporters relied wholly or even partially on memory. It is unlikely that any reporters—even the celebrated "Memory" Woodfall—had perfect recall, but we live in an age that has almost entirely lost the practice of relying on "oral" memory, although that was the main way in which information was transmitted for most of

human history. On the other hand, as parliamentary reporters, we all rely to a certain extent on memory—whether faulty or otherwise—and it is quite clear that having good short-term recall is a valuable attribute for a reporter. I therefore do not altogether rule out Caldwell's claim, although it seems probable that his memory was supplemented by other means.

At the other extreme from the use of memory was the development of shorthand for reporting purposes. Incidentally, I will skate over the parallel subject of the history of how shorthand was used by the writers employed to record Select Committee proceedings and, indeed, evidence given at the Bar of the House or in trials, such as during the impeachment of Warren Hastings. I am not going to talk about the Gurney shorthand writers, but it is important to remember that they represent another tradition of parliamentary reporting, albeit one that has now come back in-house, as it were, with Hansard having taken over the contracts for providing Select Committee transcripts for both Houses.

One practitioner of shorthand was Sir Henry Cavendish. He was a Member of Parliament both in the Irish Commons at Dublin (from 1764 to 1768 and 1776 to 1800) and the British Parliament at Westminster (in the 1768 Parliament, which is known as the "Unreported Parliament"), and he left dozens of notebooks of shorthand reporting, many of which he transcribed himself and some of which have still not been transcribed, let alone published. A small number of his debates, like this example here, which is dated 1839, were later published by John Wright.

Cavendish's notebooks are not an absolutely complete set. Some may well have been lost, but even so, it is possible to see that he missed out hours or days at a time, and of course omitted his own speeches—he could hardly have been recording his own speeches while giving them. A contemporary Government source listed Cavendish as "A good shorthand writer but a tiresome speaker". However, he was obviously an indefatigable reporter, and comparisons with accounts of debates in the Irish newspapers have shown that his accounts are usually fuller and clearer.

For reasons that I do not have time to go into, a stand-off in 1771 between the House of Commons and the publishers of parliamentary debates, powerfully backed by the City of London, led to Parliament largely turning a blind eye to the publication of its debates. That episode did not mean that Parliament had given up its zealously guarded rights to keep its proceedings secret—it maintained that only in that way could it retain its independence—but that Parliament recognised the futility of trying to restrict the publication of its debates when there was so much public interest in them. The de facto lifting of reporting restrictions coincided with, and was perhaps related to, a massive expansion in the number of newspapers and of newspaper readership. That phenomenon also involved the beginnings of industrialisation and urbanisation, with the emergence of a more affluent and literate middle class, but it is also important to understand that newspapers competed on the thoroughness of their parliamentary reporting. That may seem strange to us now, but at a time when newspapers were almost entirely filled with factual information and complete transcripts of printed documents, titles such as the Freeman's Journal, the Hibernian Journal and the Dublin Evening Post in Ireland, and the Public Advertiser, the London Evening Post and, after 1785, The Times in Britain, prided themselves on giving their readers earlier, fuller and more accurate reports.

This is the top half of the front page of The Daily Universal Register, a publication that soon became The Times. Its front page leader boasted that it would be published at 6 am daily, and would "have this advantage over the Daily Advertiser, that, though published as early, it will contain a substantial account of the proceedings in

Parliament the preceding night". In fact, *The Times* gave some of the fullest accounts of debates—much fuller than Hansard in the 1820s, for example—and in the late 19th century had the biggest team of reporters.

How then did the newspaper reporters operate? Did they rely on memory or shorthand? If anything, according to the reminiscences of another young Scottish reporter John Campbell—he later rose to be Lord Chancellor—it was more the former than the latter. In later life, he wrote that "I knew nothing, and did not desire to know anything, of short-hand." He thought that shorthand writers simply recorded the words without understanding the meaning and context. For him, parliamentary reporting was a higher calling that demanded greater powers, including literary talent. Here is Campbell's list of desirable skills for reporters, who in those days often reported the whole of a Member's speech: "To have a good report of speech, the reporter must thoroughly understand the subject discussed, and be qualified to follow the reasoning, to feel the pathos, and to relish the wit, and to be warmed by the eloquence of the speaker. He must apprehend the whole scope of the speech, as well as attend to the happy phraseology in which the ideas of the speaker are expressed." Campbell advised that the reporter "should take down notes in abbreviated long-hand as rapidly as he can for aids to his memory. He must then retire to his room, and, looking at these, recollect the speech as it was delivered, and give it with all fidelity, point and spirit, as the speaker would write it out as if preparing it for the press." Finally, in a pre-echo of Hansard's terms of reference in relation to removing redundancies and obvious errors, Campbell noted that "Fidelity is the first and indispensable requisite, but this does not demand an exposure of inaccuracies and repetitions."

What is so interesting about that description is not the reference to long-hand notes—we know that reporters were permitted to take notes, most of the time at least, from about 1783—nor the fact that reporters still used their own literary ability to translate the speech into words on the page, but the clear suggestion that a parliamentary reporter (as distinct from a shorthand writer) was expected to distil the essence and significance of a speech into a written account that was a good representation of how the speech had been received.

As another distinguished reporter, James Stephen, wrote in the mid-19th century, "in the effort to report from recollection, the Reporter will be naturally led, if not even irresistibly drawn, to give preference and prominency to those speeches or passages which produced the best effect".

Even as late as the 1870s, the reporter James Grant maintained that not only did some Commons reporters take only long-hand notes, but that they were often the best reporters. He gave the example of John Tyas of *The Times*, who was a fine writer. He never wrote shorthand, "yet was admitted on all hands to be the best reporter in the Gallery; and as a proof of that there was a sort of rivalry among speakers as to who should have him when addressing the House."

I want to consider William Woodfall's reputation as a reporter, because I think that he was much closer to the modern conception of a reporter than the myth suggested by the nickname "Memory" Woodfall.

Interestingly, Campbell had a poor opinion of Woodfall as a reporter, even though he admitted that Woodfall had a powerful memory. He recalled how Woodfall, as an old man, operated when he was almost the sole reporter in the Lords: "Immediately after prayers he took his post at the bar, leaning over it, and there he remained till the House adjourned. He then went home and wrote his report, which he sent to the printing-office". Campbell added that "The Lords were punished for their absurd

regulations by a very vapid and pointless account of their speeches.” What Campbell was really criticising was not so much Woodfall’s shortcomings as a reporter, as the fact that the Lords did not permit anyone to take notes until well into the 19th century. In fact, as a younger man, Woodfall’s reputation rested less on his memory—that was largely a matter of self-promotion—than on the thoroughness with which he compiled, checked and revised his reports, first on the *Morning Chronicle* and then on his own publication, the *Diary*. He made sure that he received the ministerial brief and sought to corroborate his drafts of accounts of speeches by approaching those involved. Most importantly, he made sure that his accounts squared with and incorporated reports in other newspapers. Remember that at this stage, reports were not necessarily published the next day, so there was plenty of time in which to check information and revise speeches, and reports of important debates might be held up for some time.

Here is Woodfall writing to Charles James Fox’s man of business William Adam on 24 February 1784: “I intended in to-morrow’s paper to have given an account of Mr. Fox’s most admirable speech of Friday last, accompanied with [the Prime Minister’s] Mr. Pitt’s. The latter has been sent to me from their party; but...I had not written more than a column of the former, and...find myself wholly incapable of doing that justice to Mr. Fox that I had wished, and the speech so well deserved.”

Then he asks: “Can you help me by loosely throwing upon paper any points you recollect to be strongly put which have not appeared or have not been well given in the papers already? I will readily and thankfully take the trouble of weaving them into my manufacture. I wrote to Sheridan for this purpose on Saturday, and he said I should have some assistance, but I have not hitherto received any... I enclose a rough and uncorrected proof of what I had written...”

That long quotation gives us a pretty good idea of how accounts of speeches were essentially constructed from different sources into what Woodfall himself calls a “manufacture”. It was not necessarily a very efficient or a very professional set-up—that quotation certainly includes a troubling sense of political deference to what the Opposition leaders wanted to be included—but it was a task that involved a huge amount of time and physical effort, and it just had to be done one way or another. I should also say in passing that, as might be expected, Members contributed significantly to the process of producing the debates. Some of course chose to publish their speeches separately, and these were often reprinted in compilations at a later date. We can safely assume that Members played their part in the process of reconstructing reports after a particular debate.

I should point out that reporters were rarely just reporters. Most of them, if not literary or legal men intent on pursuing some other career, were journalists in a wider sense, and the leading ones were often also printers, publishers, writers, booksellers and businessmen of various sorts.

One of the crucial aspects of the history of the leading parliamentary reporters is just how much they had to be innovators and entrepreneurs. The outstanding figure here is James Perry, who took over the *Morning Chronicle* from Woodfall in 1789 and greatly increased its parliamentary output. In particular, Perry started to use a team of reporters in order to increase the speed at which reports could be produced. Until his time, at the turn of the 19th century, most papers had one or perhaps two reporters—one in the Commons and the other, unless he too was needed in the Commons, in the Lords—but under Perry, the *Morning Chronicle* had at least four, who worked in a list and provided a much fuller coverage.

Until now I have largely been talking about newspapers, which were published daily or several times a week, but another and perhaps more significant aspect of the commercial side of publishing parliamentary debates relates to the production of large compilations, with several volumes covering each Session. In some ways, Ireland was again ahead of Great Britain, in that a series of 17 volumes of what was called the Parliamentary Register appeared in Dublin between 1782 and 1801, covering the debates of the Irish House of Commons (mostly) from 1781 to 1797. It is not clear how far the Irish Government was behind that venture, but the work seems to have been begun by the journalist John Giffard to raise the quality of parliamentary reporting, and it apparently relied on its own reporters and not on simply copying reports from the Dublin newspapers.

In London, a similar venture was begun in 1766 by John Almon, a self-made London printer and bookseller. He had made his name as a partisan pamphleteer, and published accounts of parliamentary debates in the London Evening Post in 1768, but he also published the Debates and Proceedings of the British House of Commons, which covered the period 1743 to 1774 in 11 volumes, and he brought out 17 volumes of a British version of the Parliamentary Register to cover the Commons and the Lords between 1774 and 1780. That series was continued in another 63 volumes for the period from 1780 to 1802 by John Debrett, a publisher who gave his name to the Peerage and similar publications.

E. Hansard

That context is important, because it is the one which was familiar to William Cobbett, who I think does not get enough of the credit in originating what became Hansard. Cobbett's career began with his being a ploughboy, included his being imprisoned in 1810 after criticising the Government over the flogging of militiamen, and ended with his being elected as MP for Oldham. Most of his life, however, was devoted to journalism of various sorts, in which he displayed his extraordinary talents for writing both as a social conservative and as a political radical.

Following a stint in America, in 1802 Cobbett began to publish in London his weekly Political Register, which he also issued in six-monthly volumes as Cobbett's Annual Register, comprising the weekly issues but with additional material. That publication was a huge digest of printed information, including extensive versions of parliamentary debates in both Houses, as well as other parliamentary data, such as lists of Members, reprints of parliamentary papers, indexes and so on.

The following year, 1803, he thought that he had so much parliamentary material that it deserved to be brought out in a volume of its own—and here it is!

This is volume 1 of the first series of what we now know as Hansard or the Official Report. It was published in 1804 to cover the first part of the 1803-04 Session (22 November 1803 to 29 March 1804).

Here is a question for the audience: this is the first volume of the first series of Hansard, covering the second Session of the second UK Parliament, but what was the number of the first column? Does anyone want to have a guess?

The answer is, in fact column 1521! The column numbers of the first volume run as follows: 1521 to 1904 and then 993 to 1184, which together account for the first 576 columns, and they are then followed by column 577 and so on to the end of the volume.

You might well ask why, and the answer underlines how ad hoc the publication of the first volume really was. The text for columns 1521 to 1904 was taken from volume IV of Cobbett's Annual Register; in other words, they had already been printed in one publication and Cobbett just used them as the first 384 columns of the new

publication, without going to the trouble and expense of renumbering all the columns. The other set of columns had already been set up as what would have been columns 993 to 1184 of volume V of Cobbett's Annual Register, but Cobbett instead used them in his new Parliamentary Debates publication, again without worrying to repaginate the text.

In case that gave the impression that the new publication was just another experiment in parliamentary reporting that was likely to go the way of its predecessors, Cobbett set the reader right in the "Advertisement" at the front of the first volume. In it, he boasted that "The Debates, in this work, are given at much greater length, and with much greater precision, than it was ever before attempted to give Parliamentary Debates."

With an eye on posterity perhaps, Cobbett also declared that "the work has, in the short space of half a session, attained to such an extent of circulation, that it is the only compilation at all likely to be regarded as an authentic Record of the legislative proceedings of the present time", or—as he might have added—of any time.

Cobbett was also responsible for starting to publish The Parliamentary History, which covers the period 1066 to 1803. As you can see from the title page of the first volume of that work, published in 1806, which refers to The Parliamentary Debates, this new venture was essentially an attempt to corner the market in publishing parliamentary debates for all time, basically by incorporating almost all previous printed and unprinted accounts of parliamentary debates—including Simonds D'Ewes's diary and manuscripts from the Hardwicke papers in the British Museum—into one vast encyclopaedic record series.

If you look at the canonical list of Hansard volumes, the "Chronology of the Parliamentary Debates" that is printed at the front of the Hansard book at the beginning of each Parliament, you will see that The Parliamentary History in fact accounts for the first 36 volumes of Hansard up to 1803, after which you have volume 1 of the Parliamentary Debates.

For all his attempts to take over the world of parliamentary debates, Cobbett did not in fact last for very long, and his publishing projects passed into the hands of Thomas Curson Hansard—which is why we are known as Hansard and not as Cobbett.

This is the famous Luke Hansard, who was not of course the publisher of the Parliamentary Debates. He was in fact for many years the official printer to the House of Commons, and in practice filled the role of a senior administrator in Parliament, since he was responsible for editing and archiving parliamentary papers, including all the Select Committee evidence sessions.

Although Luke Hansard is not a part of the history of parliamentary reporting as such, he epitomised what we would now think of as the main Hansard hallmarks of accuracy, speed, expertise, reliability and, when required, confidentiality. I like to think that Thomas Curson Hansard, although estranged from his father, nevertheless brought what his father had taught him to the task of publishing the Parliamentary Debates.

Our Hansard is this man, Thomas Curson Hansard, who was Luke's eldest son. In fact, Luke had little time for his eldest son. He disapproved of his son's association with Cobbett, and finally broke with him, leaving his Commons printing concerns to his third son Luke Graves Hansard.

Thomas Curson Hansard, who had been brought up as a printer, set up his own business, which was responsible for printing Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates from 1808. After Cobbett got into financial difficulties in 1812, TC Hansard bought him out: the 23rd volume dropped the name Cobbett from the title, which was thereafter

simply Parliamentary Debates. Not until 1829 was the title changed to Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, which it remained for most of the 19th century. (The title "Hansard") was reinstated on the title page of the Parliamentary Debates in the mid-20th century.

Under TC Hansard and his son and namesake, Thomas Curson Hansard junior (1813-91), Hansard was very different to the organisation we know today, in that the Hansards, father and son, were really editors and had no staff to speak of. The work, following the precedents of Woodfall, Almon and Cobbett, among others, was one of compilation. They devoted themselves to trying to provide the fullest and most accurate compilation by painstaking care and attention to detail. In fact, under the elder TC Hansard much of the editing work was done by his amanuensis, John Wright, while TC Hansard concentrated on the business side.

This is a couple of typical pages of text, set out in two columns to each page, showing what was then the standard size of page. As well as the general lack of procedural headings and the restrained nature of what few headings there are, the point to notice is that the debates of the two Houses are given under the same date: first for the Lords and then for the Commons. Column 53 shows the end of the proceedings in the Lords on the address of thanks in reply to the King's Speech, and the start of proceedings in the Commons, including the formal First Reading of the Clandestine Outlawries Bill, although Henry Brougham then got in—under the heading "Parliamentary Reform"—to give notice of a motion on parliamentary reform, which was the big issue of the day.

Of course, Parliament was keen to embrace new technologies—I have included this slide partly because I was so pleased to find the picture, and partly because it could almost be a scene from the reporters room: it even looks as though they are working at computer terminals with foot pedals under the desk. (Perhaps it would make a good picture for a caption competition?)

I just want to highlight a few reporting developments in the 19th century. The main change was that newspaper reporting became more specialised and was no longer confined simply to what we would regard as parliamentary reporting. One alteration was the rise of the parliamentary sketch writer, at first as a specialist summary reporter, giving an overview of a day's sitting, but then as a columnist giving a more humorous take on the day's events, which is a role that still exists. Another alteration was the emergence of lobby correspondents, who in many ways were simply political journalists who happened to be based at Westminster, and they obviously still dominate the scene here. News started to be sent more quickly to newspaper offices, including through the use of the electric telegraph.

Otherwise, the most important change was that reporting as we know it became much more extensive. Whereas in the 18th century, many speeches would have been omitted or drastically reduced in length, by the late 19th century a convention had emerged that the speeches of Ministers and other recognised leading figures were given in the first person and as fully as possible, while almost all other speeches, which were usually in the third person, were summarised at not less than a third of their actual length. In addition, Members were able to revise their speeches, and an asterisk against the name of a speaker indicates that their speech had been not simply corrected but substantially changed.

Hitherto, most reporters had had to return to their newspaper offices between turns. One reporter in 1890 observed that the pattern of turns was as follows: a one-hour turn from 4 pm, when the House met, to 5 pm; then six 45-minute turns up to 9.30 pm; and then half-hour turns to the rise of the House; although on some papers the

turns were steadily reduced to 15 minutes or less after midnight in order to speed production. Reporters were not necessarily expected to get round between turns, and they usually needed to return early to work the following morning to finish off transcribing their previous night's notes.

With the expansion of newspaper reporting in the late 19th century, the Commons authorities at last provided reporters with a Committee Room to use as an office: here the reporters sitting all round the U-shaped table, and the other tables in the room. From the mid-1850s, Hansard was supported by the Treasury undertaking to buy so many copies for Departments, embassies and so on. Another big change was that from the late 1870s, Hansard began to receive a formal subsidy from the Government to enable it to cover certain proceedings that were normally omitted from newspaper reports of debates. These were proceedings on Private Bills, deliberations in the Committee of Supply and in Public Bill Committees, and debates that continued in the Chamber after midnight. That meant that Hansard for the first time began to employ reporting staff.

From the late 1870s, a series of Select Committees investigated the management and financing of parliamentary publications, including of the Parliamentary Debates. Very little was done in practice, however, and a nadir was reached by the 1890s, when a series of attempts were begun—with predictable results—to outsource Hansard to private concerns, including the short-lived Hansard Publishing Union, with the consequence that the standard of reporting dropped to an appalling low level. To cut a long and rather sad story as short as possible, the situation was only redeemed following the report of the Commons Select Committee on Parliamentary Debates, which:

adopted terms of reference for the standard of reports—it went back to the actually rather good, but overlooked 1893 report which had recommended that the speeches of all Members should be given in the first person and treated in the same way, with transcriptions not being a “phonographic” record (the contemporary term, derived from the name of the stenography machines that were then coming into fashion) but a full transcription so that, in the familiar wording, the report “though not strictly verbatim, is substantially the verbatim report with repetitions and redundancies omitted and with obvious mistakes corrected, but which, on the other hand, leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of a speech or illustrates the argument”; ruled that Members should not be able to revise their speeches—except in relation to rulings from the Chair and minor factual amendments of obvious errors; condemned arrangements for obtaining reports of debates by contract—a lesson that perhaps should not be forgotten; and recommended that the Commons set up its own reporting staff—that in 1909 led to the establishment of the new arrangements with reports produced in separate series for the Lords and for the Commons, and both sets of Hansard staff officially employed by Parliament.

Thereafter there were about 10 or 11 reporters for the Commons. The Lords, where arrangements were deemed to be satisfactory, did not choose to produce its reports as fast as the Commons, so from 1909, the fifth series of Hansard was split into separate publications for each of the two Houses.

According to Michael MacDonagh, a reporter who wrote a large volume called *The Reporters' Gallery* in 1913, the reporter “confines himself to correcting obvious slips, and he allows even these to go forth if the value of an argument hang upon them to any extent. But his chief task is so to unwind the verbose skein as to make clear the hidden governing principle, the salient points, of the speaker; to present the vague

thought with definiteness, to give the language in which it is expressed consecutiveness and coherency.” Plus, “it is sometimes necessary to smooth out intricacies, to suppress a trite or aimless phrase, to omit purposeless repetition, to make a halting sentence march in due line with its companions, and to emphasize the main point by careful adjustment and proportion.”

Technology apart, the art of parliamentary reporting has not therefore changed a great deal over the past 100 years.

F. Drama of parliamentary debates:

Of course, there have always been criticisms of Hansard, or at least, as in this quotation from Benjamin Disraeli, Hansard has been used to as a way of attacking politicians: “What dreary pages of interminable talk, what predictions falsified, what pledges broken, what calculations that have gone wrong, what budgets that have blown up! And all this, too, not relieved by a single original thought, a single generous impulse, or a single happy expression! Why, Hansard, instead of being the Delphi of Downing-street, is but the Dunciad of politics.”

Hansard can hardly be blamed for recording what Members said—that is its function—but does it tell the whole story?

In his book about politics as theatre, the veteran Guardian journalist Norman Shrapnel had this warning to make: “to those who put their trust in the actual script, the collected works of Hansard, I can only say that this can be the most misleading source of all. Divorced from the context of mood and event—the precise background flavour, the emotional feel of a particular night in the Commons—the cold record of the words spoken can be so remote as almost to need translating.”

Parliamentary historians are becoming increasingly interested in the use of gesture or non-verbal expression in Parliament—for example, the use and meaning of hat honour in the 17th-century House of Commons—and are coming to realise that written accounts may unintentionally flatten or distort what really happened. For instance, one historian has pointed out that the Hansard for 27 May 1976, which clearly shows that there was grave disorder in the Commons, but nowhere specifies that Michael Heseltine had lifted the Mace from the Table or that Members had practically come to blows in the Lobby.

Newspaper reports of debates in the late 18th century included subjective authorial comments about the style of speaking—for example, in a report about the Irish House of Lords, Lord Carhampton was said to have made “a speech of much strength and zeal”. Not only did Archbishop Agar of Cashel apparently supply newspapers with copies of his speeches, but he also included examples of self-serving commentary: among his manuscripts is a handwritten draft of his speech on the Pension Bill, complete with the comment that his speech was “delivered in a most forcible, striking and spirited manner”, a phrase that duly appeared in the subsequent newspaper report. Hansard does include some stage directions, as we know, and has always done so. This is one of my favourite examples of what is apparently a case of mis-speaking during a discussion of the divisions between Catholics and Protestants—and Hansard helpfully includes in brackets the word that William Bankes meant to say: “It certainly ought to be a main object with government to provide for the union of sexes (sects)”

This produced “[laughter]”, which is put in just as we would today, and for much the same reason, as will become clear.

Bankes continued: “That union had been an object much attended to in Ireland. It was an union that it was of the greatest consequence to keep up”.

This produced “[renewed laughter].”

Finally, Bankes said that, “He apprehended, from the laughter...that he had inadvertently committed some verbal inaccuracy.” Nowadays, we would put in the stage direction about laughter because the Member referred to it, but I suspect that it was included on that occasion because the House was convulsed with laughter for about 10 minutes and even the strait-laced Home Secretary Robert Peel nearly fell off the Government Front Bench.

Here is another example, this time from the House of Lords, which John Vice kindly sent me. It shows that Lord Normanby’s speech was interrupted by the return of the Lord Chancellor to the Woolsack, with this long stage direction:

“[Here the Lord Chancellor re-entered the House, and took his seat on the Woolsack amidst a little confusion, which rendered the noble Marquess inaudible. After a short pause the noble Marquess continued with much emphasis]...”

Not only does that help explain the little political drama unfolding on the Floor of the House, but it also provides the manner in which Normanby continued to make his speech.

There were then further interruptions, some, but not all, of which were required to make some sense of Normanby’s increasingly disjointed speech:

[Cries of “No, no!” “Yes, yes!” from both sides of the House.]

[Cries of “Yes, yes!” and some confusion]

[“Hear, hear,” and “No, no.”]

[Cries of “No! No! Order, order.”]

The parliamentary reports of some countries insert non-verbal information. This is an actual example from the Finnish report that was given at the recent Intersteno meeting: “Here it is. [The MP waved the budget proposal in his hand.]” We would not think that it was essential to include such information, but clearly there may be other occasions when we would want to be able to do so.

Hansard reporters are helped by several factors, including the convention that Members are not supposed to use props or visual aids. Other Members will often intervene to complain or to comment if such a situation arises—Members seem to feel that they have to describe what is front of their eyes—and that normally gives the reporter a way to illustrate what is happening without having to resort to anything out of the ordinary.

The other advantage that we have is that the all-encompassing “[Interruption.]” is at our disposal. As I was taught in training, “[Interruption.]”—if required—can be used to cover everything from gentle murmurs to masked men entering the Chamber. On the whole, we do not have the problem of having to identify applause or its opposite, or to comment on which side of the House it is coming from, which is of course what the French reporters have to do.

Here are some French examples—and do not ask me what all the party groups stand for:

«Encore!»

«Bravo!» et applaudissements

«Non!»

«Eh oui!»

«Hou!» and

«Ah!»

If you think that knowing which one of those to pick might be a problem, how would you deal with choosing between all these different gradations of “interruption”:

Murmures

Exclamations sur plusieurs bancs

Vives exclamations  
Protestations, and my favourite of them all—  
Brouhaha continu.

I would love to be able to put in “[Continued brouhaha.]”; somehow “gross disorder” does not have the same ring to it.

I am conscious that I have wandered quite a long way from the history of parliamentary reporting in Britain and Ireland to the eccentricities of the reports of the French national assembly. The important point is that, whether in relation to historical or contemporary reports of debates, we should always be asking whether the published version fully reflects the context of the political theatre in which speeches were delivered.

G. Conclusion:

Finally, I think that we should probably emulate Cobbett in making emphatic statements about the obvious quality of Hansard as often as possible, but for the time being at least we have Mr Speaker Bercow to do that for us—and who am I to disagree with him. As he recently said in the House of Commons: “I think I will command universal assent when I say that the Hansard writers are expert, professional public servants of unimpeachable integrity who would not be bettered in any part of the United Kingdom in any professional capacity.”

Thank you very much.