

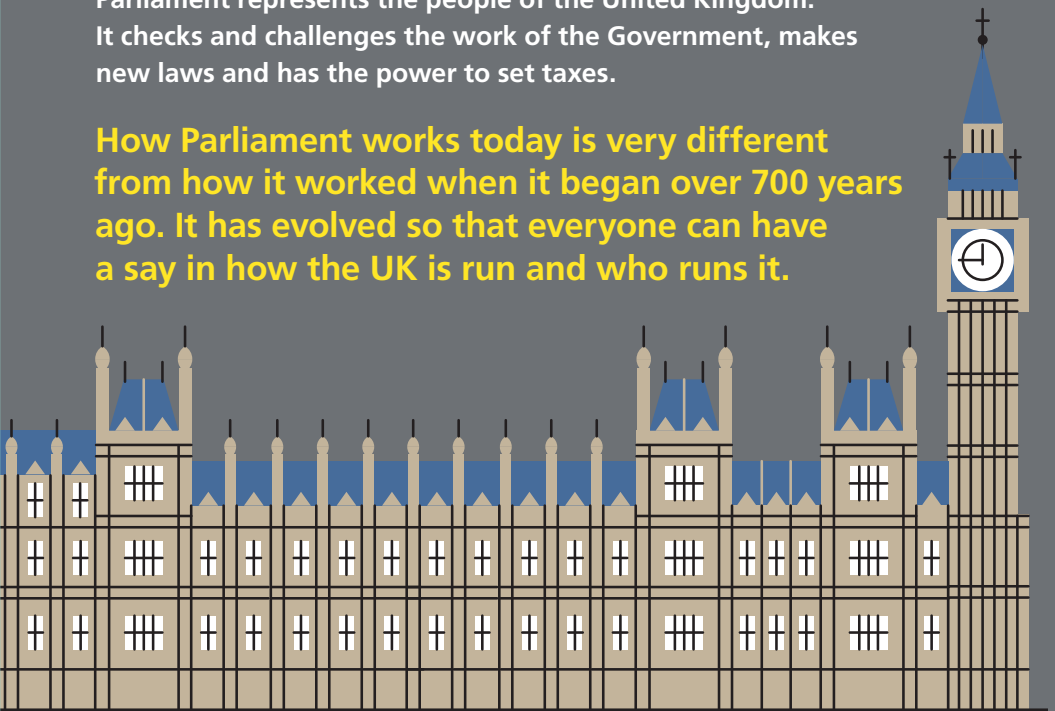


HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

THE STORY OF PARLIAMENT

Parliament represents the people of the United Kingdom. It checks and challenges the work of the Government, makes new laws and has the power to set taxes.

How Parliament works today is very different from how it worked when it began over 700 years ago. It has evolved so that everyone can have a say in how the UK is run and who runs it.



Parliament consists of three parts: the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Monarch. The balance of power between these three parts has changed over the centuries.

In the House of Commons there are 650 MPs who are elected by people throughout the UK to represent their interests and concerns. The House of Commons has the final say on laws introduced in Parliament.

The House of Lords is the second Chamber of the UK Parliament. It has around 800 members, most of them life peers, appointed because they have had a distinguished career or have made a significant contribution to British life. The Lords works independently of the Commons but the two Houses share the task of making laws and checking and challenging the work of the Government.

The Monarch's role is largely formal. It includes approving laws, appointing life peers, and announcing the Government's plans for the year ahead at the State Opening ceremony.

The story of Parliament is central to the story of democracy in the UK. This leaflet describes some of the milestones and dramatic events that have shaped, and continue to shape, life in the UK.

Parliament and the Government play separate roles. The Government is responsible for running the UK; Parliament is responsible for holding the Government to account. However, members of the Government are drawn from the membership of the Houses of Parliament.

FROM MONARCHY TO DEMOCRACY

MAGNA CARTA 1215

From before the 7th century to the 11th century, councils of influential men – barons and bishops – were called together by Monarchs to advise them on how to rule. Those councils were an early version of our modern Parliament.

In England, relations between the King and these powerful advisers became a struggle for control. In 1215, King John was forced to agree to a Great Charter – Magna Carta in Latin – which limited the Monarch's authority. This was the first time an English Monarch formally recognised that their subjects had proper legal rights, such as the right not to be condemned without a trial. Magna Carta gave barons and bishops the right to be consulted before new taxes could be levied.

THE MONTFORT PARLIAMENT 1265

In the 13th century, tensions grew as the barons tried to curb the King's power over government. One baron, Simon de Montfort, led a rebellion against Henry III. After defeating the King in battle, he called a Parliament in 1265. De Montfort expanded representation to include two knights from each county, and two citizens or burgesses from England's cities and boroughs. Simon de Montfort was killed in battle the next year, but he is remembered because his Parliament was the first of its kind and paved the way for the emergence of the House of Commons.

THE MODEL PARLIAMENT 1295

In 1295, Edward I summoned a Parliament made up of nobles and churchmen, along with two representatives from each county, city or town, mainly to discuss taxes. It was the model for future Parliaments.

In the 14th century, the two distinct Houses of Parliament emerged. The representatives from the towns and counties began to meet separately as the House of Commons. The churchmen, known as the Lords Spiritual, and noblemen (Lords Temporal) formed the House of Lords.



The first known Speaker of the House of Commons, Thomas Hungerford, was elected in 1377. His role was to act as spokesperson for the Commons to the Monarch and the House of Lords.

PARLIAMENT AND THE CIVIL WAR

In 1625, Charles I became King. He believed that he could govern without the advice and consent of Parliament. This led to clashes, and the King tried to rule without Parliament from 1629 to 1640.

In 1641-2, relations between Charles I and Parliament broke down. On 4 January 1642 Charles I came to the House of Commons with a group of soldiers to arrest five MPs who were his political enemies. The Speaker at the time, William Lenthall, refused to tell the King where they were, saying, "May it please your majesty, I have neither eyes to see nor tongue to speak in this place but as this House is pleased to direct me whose servant I am here".

Parliament became the focus for opposition to Charles I. The struggle led to the Civil War in which half a million people died and, ultimately, to Charles I's trial and execution in 1649, followed by the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. Oliver Cromwell, commander of the army, took charge, but found the House of Commons too unruly to manage and brought it to an end in 1653. Cromwell ruled as Lord Protector, or head of state, of the new republic for nearly 10 years. It was not until 1660, two years after his death, that Parliament and the monarchy were restored.

BILL OF RIGHTS 1689

The Bill of Rights set out exactly what was expected of the Monarch. It limited royal power and established the supremacy of Parliament. The Monarch could not suspend or create laws, levy taxes or raise a standing army in peacetime without Parliament's consent. People were allowed to petition the Monarch without fear of prosecution. There would be frequent Parliaments, free elections and freedom of speech within Parliament.



PARLIAMENT AND TAXATION

The idea that the Commons rather than the Lords should have the final say on tax-raising powers has been important throughout the story of Parliament. In 1348, the Commons claimed financial primacy on the grounds that it, not the Lords, represented the people. That claim was repeated in resolutions in 1671 and 1678. By the 19th century, the Lords had begun to challenge it.

When the Lords rejected the 1909 Budget there was a political crisis. In 1911, Members of the House of Commons argued that people had voted for them, so they should decide the law. As a result, the Parliament Act 1911 removed the House of Lords' ability to veto legislation on taxation and spending.

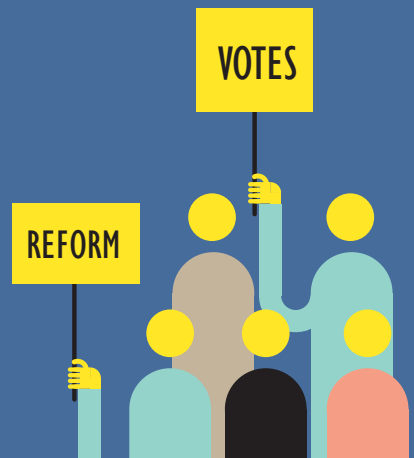
CHANGE IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

For hundreds of years, membership of the House of Lords usually passed from father to son. Members were known as hereditary peers because they had inherited their position. By the 1950s, it was accepted that that needed to change. The Life Peerages Act 1958 allowed peers to be appointed for life rather than on a hereditary basis. The Act also allowed women to become members of the House of Lords.

The proportion of life peers in the Lords increased dramatically when the House of Lords Act 1999 ended the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the Lords. The aim, explained the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, was to make the House of Lords "more democratic and representative".

In 2000, the independent House of Lords Appointments Commission was set up to recommend people for appointment as life peers.

The Palace of Westminster was almost destroyed on 5 November 1605 in the Gunpowder Plot, a conspiracy to blow up Parliament and kill James I, who was due to come to Parliament for State Opening. The gunpowder was discovered and the plot failed, but every year on 5 November the anniversary is marked with bonfires and fireworks.



VOTES FOR ALL

40-SHILLING FRANCHISE 1430

As the practice of holding parliamentary elections became established, so did the arguments over who should be allowed to vote in them.

In 1430, following complaints about “persons of low estate” taking part, the first electoral law was passed. This law stated that only men whose land produced an income of at least 40 shillings a year – a very large sum at the time – had the right to vote.

GREAT REFORM ACT 1832

By the 1800s, with radical ideas and revolution taking hold in Europe, many people felt change at home was long overdue. The Great Reform Act 1832 extended the vote to around one in seven men based on the property they owned, and tackled the problem of rotten boroughs – areas where only a handful of voters, often controlled by landowners, elected MPs. Constituency boundaries were redrawn and new industrial cities like Manchester and Birmingham could elect their own MPs for the first time.

Public pressure for change continued, and between 1867 and 1884 further reforms were made, including the

introduction of secret ballots at elections. Although the reforms increased the number of men with the right to vote, women were still excluded from the voting process.

VOTES FOR WOMEN

Groups demanding votes for women became active in towns and cities in the 19th century, and in 1897 Millicent Fawcett founded the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, or the Suffragists, to co-ordinate a national campaign.

In 1903, Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst founded the Women’s Social and Political Union, whose members became known as Suffragettes and supported direct action.

On the night of the 1911 census, Suffragette Emily Wilding Davison hid in a cupboard in Parliament so that she could give her address as The House of Commons, emphasising her claim to political equality with men. Another Suffragette, Margery Humes, staged a protest by chaining herself to a statue in Parliament.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 made radical changes to the voting system, giving votes to women over 30 and men over 21. In 1928, the Equal Franchise Act was passed and finally both men and women over 21 had the right to vote.

CHANGING THE VOTING AGE

In 1969, the age at which people could vote was reduced to 18. There have been campaigns to reduce it even further to 16. In 2014, 16 and 17-year-olds were given a vote in the referendum on Scottish independence. The debate on reducing the voting age in other ballots continues.

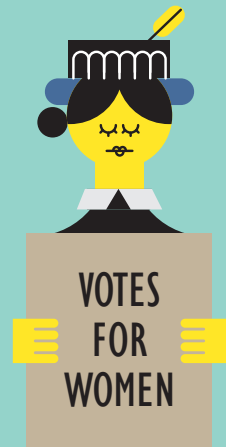
The United Kingdom and Devolution

The modern Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Assembly were established by Acts of Parliament passed in 1998. While all parts of the UK elect MPs to represent their interests in the UK Parliament, certain matters that specifically affect Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland are decided by these devolved legislatures. Public demand for more say in local and regional matters continues to play a part in the debate about how the UK should be run.

PARLIAMENT AND YOU – WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

This leaflet traces the story of Parliament from its beginnings as an advisory council to the Monarch to its present democratic form in which citizens have a right to vote and be represented. Ultimately those changes came about because people wanted them.

Parliament continues to evolve and you can play a part in shaping the Parliament of the future. You can vote in a general election for the candidate you want to represent your area, lobby your MP on the issues that matter to you, create or sign a parliamentary petition, or send in evidence to help shape new legislation. Other leaflets in this series give you more information about how to make your views known.



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