



WORKING PAPERS

**Concepts and a Catalogue of UK
Parliamentary Ceremonies**

Rosa Malley & Faith Armitage

GCRP05/09/08

Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament (GCRP), our research programme, will enquire into the ways in which parliaments operate through ceremony and ritual and how this impacts upon public perceptions of parliament. This will be researched in the British, Indian and South African parliaments. Our research questions in each site can be summarised as the following. First, what are the various ceremonies and rituals in parliament and how do these contribute to institutional norms and socialisation of members to dominant ‘ways of being and doing’? This involves identifying the formal and informal rules in Parliament, examining how these interact and how they are expressed and transmitted. We will examine the dominant modes of behaviour amongst elected representatives and the extent to which members are disciplined by ceremony and ritual.

Second, GCRP is interested in how these ceremonies and rituals are gendered, sexualised and racialised and how this relates to processes of inclusion and exclusion in parliament. This involves looking at how masculinities and femininities are played out in ceremony and ritual and whether there are differences between ethnicity and region. It includes analysis of how MPs present themselves visually and in speeches and how they are portrayed by others. We will assess whether this varies by gender, race, class or regional background. Third, GCRP will explore how ceremonies and rituals affect the representativeness of parliament. This involves looking at parliament’s external relationships with constituents, groups with similar identities, civil society groups and the media. These research questions will enable comparison across three parliaments so we can determine how these processes vary between institutions and political systems.

The concepts ‘ceremony’ and ‘ritual’ must be defined in order to engage with these research questions. Review of the literature on ceremony and ritual reveals high levels of disagreement regarding definitions and functions, within and between different disciplines. Ceremony and ritual are often used in different ways and sometimes interchangeably. The ambiguity is confusing, but positive in that it leaves the terms open to debate and malleability for our purposes. It is necessary to develop distinctive working definitions of ceremony and ritual to answer GCRP’s research questions. Thus, in Part I of this paper, we review how the terms are most commonly employed and try to settle on interpretations and definitions that will facilitate our research. Part II provides a catalogue of the most well-known and distinctive ceremonies and rituals in the British Parliament.

| |
|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">PART I: CEREMONY AND RITUAL ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPTS AND THEIR DISCIPLINARY USES</p> |
|---|

While scholars of ceremony and ritual tend to conflate those terms, for GCRP, it is more useful to keep them distinct. This allows us to examine different areas of parliamentary activity and to identify the differing processes involved in the creation of ceremony and ritual and assess the various outcomes of each. Thus, to briefly anticipate our final conclusions, we believe ceremony should be understood to mean *a formal and officially sanctioned event, consciously and deliberately performed on a special occasion*. This accords with how the term is used in official parliamentary documents.¹ Wider

¹ See, for example, Peter Thorne’s THORNE, P. F. (1980) *Ceremonial and the Mace in the House of Commons*. London, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office. splendid document ‘Ceremonial and the Mace in the

conceptions of ritual are preferable for GCPR because they allow for the study of behaviour, customs or performance that are not conducted in a formal, orchestrated ceremony or explicitly referred to as a ritual, but appear to be ritualised nonetheless in that they are *rule-governed, structured and symbolic*. Ritual may be more subconscious than ceremony. Participants are not necessarily aware of their participation in ritual – it may be done unthinkingly, based on assumptions about ‘the way things are done.’ It is essential that a study of parliament includes examination of ritualised behaviour, that which is not officially sanctioned, but is conventional and ordered, because it will provide a glimpse of the more subtle and nuanced (and therefore potentially more powerful) forces that create institutional and environmental norms.

Ceremony and ritual *are* therefore different, and the main distinction is the officially sanctioned and special occasion nature of the former. However, the terms are *not* dichotomous and in reality the separation between them is often blurry. Ritual is a broader term and ceremony can be viewed as a subset within this. The following literature will be reviewed by discipline and evaluated according to whether the proffered conceptions of ceremony and ritual contribute to a better understanding for the purposes of answering GCPR’s research questions. As will be seen, ceremony and ritual are what philosopher Walter Bryce Gallie (1956) called “essentially contested concepts”; that is, concepts that attract widespread agreement on an abstract core *notion* itself (e.g., “fairness”), but provoke endless argument about what might be the best *instantiation*, or *realisation* of that notion.

1. Disciplinary approaches to ceremony and ritual

Social anthropology forms the nucleus of debates over the contested nature of ceremony and ritual. There is inconsistency in usage of the terms and some authors in the reviewed literature conflate them. Many of the descriptions of ritual are more useful in developing the conception of ceremony. For instance, Victor Turner’s (1969) examination of the symbols contained within rituals refers to formal and prescribed occasions (1969: 299-301). His later conception of ritual (with interchangeable use of the term ceremony) is based on Arnold Van Gennep’s (1909) framework which views a ritual as a three-part process of separation, liminality and reintegration. Arnold Van Gennep’s ritual is a special-occasion ceremony that celebrates an individual’s change in social status. It is a three-part process: first, separation from everyday activities. Second, ‘liminality’, which is a transitional period of limbo characterised by a change in social status. The final stage is re-entry to the everyday world. A pertinent example that can draw upon this framework is the Introduction Ceremony of an individual being made a Peer in the House of Lords, “which marks their formal membership into the Lords’ end of the Westminster village” (Crewe, 2006: 86).² Turner’s view of ritual as a performance – a formal,

House of Commons,’ and House of Commons Information Office (hereafter HCIO) Factsheet M2 HOUSE OF COMMONS INFORMATION OFFICE (2003a) The Speaker (Factsheet M2 Members Series). London, House of Commons Information Office. ‘The Speaker,’ and HCIO Factsheet G7 HOUSE OF COMMONS INFORMATION OFFICE (2004) Some Traditions and Customs of the House of Commons (Factsheet G7 General Series). London, House of Commons Information Office. on traditions and customs of the House.

² See Emma Crewe’s fascinating studies of the British House of Lords (2005; 2006).

exaggeration of everyday life, which is away from normal everyday activities (1969: 1-8) – is more useful for developing our conception of ceremony.

Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (1977) primarily use the term ritual, but argue for the interchangeable use of ceremony and ritual. They recognise that the term ritual is vast and covers a huge array of behaviour; it “could encompass everything from individual ritualized behaviour and its psychological significance (vide Freud) to collective ceremony” (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977: 4). However, they wish to limit their conception of ritual to special-occasion events. The event they describe is organised and planned, with an “exaggeratedly precise” order. Repetition of symbols and of the occasion, acting or self-consciously performing ‘a part,’ and stylised behaviour are key features (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977: 7-8). These characteristics thus map onto a formal and special-occasion event such as the annual State Opening of Parliament in Britain, but are unsuitable for developing the concept of ritual. Thus, Moore and Myerhoff’s concept of *ritual* in fact seems to us to offer a better understanding of *ceremony*.

Another example of a discussion of ritual that is more suitable in developing the concept of ceremony is Marc Abélès’s analysis of two performances by the French President Francois Mitterrand. He examines the well established custom of inauguration and the newer ritualised pilgrimage that Mitterrand undertook each year. He argues their function is political legitimacy and that rituals presuppose solidarity rather than generate it (Abélès, 1988: 391-94). The characteristics of ritual he identifies and his case studies are closer to a conception of ceremony in that they are formalised procedures, away from everyday activities and highly prescribed and formulated. To summarise, then, the above approaches are examples of people who use the term ‘ritual’, but for our purposes, are contributing to and elaborating the distinct concept of ‘ceremony’.

Some social anthropological approaches make distinctions between ceremony and ritual. Max Gluckman (1962) discusses the multitude of concepts used and argues for a distinction between ceremony and ritual along secular/religious lines. For Gluckman, ritual contains “mystical notions” (1962: 22). This necessary religious element limits its use in the study of modern secular ritual. However, his definition of ceremony is more useful to us. It refers to “any complex organisation of human activity which is not specifically technical or recreational and which involves the use of modes of behaviour which are expressive of social relationships” (1962: 22). He argues that ceremonies confer and create obligations of social roles. Individual roles are exaggerated by customs and a breach of role can affect the entire group negatively – this encourages compliance with existing social arrangements. An example to support this argument is self-regulation in House of Lords’ debate, where the good of the group is prioritised over the individual (Crewe, 2005: 96-97). We can appropriate Gluckman’s definition of ceremony to develop our concept of ritual, because it covers an array of activities beyond a formal and officially sanctioned event.

Emma Crewe discusses both ceremony and ritual in her study of the House of Lords and offers relevant conceptions of both. Ceremony is one type of ritual that interrupts normal proceedings (Crewe 2005: 231). This is a perspicacious conception of ceremony because it distinguishes between the concepts without needlessly dichotomising them. It recognises that there are ritualised aspects of ceremony, aspects can become so ingrained they are performed unthinkingly, and that some rituals, despite being performed on an everyday basis, are ceremonial in nature. Crewe’s conception of

ritual is also extremely useful because it covers everyday activities; for instance, debates, dress codes, time management, bills, movement in the Chamber. It includes any behaviour that is *prescribed, structured and symbolic*. Additionally, Crewe distinguishes between ceremony and ritual in terms of their outcome. She argues that rituals define relationships between participants, whereas ceremonies define external relationships with the public (Crewe 2005: 184). Whilst Crewe's individual concepts are extremely useful, there are some problems with this distinction: to wit, ceremonies have implications for participants as well as the audience. Moreover, this distinction ignores Crewe's own observation that aspects of the most elaborate ceremony in parliament, the State Opening, are hidden to the public. Some of it is behind-the-scenes; for example, the morning search of the cellars for plotters, a tradition rooted in Guy Fawkes's gunpowder plot (Crewe 2005: 209). Ceremonies therefore do more than define external relations, and ritualised activities, such as debate, are important in defining public perceptions of Parliament. Hence, this is an insufficient way of distinguishing between ceremony and ritual.

This review of social anthropological approaches to conceptions of ceremony and ritual and distinctions between them exposes disparities and unsettled debates. Some of the authors use the terms in conjunction but, for our purposes, offer useful conceptions of *either* ceremony *or* ritual. None of the attempts to distinguish between ceremony and ritual are entirely appropriate for GCRP. The concepts have been used most extensively in social anthropology which explains its dominance in debates. It is the springboard from which other disciplines take and modify conceptions of ceremony and ritual. Many of the debates and conceptual ambiguities, left unsettled with anthropology, are therefore transferred to other disciplines.

This is evident in sociological approaches to ceremony and ritual. For example, in her argument for the interchangeable use of ceremony and ritual, Christel Lane analyses their use for cultural management in Russia (Lane, 1981: 16). She limits her study to formal and officially-sanctioned events, meaning her definition of ritual maps onto our conception of ceremony. A sociological approach that provides a useful conception of ritual is articulated by Erving Goffman (1967). His conception of ritual covers everyday behaviour and is extremely adaptable in its application. He argues that ritualised activity is essential for social order – it is based on the mobilisation of “members as self-regulating participants in social encounters” (Goffman 1967: 44). People are taught how to act in situations, according to a series of informal and unspoken rules, enabling them to fit in with the social environment. The constraining nature of this ritualised behaviour preserves the social status quo. People are more likely to unthinkingly learn the ritual order than challenge it. This conception of ritual is sufficiently broad and his observations are pertinent in a study of parliament.

A sociologist whose more recent work resonates with Goffman's perspective is Pierre Bourdieu. In particular, Bourdieu's development of the concept of ‘habitus’ could potentially shed light on the gendered aspects of ceremony and ritual since it has been employed by feminists to try to explain the persistence of gender hierarchies (cf. Chambers, 2007). To oversimplify, habitus refers to the set of dispositions that agents acquire in response to the objective facts of social structure and organisation. Or, to put it another way, an agent absorbs objective social structure into a personal set of cognitive and somatic dispositions that help her to understand and negotiate the world. The

concept of habitus has proved helpful, therefore, in feminist arguments about how women apparently reproduce their own inferior positions within society through their choices.

Political science has traditionally dismissed ceremony and ritual as a ‘cultural sideshow,’ preferring a focus on more tangible power structures and policy processes (Crewe and Müller, 2006). This tendency is something that Emma Crewe and Marion Muller hope to correct in their comparative volume of ceremony and ritual in different parliaments which emphasises how integral they are to politics and power (Crewe and Müller 2006: 8-11). On one hand, political scientists such as Muller, Abeles and other authors featured in the edited volume, who are attempting to foreground political ceremony and ritual in political science, tend to use the term ritual. This, despite the fact that ceremonies are typically more obvious and tangible. On the other hand, political scientists for whom ceremony and ritual is not a major concern tend to use the term ‘traditions’ and ‘ceremony.’ For example, with regard to the Speaker, a typical political science textbook will go on for pages about the Speaker’s powers, such as their discretion to call members, and then will usually add something to the effect that ‘The Speaker also has a number of ceremonial duties, which have been passed down to him as parliamentary traditions.’³

Both Marion Muller and László Kurti use the term ritual in their discussions, even though their case studies are on what we would call ceremonies. Muller provides a relevant argument that rituals are the basis of political life. She argues they create common sense and provide the “means of cultural interpretation that is necessary for understanding information shared by masses” (Müller, 2006: 183). Her examples, a comparative study of oath-taking across different Parliaments, are more suitably described as ceremony given their highly formalised nature away from everyday politics. Similarly, Kurti only uses the term ritual – oath-taking is referred to as the “beginning of the ritual cycle” (Kürti, 2006: 54). These empirical political science studies of ‘ritual’ in Parliament reveal an interest in processes we regard as more ceremonial in nature.

Within political science, the most useful conception of ritual is offered by Steven Lukes who, finding the multitude of definitions in social anthropology lacking, proposes his own definition. Ritual is a “*rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance*” (Lukes, 1977: 54, italics added). He wants to consider institutional practices that are not necessarily considered ritual by the participants, widening the conception in an important way. This conception of ritual is highly relevant for our study of parliaments since we believe that ritual is constitutive of whole institutional and normative edifices we wish to interrogate.

Religious studies constitute the final disciplinary approach to ceremony and ritual under review here. Its inclusion is important given the religious connotations often associated with ritual evident in social anthropology. Evan Zeusse (2005) dismisses anthropological approaches that attempt to distinguish between ceremony and ritual on a secular/religious basis. He argues for a necessary religious element to ritual and argues the repetitiveness of ritual is accredited to its religious orientation. Zeusse suggests that an agent’s contact with the world is through her physical contact with it and that certain sensory experiences such as eating and pain are repeated so often that they have become the primary form of bodily awareness. During ritual, this is “transformed into symbolic

³ Faith’s working paper ‘Challenging the Neutrality of the Speaker’ discusses this.

experiences of the divine” (Zeusse 1987: 7834). Such a limited view of ritual is unsuitable for the secular processes in parliament, although again, Zeusse’s discussion of the body may hold potential for our project given the enormous interest in the body amongst contemporary gender and feminist theorists.

Catherine Bell’s (2005) discussion of ritual has greater overall relevance to the project. She is opposed to defining universal qualities of all rituals, viewing them as contingent, transitory and time specific. Ritualising activity is rooted in the “socialised body” that reacts to pre-existing forces and also shapes the environment. This is “a circular process by which the body shapes the space that shapes the body” (Bell 2005: 7853). She argues against categorisation of rituals in dichotomies and the impulse to view rituals as a specific form of action. This entails a wide conception of what activities can be considered a ritual: “ritual is not an intrinsically special way of acting, but it is a distinct orchestration of activities: the commonality of ritualization with other actions allows a better focus on what is distinctive about the choices involved in it” (Bell 2005: 7852). Rituals can be distinguished by their contrast with other forms of action rather than particular qualities. Whilst such a wide conception of ritual is appealing, the denial of any common characteristics or features is not useful for a study of ceremony and ritual in Parliament.

2. Debates over the character of ritual

The preceding discussion reveals the contested nature of ceremony and ritual and particularly high levels of disagreement over the *character of ritual*. As with disagreements over definitions, these debates originated and developed in social anthropology and remain unresolved. They have therefore been carried into other disciplines and developed for particular purposes. The main debates relevant to political science and a study of parliament are, first, whether ritual is necessarily religious; second, the scope of activities that can be considered ritual; and finally, the extent to which participation is voluntary or subconscious. The latter debate also applies to ceremony, whereas the first two are specific to the concept of ritual.

An old debate is whether there is a necessary religious element to ritual. Evan Zeusse (1987) argues, from a religious studies perspective, for the fundamental religious basis of ritual. Social anthropology has been hugely active in this debate, where traditional conceptions of ritual presume their religious character. Gluckman’s (1962) distinction between ceremony and ritual is along religious lines and Clifford Geertz (1973) uses the terms ritual and religion interchangeably. Marc Abélès makes an interesting argument that emphasises the similarities of modern political rituals with those described in traditional societies. He argues there is a religious dimension to modern political rituals in France (Abélès 1988: 391-2). There have been concerted efforts to extend the concept of ritual beyond its religious meaning to include secular ceremonies, considerably widening its applicability (Moore and Myerhoff 1977). Political science takes its cue from the generally accepted view in social anthropology that both ceremony and ritual can be secular. Studies of secular processes in politics argue or assume there is no necessary religious element to ritual (Lukes 1977; Muller 2006; Kurti 2006). Interestingly, however, some political scientists in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s argued in the other direction – that although American politics is officially secular,

nevertheless there are significant religious elements running through it that become particularly evident in times of crisis (cf. Bellah, 1968, Lipsitz, 1968, Verba, 1968, Verba, 1965).

The lack of consistency in how ceremony and ritual are employed relates to debates regarding what activities can be considered ritual. Some authors use ritual to refer only to a formalised procedure – an official, orchestrated and planned special occasion (cf. Turner 1969; Moore and Myerhoff 1977; Abélès 1988; Lane 1981) whilst other definitions extend the activities that can be regarded as ritual (Goffman 1967; Lukes 1977; Crewe 2005; Bell 2005; Bloch 2005). Studies of ritual in politics are dominated by special occasion cases; for example, Su Olsson and Marianne Tremaine's (2002) examination of maiden speeches in New Zealand and Muller's (2006) comparison of oath-taking in different parliaments. These are formal and officially sanctioned events, as opposed to ritualised behaviour. Exceptions include Crewe's (2005) and Abélès's (2006) studies of ritualised debates in the House of Lords and French Assembly respectively.

There is also disagreement over the extent to which participation in ritual is voluntary, conscious or performed unthinkingly. Pertaining to the former view, Evan Zeusse (1987) argues that one chooses to participate. For Maurice Bloch, a Marxist social anthropologist, the central feature of ritual is deference – the explanation for the ritual is based on tradition or the 'way things are done' without necessarily an understanding of why, where or with whom the ritual originated (2005: 125-136). This concept of deference is useful to explain both everyday behaviour and formal ceremonies. It demonstrates the extent to which behaviour is based on convention, done unthinkingly, without a full understanding of the rationale behind it. It also shows that 'the way things are done' is based on deference to unknown creators of tradition.

However, it is likely that the level of voluntarism in ceremony and ritual varies between different participants. For some people, the social messages contained in ceremony and ritual are so ingrained that they are taken for granted and unthinkingly absorbed. For others, there will be a more conscious decision to accept or reject these messages, for instance, if there is a tension between the messages and their social background. The refusal of some Northern Irish MPs to take an oath to the Queen is a stark illustration of such a dilemma. This shows the complexity of the level and nature of voluntarism in ceremony and ritual.

3. Debates over the function of ceremony and ritual

The debates over the functions and implications of ceremony and ritual are equally extensive across all disciplines. These issues are relevant to both ceremony and ritual, and because of the inconsistency in the use of the terms by different authors, in this section we relax our drive to keep them distinct and simply follow the authors' own usage. Early social anthropological studies of ceremony and ritual typically assumed, rather than argued, that ceremony and ritual have socially beneficial functions. These tacit beliefs have since been challenged in the literature, and we will consider two of the key critical themes: theorists objected to the assumption, first, that ceremony and ritual are necessarily socially unifying or integrative, and, second, that they are essentially stabilising.

The assumption of the unifying effects of ceremony and ritual is evident from an emphasis on their role in social cohesion and entrenchment of social roles. For instance, Turner indicates that rituals are necessary for group cohesion by arguing their number increases during conflict or crisis (Turner 1969: 10). The presumption that ceremony and ritual express commonality which unites participants has been questioned in a number of ways. Lukes is critical of approaches that he considers too narrow in focus and simplistic in analysis. He argues an emphasis on social order presumes shared values across a large group of people and ignores the use of rituals by dominant groups to ensure hegemony. Political rituals could be very helpful in explaining “continuing compliance of subordinate groups in terms of their members’ participation in activities, performances of roles and conformity to norms to which no realistic alternatives are perceived or imagined” (Lukes 1977: 64). Lukes raises interesting and important questions – who prescribed the performance and specified rules? Who decides what is of special significance? Whose interests is this in? What forms of activity are deemed less significant and ignored as a consequence? How are rituals used strategically by different and competing groups? How can ritual be used creatively – to challenge dominant norms? (Lukes 1977: 68-69). These questions are highly relevant for the study of parliament. The power of ceremony and ritual to socialise participants according to dominant norms is also evident from Crewe’s study in the House of Lords. She argues ceremony and ritual have enormous power in disciplining Peers and creating notions of acceptable behaviour. Informal rules encourage self-restraint which can be difficult to change, maintaining the status quo (Crewe 2005: 184-200). Studies such as these in some ways actually confirm the premise that rituals are socially integrative. However, unlike some earlier studies which uncritically assumed that such integration was a good thing, later writers have argued that it can be sinister, helping to reproduce hierarchy and dominance. They show that ceremonies and rituals are not neutral – they reflect the dominant ideology and have different meanings and implications for different people depending on their social location.

A related debate is whether ceremonies are primarily intended for the audience or participants. A common view of state ceremonies is their role in conferring legitimacy to an institution and democracy as a whole. The nature of ceremonies makes them particularly suited to disseminating social messages to the public. However, some ceremonies may make no sense to outsiders (Moore and Myerhoff 1977: 7-9). This shows that the audience of the ceremony is more than the public – indeed participants in the ceremony also constitute their audience. This means that despite the symbolic and ‘acting’ nature of ceremonies, they are still important in creating norms and perceptions for all – audience and participants alike. The meanings in ceremony and ritual are multiple, take place at different levels (conscious and subconscious) and vary amongst different participants and observers. The traditional assumption, that the primary function of ceremony and ritual is social cohesion, fails to recognise this.

Another traditional assumption, of the stabilising effects of ceremony and ritual, has also been challenged. Such an assumption is evident in Gluckman’s ‘rites of rebellion’ which shows how ceremony and ritual reaffirm social order even when they appear to be challenging it. He examines rituals in which normal everyday roles are transgressed or even reversed, using an example of a ritual where African women take a dominant role, in contrast to their usual, subordinate, everyday role. He argues that the

women are expressing discontent with their disadvantaged position in society – these ‘rituals of rebellion’ should be viewed as symbolic protest against the established order. However, the rebellion is controlled and participation in the ritual can be viewed as cooperation with the system which reinforces dominant power structures: “the acceptance of the established order as right and good, and even sacred, seems to allow unbridled excess, very rituals of rebellion, for the order itself keeps this rebellion within bounds” (Gluckman 1963: 211). Contained within his theory is the assumption that ceremony and ritual are essentially stabilising, even in cases where they appear not to be. This is challenged from two angles.

First, ceremony and ritual can be disruptive to society. Using anthropological fieldwork in Indonesia to support his argument, Clifford Geertz (1973) argues that a discontinuity between integration in the social and cultural structures leads to conflict, because socially the people are urbanites but culturally they are old-fashioned. His analysis shows how rituals can become politicised and used to express ideological commitment (Geertz 1973: 162-9). An interesting example supporting these observations is the clash between traditional rituals and modern social patterns in the conflict over Orange Order marches in Northern Ireland. This challenges the presumption that ceremony and ritual necessarily stabilise society. Second, ceremonies and rituals can be a way of challenging the existing order. Alistair Mann’s historical perspective on the devolution of power from Westminster to Scotland shows how ritual is used to mark a new site of power. It is interesting to observe the desire of the Scottish to symbolically mark a break with Westminster through alteration of traditional rituals and to consider which aspects they abandoned and which retained, e.g. inclusion of women in previously men-only rituals (Mann, 2006: 154-57). Kurti discusses the use of rituals as ideological and political instruments. He argues the Hungarian Parliament reveals that the “ritual process is a complex phenomena that takes shape through the conscious negotiations and contestations by political players” (Kurti 2006: 42). This further shows the multifunctional and contextual nature of ceremony and ritual. The traditional assumptions, of the unifying and stabilising functions of ceremony and ritual, are too simplistic in light of these challenges, which point to the reality of the complex nature of power and society.

Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review of different disciplinary treatments of ceremony and ritual was to ascertain a better understanding of the concepts in order to develop working definitions for GCRP’s research questions. Our survey documents the high levels of disagreement surrounding definitions, distinctions, character and functions of ceremony and ritual. This is confusing, but enables freedom in using the concepts. The literature offers many definitions which are good for developing each term. We feel that a useful and practicable distinction between ceremony and ritual is the special occasion character of the former and routine or everyday nature of the latter. This is easily identifiable (especially compared to the voluntary-versus-unthinking dichotomy that some writers prefer to distinguish them) and valuable because it allows us to distinguish between various parliamentary activity and events that participants may view or do differently. It also enables us to view ceremony as a type of ritual (Crewe, 2005), meaning we can recognise the ritualised elements within ceremony and ceremonial aspects of some ritual.

However, we accept that any distinction is blurry and difficult to maintain. And we remain open to the possibility that our further research into the traditions, performances, customs and symbols in Parliament will generate the need for more fine-grained distinctions, for example between ceremonial ritual and routine ritual.

PART II

A CATALOGUE OF UK PARLIAMENTARY CEREMONIES & RITUALS

This descriptive list of parliamentary ceremonies and rituals concentrates on the House of Commons. Emma Crewe's (2005; 2006) path-breaking ethnographic study of the House of Lords includes discussion and analysis of its ceremonies and rituals, but those of the Commons, considered in and of themselves, are relatively neglected. Our aim is simply to enumerate the ceremonies and rituals, not to analyse them – a more intensive task dependent on further research. We have grouped House of Commons ceremony and ritual into four categories: (1) Speeches and Performances; (2) Debates and Questions; (3) Bills and Legislation; and (4) Officers and Staff Ceremonies and Rituals. These categories are porous and overlap in places. For example, debates are typically constituted by a series of speeches, and bills do not become law without debates. The categorisation of parliamentary ceremony and ritual is further complicated by the fact that there are ceremonies within ceremonies, and rituals within rituals. For example, the election of the Speaker as a whole constitutes a ritual drawn out over at least two days. It consists of a series of performances that count as ritual or ceremony in their own right, which range from the spectacular to the mundane. Nevertheless, these four groupings seemed to capture some of our intuitions about how an analysis of parliamentary ceremony and ritual might proceed. Not everything that someone might regard as a ceremony or ritual of the House of Commons is described below. Conversely, this list might contain an entry for something that strikes readers as embodying procedure or etiquette. This ambiguity is an evitable part of such a subjective exercise. It also reflects the staggering complexity of the British parliament.

1. SPEECHES AND PERFORMANCES

Election of the Speaker

The election of a Speaker is the first substantive action of a new Parliament. After a general election, MPs assemble in the House of Commons. They are summoned by Black Rod to the House of Lords and instructed to elect a Speaker. The Members return to their Chamber. The Father of the House (i.e. the longest serving member of the House who is not a minister of the Crown) occupies the Lower Chair (i.e. not the grand chair in which the Speaker sits) before the Table. A motion is moved and seconded that 'X do take the Chair of this House as Speaker.' It is traditional for the seconder to be a member of a party different from the nominee's, as a symbol of the independence and political neutrality of the office of Speaker and the support it claims from all parties. If the motion is unopposed, the nominee becomes the Speaker Elect. He – and except for Betty Boothroyd, they have always been men – stands in his place on the benches, and delivers a speech thanking Members for the honour. His mover and seconder then physically

grasp him by the hands and conduct the Speaker Elect to the Chair. This tradition symbolises the reluctance some people may have felt at becoming Speaker since, through history, nine Speakers have met violent deaths, eight of whom were executed. The Speaker takes the Chair and the Serjeant at Arms takes the Mace, which has been resting on brackets below the Table, and places it on top of the Table. The Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and leaders of the other parties make speeches of congratulation to the Speaker. The House is then adjourned to the following day, when the Speaker Elect must receive Royal Approbation.

Until 2001, if there was more than one nominee for the Speakership, then the House would have to vote on each candidate. This was done by moving amendments to the original motion to elect the Speaker by substituting the name of the competing candidates. There were an unprecedented twelve candidates standing for the Speakership in 2000, following Boothroyd's retirement.⁴ A new procedure for electing the Speaker was adopted by the House in 2001, following a report from the Procedure Committee. Under the new procedure – which has not been tried yet – if there is more than one nominee, the nominees' names are submitted to the Clerk of the House on the morning of the election. Each nominee must have the support of twelve to fifteen MPs, at least three of whom must be from parties other than her/his own. When the House meets later that day, each nominee make a speech to the House, and then MPs vote by secret ballot. If one candidate gets more than half the votes, she or he becomes the Speaker. If no one does, then the candidate with the lowest number of votes, or any candidate receiving less than five per cent of the votes, is eliminated and MPs vote again. The process continues until one candidate has secured more than half the votes.

On the day after the House has elected its new Speaker, the Speaker Elect must attend the House of Lords to receive Royal Approbation. The usual carry-on that attends any occasion when the Commons goes to the Lords happens, too, on this occasion. The Speaker, accompanied by no less than nine officials (a Doorkeeper from each House, the Serjeant at Arms, Black Rod, the Clerk of the House, the Inspector of Police, the Ceremonials Advisor,⁵ the Speaker's Secretary and the Speaker's Trainbearer), process to the Lords, along with the two front benches of the House of Commons (Thorne 1980: 11, 22). The Serjeant at Arms carries the mace in the crook of his left arm rather than on his right shoulder to signify the 'elect' status of the Speaker, and he is "wearing white gloves but not carrying a hat" (Thorne 1980: 21). The Lord Chancellor⁶ conveys Her Majesty's

⁴ "Thus in 2000 the motion named Michael Martin, and the other candidates were put to the House one by one in a series of amendments. Speeches proposing and seconding the candidates, and by the candidates themselves, together with the votes on each amendment and the final decision, took nine hours" ROGERS, R. & WALTERS, R. (2006) *How Parliament Works*, Harlow, Essex, Pearson Education Ltd.. In the event, Michael Martin won the nomination with 370 votes in favour and eight votes against. There is a good account, from the BBC, of Michael Martin's election to the Speakership in 2000, as well as some other facts about the office: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/985427.stm

⁵ This list of people accompanying the Speaker is from Thorne (1980: 11, 22). A search of 'ceremonials advisor' on the parliamentary website yielded no results: the job may no longer exist or it may go by a different title.

⁶ At least, this used to be the case, and on May 12, 2005, the Lord Chancellor (Lord Falconer of Thoroton) recognized Speaker Martin as the Commons' Speaker (see http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldhansrd/vo050512/text/50512-01.htm#50512-01_head0 for the account from Hansard). I'm unclear if the Lord Speaker, a newly created office, will do this in future. According to a parliamentary website: "The Lord Chancellor used to preside over the House

approval of the choice of Speaker, and the procession then returns to the House of Commons, now with the Serjeant at Arms carrying the Mace on his right shoulder. Before Speakers Boothroyd and Martin abandoned the tradition of wearing the full-bottomed wig, this would be the moment when the Speaker would don the wig and gown and take the Chair as a fully-fledged Speaker for the first time. The Speaker then takes the oath of loyalty to the Queen, followed by members (see below).

Oath (or affirmation) of allegiance to the Queen

After a general election, MPs must swear or affirm their allegiance to the Queen before they are allowed to receive their MPs' salaries, take their seats, or speak in the House of Commons. The Speaker is the first to swear the oath, after receiving Royal Approbation, and is then followed by other Members, in an order determined by seniority and position. Thus, following a ruling by Speaker Boothroyd in 1997, the Father of the House was the first to be sworn in, followed by Cabinet Ministers, Shadow Cabinet Ministers, Privy Counsellors, other Ministers, and other Members according to seniority.

Members take the oath by approaching the Table, which is attended by a Clerk, who provides them with the texts of the oath or affirmation on a card. A variety of practices are allowed – such as holding a holy book or simply raising one's hand – and a variety of wordings are acceptable. For example, while holding a copy of the New Testament (or, in the case of a Jew, Muslim, or Sikh, the Old Testament, the Koran, or Granth, respectively) a Member says: "I [name] swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors, according to law. So help me God." Members who make a Solemn Affirmation instead of the Oath say, "I [name] do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, her heirs and successors according to law".⁷ The oath or affirmation must be said in English, but the Speaker has allowed Members to say it additionally in Welsh, Scots Gaelic, or Cornish (Rogers and Walters 2006: 137). The option of making a solemn affirmation instead of an oath "emerged over time, different categories of people gaining the right at different times. The general right to affirm was established in 1888 following the case of Charles Bradlaugh, who was first elected to Parliament in 1880, but, as a professed atheist, was not allowed to take the oath or to affirm" (Walker and Wood, 2000: 3).

After taking the oath or affirmation, Members sign the 'Test Roll,' which was formerly a roll of parchment, headed by the text of the oath, and is now a book with pages of parchment. After signing the Test Roll, the Clerk of the House introduces Members to the Speaker. Once the majority of Members has been sworn in (which usually takes a few days and continues on subsequent days after Prayers), the House is considered constituted and can begin to proceed with business including the Queen's Speech.

of Lords..., representing the Lords at ceremonial occasions. However, when the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 was introduced, those duties were given to the Lord Speaker. On 4 July 2006 Members of the House of Lords elected Baroness Hayman as their first Lord Speaker"

(<http://www.explore.parliament.uk/Parliament.aspx?id=10067&glossary=true>)

⁷ <http://www.parliament.uk/about/images/work/oath.cfm>

Failing to take the oath or affirmation prior to sitting or speaking in the House has serious consequences: the Member will be fined £500 for each occurrence, and his or her seat must be vacated and a by-election called. There have been cases when a Member has inadvertently failed to take the oath before sitting, and some lenience is shown towards him or her by the passing of an Act of Indemnity, which relieves them of paying the fine. However, the Act does not reverse the other part of the penalty, and so the Member loses his or her seat, and a by-election is called (Walker and Wood 2000; Erskine May). According to Richard Kelly of the House of Commons Library (personal communication June 2008), the last time this happened was in 1924. Major the honourable John Jacob Astor voted in a division before swearing the oath. His seat was declared vacant, and a by-election declared. It was not contested by any parties, and Astor was returned to the House of Commons on 12 March 1924, whereupon he made the oath.

This ceremony has been the source of considerable controversy for centuries. A House of Commons Library research paper on the topic summarises the issues: “Various objections are levied against the oath of allegiance: objections to the religious loyalties still implicit in the oath; republican objections to the requirement to pledge allegiance to the Crown; objections that the oath contains no pledge of duty towards the people, or towards democracy. There are also objections to members of Parliament having to take an oath at all” (Walker and Wood 2000: 3). Members’ objections to the ceremony have thus been a constant source of colourful stories for the media to relate. According to an obituary published in the *Telegraph*, the famously outspoken Labour MP Tony Banks, a ‘staunch republican, ... was forced to say that he had only crossed his fingers “for luck” when he took his oath of allegiance to the Queen.’⁸ Tony Benn is also known for his objections to the ceremony, prefacing his oath in 1997 with these words: “As a committed republican, under protest, I take the oath required of me by law, under the Parliamentary Oaths Act of 1866, to allow me to represent my constituency...” (Walker and Wood 2000: 25). Sinn Féin MPs, including most famously Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, have refused to take the oath and therefore their seats. A series of legal battles – including to the European Court of Human Rights – and parliamentary debates and decisions have ensued around the question of whether, despite not taking the oath, Sinn Féin MPs are entitled to access Parliament and receive parliamentary allowances. In December 2001, the Commons voted to allow Sinn Féin MPs to make use of parliamentary facilities and services, and to have offices in the House of Commons, even though none have ever been sworn in. In the 2005 election, five Sinn Féin MPs were elected to the House of Commons; none have taken the oath.⁹

If some of these stories make the oath-taking ceremony sound fiery, it has to be said that one would be hard-pressed to find a photo more boring than the one on the parliamentary webpage for the ceremony¹⁰: five white males attired in drab suits stand in a queue before the Table. The rotund man taking the oath when the camera shutter closed

⁸ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/01/09/db0901.xml>

⁹ This is a brief overview of the oath-taking ceremony and related controversies. A definitive account is available in the House of Commons Library research paper (2000) by Eileen Walker and Edward Wood, which runs to 50 pages.

¹⁰ <http://www.parliament.uk/about/images/work/oath.cfm>

looks like he is waiting for his bus, his left hand in his trouser pocket and his right hand loosely holding what is presumably the bible. The man waiting his turn to swear hugs a black spiral notebook to his chest. No one in the picture is smiling.

The State Opening of Parliament

The State Opening of Parliament is one of the most well-known and splendid of British political ceremonies. It is an annual event, occurring at the start of each session, usually in October or November. The three elements of the British Parliament – the Sovereign, the Lords, and the Commons – are all involved.

The State Opening begins in the morning with a behind-the-scenes ritual: the Yeomen of the Guard, the royal bodyguards, ceremonially search the cellars of the Palace for explosives. This commemorates Guy Fawkes's 'gunpowder plot' of 1605 – an attempt to blow up King James I in Parliament. Another reminder of the violence and intrigue historically surrounding relationships between the Commons and the Crown is the fact that a member of the Commons is ceremonially held hostage in Buckingham Palace while the Queen attends the Palace, to ensure her safe return. The hostage is usually the Vice-Chamberlain of the Household – that is, an MP whose office makes him or her officially a member of the Royal Household, and, simultaneously, a junior Whip for the Government.

The Queen processes in an elaborate, gilded, horse-drawn carriage from Buckingham Palace to Westminster, preceded by the Imperial State Crown in its own carriage. When she arrives at Westminster, she enters the Palace through the Sovereign's Entrance beneath the Victoria Tower. Processing to the Queen's Robing Room, she puts on the Robes of State and the aforementioned crown, before proceeding through the Royal Gallery to the House of Lords. In addition to Peers, who are decked out in scarlet robes and ermine capes, the audience in the Chamber of the House of Lords includes family members of Peers, ambassadors, and visiting dignitaries, dressed in ball gowns, military uniforms, national dress, or other formal attire. The Queen assumes the Throne, and instructs the house by saying, "My Lords, pray be seated." She then motions to the [Lord Great Chamberlain](#), who in turn gestures at Black Rod (or, to use his full title, the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod) who has been waiting in the Commons Lobby, to summon the other House.

As is well known, when Black Rod approaches the House of Commons, the doors are slammed in his face. He knocks upon them three times with his stick – made of ebony – and when they are opened again, he approaches the Table to announce that the Queen summons the Commons. This ritual symbolises the right of the Commons to exclude royal messengers, and is said to commemorate the events of 1642, the last time a sovereign entered the Commons, when King Charles I tried to arrest five MPs. Led by the Speaker and Black Rod, and followed by the Clerk of the House, the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, MPs walk two-by-two to the House of Lords. Tradition has it that they amble to the Lords noisily, to show that while the "monarch may summon them with the pomp of apparent authority, they obey only voluntarily and in their own time and manner" (Crewe 2005: 211). The Commons crowd into the small space between the doors and the bar of the chamber to hear the Queen read her speech from the throne at the opposite end of the room (see the Queen's Speech below for further detail).

When the speech is finished, the Commons bow to the Queen and return to their own chamber. The Speaker suspends the sitting until 2.30pm that afternoon. When the Commons return, the Speaker welcomes new MPs and makes other announcements and reminders. Then, according to custom, House then gives formal first reading to the Outlawries Bill, or, to give it its full title, a “Bill for the more effectual preventing clandestine Outlawries.” No MP moves its introduction, nor has it ever been ordered to be printed, and it is not intended to make any further progress. Its purpose is purely symbolic: by conducting a piece of its own business first and not discussing the contents of the Queen's speech, the Commons demonstrates in another way its right to independence from the Sovereign.¹¹

The Queen's Speech

This speech is not delivered by an MP, and it does not happen in the House of Commons. But we include an account of it here because several other important ritual speeches that meet both of those criteria are best understood in light of this one.

The Queen's Speech takes place at the opening of a new session of Parliament. The speech is written by the government of the day, approved by the Cabinet, and delivered by the Queen in the House of Lords. With both Peers and MPs in attendance, the speech is addressed to both Houses. There are typically a number of elements in the speech: recent or imminent royal events or state visits; statements of broad policy intentions and the legislative programme of the government; and an announcement that the House of Commons will receive the estimates for financing the public services. As Rogers and Walters note, “Bills do not have to be in the Queen's Speech to be introduced [in the session], but the speech outlines the main legislative activity for the year ahead” (Rogers and Walters 2006: 139).

Customarily, Peers and MPs listen to the speech in respectful silence. But in 1998, the speech contained the Government's intention to eliminate hereditary peers. When the Queen announced this, supporters of the move shouted, ‘Yes’ and ‘Hear, hear,’ and opponents cried, ‘No,’ and ‘Shame’, but the Queen continued the speech without pause.

Speeches following the Queen's Speech

After the Queen delivers her speech at the start of a new session, the House of Commons assembles to debate the speech. In 2005, the Queen delivered her speech on 17th May in the morning, following the election of the Speaker and two days of the swearing in of Members. The debate on the Queen's Speech usually lasts four or five days. The debate is opened by two Government backbench MPs, who move and second the motion to debate the speech. This is now the only occasion on which a motion in the House is

¹¹ For official descriptions of the State Opening, visit <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/occasions/stateopening/nov2007.cfm> and http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_publications_and_archives/parliamentary_archives/archives_state_opening.cfm.

For enlightening behind-the-scenes accounts of the State Opening, see Emma Crewe (2005: ch 11), who tells funny stories about several unofficial elements of the ceremony, including the time the Yeomen of the Guards got lost in the cellars; feeding the Queen's horses in the courtyards; MP Dennis Skinner's personal show of defiance to Black Rod, the Queen's messenger; and the nearly unprecedented interruption of the Queen's Speech in 1998 when she announced the abolition of hereditary peers.

seconded (Kevin Williams, HC Information Office, personal communication June 2008).¹² The individuals are specially selected by the Whips and it is considered an honour to deliver one of these speeches. By convention, these MPs are expected not to be “contentious but to be reminiscent and witty and to extol the virtues of their constituencies” (Rogers and Walters 2006: 140). Also by convention, they are “usually a contrasted pair (rural and urban; old and new; Scottish and English)” (Griffith and Ryle, 1997: 189) or an “MP whose career is on the way down (the elder statesman MP), and... an MP whose career is on the way up (the whippersnapper MP)” (King, 2007: 194).

In 2002, Oona King approached Hilary Armstrong, Labour’s Chief Whip, to ask if she could second the Queen’s Speech. Armstrong agreed, and here is part of King’s account of the event: “I’ve written a speech that covers my well-worn areas of obsession: housing, genocide, racism, sexism, enforcing UN resolutions, and representational democracy. Should have them rolling in the aisles. Oh, and I’ve also slipped in a bit about gorillas in the mist.... Scared to death. Hope I don’t cock it up” (King 2007: 194). Evidently, she didn’t: “I got loads of letters from MPs saying they liked it, including from about a quarter of the Cabinet. Unfortunately MPs are like GPs – you can’t read their writing. It’s taken me weeks to decipher half the letters I received.... Gordon (Brown) wrote, ‘Congratulations on your great speech on the *Mormons*. It was magnificent.’ From Jack (Straw’s) letter I can make out, ‘You managed the difficult task of combining great humus with some onions. So my sinuses lung rabulation – you were brilliant.’ (Translation: You managed the difficult task of combining great humour with serious points. So my sincere congratulations – etc.)” (2007: 196).¹³

Betty Boothroyd, the Speaker from 1992 to 2000, describes the ritual during one session from her perspective in the Chair: “Before battle [between a beleaguered Tory government led by John Major and a resurgent Labour opposition] resumed the next day, two backbenchers moved and seconded the Loyal Address to the Queen, a ritual that precedes the resumption of hostilities between party leaders and gives the chosen two the chance to impress and amuse a packed house. It is a very in-House occasion, low on partisan content and high on local pride and good humour. Success depends on style as much as content. The two Members have to select the right ingredients, mix the appropriate measures and serve them at the correct temperature. It can be a gruelling test, even for long-serving Members, and I did what I could to help them, keeping my eyes on them throughout their delivery and willing them to succeed” (Boothroyd, 2001: 223).

Maiden Speeches

¹² Until 2001, another occasion was in the election of a Speaker, where the procedure required Members to move and second a nominee. In March 2001, the Commons approved a new system for electing the Speaker recommended by the Procedure Committee. Under the new procedures, an unopposed nominee will be moved and seconded by Members. But if the Speakership is contested, the new procedures require nominees’ names to be submitted by paper – with the names of 12-15 MPs who support the nomination – to the Clerk of the House. A secret ballot then follows. In 2005, when Speaker Martin stood for the Speakership again and was unopposed, only one member (Angela Browning) moved his nomination; the motion was not seconded. Here’s the link to the relevant Hansard entry: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo050511/debtext/50511-01.htm#50511-01_time0

¹³ These are excerpts from the pages describing the speech and the reaction of politicians and press; they are quite funny and well worth a read (2007: 193-197).

Every newly-elected MP to the House of Commons must, at some point, deliver her or his maiden speech in the Commons. Here is the advice of Paul Flynn, MP and author of a tongue-in-cheek handbook for backbenchers: “The first speech is a daunting hurdle. Ignore advice to postpone it for months. Delaying it increases the trepidation. Put a request in to the Speaker immediately after taking the oath. The likelihood is that a slot will be found the following week, in the Queen’s Speech debates. The House will be largely empty, a doughnut¹⁴ of friends assembles and the Chamber’s intimacy will quiet jangling nerves. Once that hurdle has been surmounted the Chamber becomes a friendly place” (Flynn, 1997: 118).

Traditionally, MPs’ maiden speeches are supposed to be non-contentious. Flynn argues that this convention has been broken so many times as to make its status *as* a convention uncertain. But, he warns, if Members do decide to make a political speech, they’d better be prepared for their opponents to break the corollary tradition of listening to maiden speeches in silence, i.e. without heckling (1997: 117). Speaker Boothroyd confirms Flynn’s remarks in her account of Members’ maiden speeches after New Labour’s huge win in 1997: “There were so many MPs waiting to make their maiden speeches, which are supposed to be non-controversial, that I had to allow them to break with custom and speak on amendments to bills” (Boothroyd 2001: 249).

Similarly to Westminster, new members to the Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly are allotted ten minutes to make a maiden speech, in which there should be no interruptions from other members.¹⁵ They can be on any subject and a preliminary analysis of maiden speeches suggests there is not much fuss made of them by the individual, the Assembly or the media. The majority of examples show members getting on with business and responding to other members. There are exceptions – some members use their maiden speeches more sentimentally to pay tribute to another or align themselves with past figures; for example, Dawn Purvis’ (PUP) replacement of David Ervine. The low key nature of maiden speeches in the NI Assembly reflects the lack of obvious or overt elaborate ceremony in general. This is striking in comparison with Westminster.

Language

Members of Parliament must use certain phrases and words, and refrain from using others, when speaking in the House of Commons. Their language is thus frequently ceremonial and symbolic. The House of Commons Factsheet G7 outlines some of the most important rules and conventions (2004: 3-4). We will not describe all of the parliamentary language conventions here, but we want to identify and explain some of the more obscure terms that arise in the document.

The Other Place: By convention, MPs are not supposed to mention the House of Lords by name in their speeches in the Commons, and the corresponding norm holds for Lords

¹⁴ ‘Doughnut’ is both a noun and a verb, as explained by Flynn in the section entitled ‘How to Doughnut’: “The MP speaking is the hole in the doughnut. The doughnut is the circle of faces, knees and bellies that surround the speaker in the television frame. The doughnut is a living thing, yawning, scratching, dozing, chattering, and just occasionally, listening attentively. Half a dozen MPs make a doughnut....” (1997: 124). The rest of the entry (124-125) is hysterical and worth a read. MPs ‘doughnut’ so that the House does not appear for television viewers to be as empty as it often is.

¹⁵ ‘Proceedings of the Committee to Advise the Presiding Officer’, 15th Sep, 1998. NI Assembly website. Accessed May 2008.

speaking in their House. Thus, the practice evolved for both MPs and Lords, to refer to 'the other place', or 'the other House' or 'another place' in their speeches.¹⁶ I recall reading somewhere that some Members want to scrap this terminology, but judging from a scan of recent Hansard entries, members of both Houses persist in using it.

Strangers: This is the term used by MPs, Lords, and officers and staff of the House of Commons, to refer to members of the public when they are in the House. According to Parliament's website, it was replaced by 'Members of the Public' in November 2004¹⁷ (see also Modernisation Committee report 2004: 6). However, to my knowledge, the police still shout 'Hats off, strangers!' as the Speaker's procession makes its way through the Central Lobby, so its use has not been entirely abandoned. "I Spy Strangers" was the traditional phrase uttered by MPs in order to have members of the public removed from the galleries of the House of Commons so that the Chamber could sit in private. Following a request from the Modernisation Committee, the practice was abolished and replaced by the motion 'that the House sit in private.' Through history, MPs have 'spied strangers' for legitimate reasons of privacy, but also to try to stall proceedings in the House or to make some other political point.¹⁸ An MP wishing to interrupt a debate shouts: 'I Spy Strangers.' The [Speaker](#) must then immediately put the motion 'That strangers do now withdraw.' If the motion is carried, the galleries – including the press gallery – are cleared and the business continues in private. In the 1870s, an Irish Nationalist MP caused the [Prince of Wales](#) to be removed by using this method.

2. DEBATES AND QUESTIONS

Debate on the Queen's Speech

The formal name for this debate is The Debate on the Address thanking Her Majesty for her Speech. Some of the constituent parts of this important debate have already been described (see entries in section 1 for Queen's Speech, and Speeches following the Queen's Speech). It remains to give an overview and characterise the debate on the Queen's Speech as a whole.

Following the State Opening, a motion that the House sends a 'Humble Address' to the Queen thanking her for the Speech is introduced in both Houses. The Government's programme, as presented in the Queen's Speech, is then debated by both Houses for four or five days. Griffith and Ryle (1989: 189) indicate that the Speaker used to read the Queen's speech to the House again. I believe the practice now is for the text of the Speech to be recorded in Hansard, but the Speaker does not actually read it to the House. The Speaker then announces which topics from the speech will be debated on which days.¹⁹ Next, as already explained, backbench MPs from the Government side move and

¹⁶ See, for example, http://www.parliament.uk/about/glossary.cfm?ref=another_5810

¹⁷ http://www.parliament.uk/about/glossary.cfm?ref=strange_5288

¹⁸ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199394/cmhansrd/1993-12-14/Debate-47.html> See this record from Hansard for an account of an 'I spy strangers' episode on 14 December 1993. It seems to have been very contentious, with Members (covered) – which means that they were wearing the top hat – making points of order during the division that the Deputy Speaker should say that the Member was in contempt of the House because he spied strangers when there were none in the galleries, and so interrupted proceedings.

¹⁹ In the Debate on 6th November, 2007, for example, the Speaker announced: "Before I call the mover and seconder, I shall announce the proposed pattern of debate during the remaining days on the Loyal Address:

second the motion to debate the Queen's speech. The Leader of the Opposition speaks next, and congratulates the mover and seconder. He can then begin the debate proper, in the sense of subjecting the Government's legislative programme to critical scrutiny and comment. In the 2007 debate, David Cameron spoke for about thirty minutes, but not continuously, as the Speaker allowed Labour Members to interrupt and put questions to him. The Prime Minister speaks after the Opposition Leader has had his go.

The debate on the first day is a general one, with the following day's debates on particular subjects (such as health or foreign affairs). On the last day of the Debate, the House votes on the original motion – to send a Humble Address to the Queen – as well as on two amendments to the motion. One amendment is moved by the Leader of the Opposition, and is debated by the House. The second amendment, which is chosen at the discretion of the Speaker, is also voted on by the House, but is not debated. The Speaker traditionally selects an amendment moved by the Leader of the second opposition party. These amendments are typically expressions of regret from the Opposition parties about ways in which the Government's agenda, as articulated in the Queen's speech, is lacking. The Queen's Speech is voted on by the Commons, but no vote is taken in the Lords.²⁰

Prime Minister's Question Time

Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQT, or simply PMQ) occurs every Wednesday that Parliament is in session, from about 12-12.30pm. While usually far from ceremonial (due to the constant exchange of politely-framed insults and put-downs), PMQ represents a highly ritualistic performance wherein the main players obey many unwritten rules.

The Commons is usually packed with MPs for the duration, and they begin drifting in about five or ten minutes beforehand to secure a good seat. The Speaker begins PMQT by calling on a Government MP to ask the Prime Minister about his engagements for the day. The Prime Minister will briefly and vaguely summarise who is meeting and what he is doing on the day (e.g. on 26th March 2008, Brown replied "This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today"). The same MP is also usually then called again by the Speaker to put another 'friendly' question to the PM. However, PMQ really gets going when the Speaker calls on the Leader of the Opposition to put the first question, which he does – by standing at the dispatch box on his side of the Table – to much supportive harrumphing from his fellow MPs. If the Government is seen as being vulnerable on some issue of the day, the Opposition Leader's first question may probe this. The other strategy is to ask a question related to some issue of enduring and critical interest to the Opposition, on which they differ strongly from the Government. The Prime Minister will rise to the dispatch box on his side of the Table to answer the question. Mirroring the Opposition's vocal backing for its Leader, Government front- and backbenchers make supportive noises at the appropriate moments while the PM responds. Thus, choruses of 'Hear, hear!' punctuate the back-and-forth of PMQT.

The pattern repeats. The Speaker will usually call the Opposition Leader to put the six questions, grouped into two groups of three. The leader of the second opposition

Wednesday 7 November—home affairs and justice; Thursday 8 November—local government and environment, food and rural affairs; Monday 12 November—foreign affairs and defence; Tuesday 13 November—health and education; Wednesday 14 November—economy and pensions."

²⁰ From: <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/occasions/stateopening.cfm>

party usually has the opportunity to put two questions during PMQT, though not necessarily immediately after the Opposition Leader. The Speaker will also usually call several Government backbenchers, who almost invariably put ‘softball’ or ‘friendly’ question to the Prime Minister, allowing him to advertise some policy triumph or other piece of good news. The Speaker signals that PMQT is over by calling a Member who has a question for a Minister, rather than the Prime Minister. The PM does not usually hang around in the Chamber when his questions are over; neither do many MPs....

There is great disagreement (amongst MPs, journalists, and the general public) about PMQT, and it is impossible to canvass the huge range of opinion here. Suffice it to say that for those who approve of the ritual, the reasons given include the following: it is good theatre; it is a much-needed showcase for Parliament; it is a good opportunity for the Opposition to hammer the Government on its mistakes and failures; and it gets MPs down to London. For those who disapprove, the reasons given include: it is merely a showcase with little productive outcome; it is the centrepiece event for the Commons’ generally macho, public-boys-school culture; and it diminishes the reputation of Parliament in the eyes of the public. Love it or loathe it, this weekly thirty minutes of parliamentary time represents for many people their only window into the House of Commons’ goings-on.

Whatever one’s opinion of the point or efficacy of PMQT, there is greater consensus around the claim that there can be good and bad performers at PMQT. In other words, even MPs who dislike it and what it represents will admit that there are certain crucial ingredients to making a successful contribution in the performance. In his book for backbench MPs, Paul Flynn has even come up with a formula: “The question should have three parts in three sentences. 1. Seize the attention of the House. 2. Make a powerful new point. 3. Pose an unanswerable question.” (1997: 37). He continues: “A model question was asked by Nick Ainger on the 6th July 1995, two days after John Redwood’s bid to oust Major as leader of the Tory Party failed. It was the topical issue that was the sure-fire way to grab the attention of a noisy distracted House: 1. Attention – *Given the description by John Redwood of the Prime Minister’s leadership as ‘uncertainty based on indecision’* 2. Point – *Is it the job of the Deputy Prime Minister now to take the decisions?* 3. Unanswerable question – *Or has the Prime Minister not decided yet?* (1997: 38).

Question Time

Other ministers besides the Prime Minister are also held accountable by and to Parliament in Question Times devoted to their departments. When Parliament is in session, Question Time occurs Mondays through Thursdays, at the start of business – i.e. after prayers and any private business. Question Time lasts about 55 minutes and ministers for each government department answer questions every four weeks in a rotation set by government (this time is sometimes divided between smaller departments and other government bodies such as the House of Commons Commission). During Question Time, ministers respond to Oral Questions tabled by MPs. (Members can also table Questions for Written Answer – otherwise known as Written Questions – to ministers, but we will not discuss these here). Oral Questions must be tabled at least three days prior to the Question Time for each department. The order in which the questions are then asked on the day by the MPs who submitted them is determined randomly by a

computer. Typically, more questions are tabled than will be answered by ministers due to the time limits, so only twenty-five questions will be printed on the Order Paper (or fewer, depending on the amount of time allotted to ministers for smaller departments and commissions). The surplus are treated as 'lost,' and will not be printed or receive an answer.

Oral Questions to ministers emerged as a feature of the business of the House of Commons in the nineteenth century (the first Written Questions were introduced in 1902). The purpose of parliamentary questions, according to Erskine May, is to "obtain information or to press for action." Consequently, there are a number of rules that restrict the types of questions that can be asked. Most obviously, MPs can only ask ministers about things for which they are responsible. They cannot ask ministers questions that implicate opposition parties' policies (e.g. "What would be the effect on public services of the spending plans announced by the Conservative Party?"). They cannot ask ministers about matters that are *sub judice* – i.e. before the courts. Questions must not offer information ("Is the minister aware that...?"), be argumentative, or repeat questions tabled earlier in the session. MPs may not ask ministers about areas of responsibility that have been devolved to the assemblies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Interestingly, Members may not mention the Queen in their questions, and this rule was very recently tested and upheld: in a question on the economy to Harriet Harman, who was standing in for Gordon Brown at PMQ on Wednesday, 2nd April 2008, Lib Dem Deputy Leader Vincent Cable said: "It was reported this week that Her Majesty the Queen had cancelled her diamond wedding celebrations because it was judged to be inappropriate to engage in extravagance at a time of economic gloom and recession. Do you share my view that this demonstrates Her Majesty's unerring instincts for the public mood, or does the Government think she was overreacting?" Speaker Martin would not let the question be answered. According to Erskine May, the "irregular use of the Queen's name to influence a decision of the House is unconstitutional in principle and inconsistent with the independence of Parliament.... Any attempt to use her name in debate to influence the judgement of Parliament is immediately checked and censured."²¹

MPs who are called by the Speaker to ask their question do not read it out, but simply call out its number. When the government minister has replied, the MP can ask another question (known as a supplementary) and other MPs may also be called to ask supplementary questions. It is at the Speaker's discretion that other Members are called for supplementaries, and the minister must reply to each in turn. Supplementary questions must be on the same subject as the original question. This rule is sometimes abused, as an anecdote from Paul Flynn MP, shows: the infamous Tony Banks, a committed animal rights supporter, was anxious to ask the Foreign Affairs Secretary a question about Norway's threat to re-commence whaling. "He stood and was not called after mentally rehearsing tortuous links with questions on Papua, Sudan and Israel. Finally the Speaker relented and called him. How was Tony going to link his plea with a question that asked 'What action the Government intends to take to increase the imports of bananas from the Windward Isles?' We held our breath. 'Madam Speaker,' he explained, 'the people of Norway are going bananas about the whales.' Speaker Boothroyd was so amused, she let him get away with it" (Flynn 1997: 43).

²¹ See the BBC report for a full account: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7326746.stm

Comedy like this notwithstanding, the supplementary questions are often the ones that really count. Rogers and Walters refer to the ‘art of the supplementary’ (2006: 322). The tabled question and researched and rehearsed answer from the minister usual contain no surprises; it is “like two fencers squaring up to each other before the swords clash. The real conflict of Question Time is in the supplementaries” (322). It is in the improvisation of supplementaries that ardent supporters *and* critics of the government get their chance to publicly valorise or condemn it.

Divisions

Debates and motions in the House of Commons culminate in a division, or vote, of the whole House. The term ‘division’ refers to the fact that Members physically ‘divide’ by rising from their seats and walking through lobbies. When the House is sitting, divisions are daily and routine, so there is reason to regard them as an aspect of procedure or routine. However, we think divisions merit designation as a parliamentary ritual because this method of voting is a distinctive aspect of Westminster, and is the source of debate amongst MPs when it comes to parliamentary reform and modernisation.

A division occurs when an opposed motion is put to the House (an unopposed motion does not trigger a division). A Member will move a motion, for example, that “the bill be read a second time.” Debate amongst members then ensues. At the end of the debate, the Speaker “puts the Question”; i.e. repeats the motion before the House by saying “The Question is, that the Bill be now read a second time. As many as are of that opinion say ‘Aye.’ Of the contrary, ‘No’,” pausing between the last clauses for Members to speak up. If the motion is uncontroversial, an affirmative murmur emanates from the Government side, and the matter is decided without a vote. If, however, the matter is controversial, the two sides will shout out when the Speaker puts the Question. The Speaker will at this stage judge what he thinks is the louder cry and announces, “I think the Ayes [or the Noes] have it.” This decision can be challenged by Members who continue to cry Aye or No. When this happens, a division finally occurs.

The beginning of a division is signified by the Speaker ordering, “Division. Clear the lobby.” The division bell starts ringing, and Members rise from their seats and proceed out of the Chamber on either side of the Speaker’s Chair. The division bell rings around the Parliamentary Estate, and in pubs, restaurants, and even private flats belonging to MPs in the vicinity. Those who are in favour of the motion enter the Aye division lobby, which is to the right of the Chair from the Speaker’s point of view. Those opposed enter the No lobby on the left. Inside, Members queue up to give their names to the clerks from the Clerk’s Department. There are also two ‘tellers’ in each lobby who count the Members as they exit. The tellers are a supporter and an opponent of the issue being voted on, usually a Government and Opposition Whip.²² The tellers are named for each division by the Speaker two minutes after the division bell is first rung. If no teller or only one has come forward on one side, the Speaker declares the other side to have won the division.

When many Members of the Commons are present for the division, it can take up to twenty minutes for all Members to vote. Members have eight minutes from the

²² A division result is invalid if fewer than 40 MPs were present, taking into consideration that there are usually five non-voting Members: the four tellers and the occupant of the Chair (Speaker or Deputy Speaker).

moment the division bell starts to ring to get to the lobbies to vote. After eight minutes, the doorkeepers close and lock the entrance doors to the lobbies to prevent any stragglers getting in.²³ Once their names are recorded, Members can leave the lobbies to return to their seats in the Chamber. When everyone has voted, the four tellers approach the Table in the Chamber, and give the figures to a Clerk. Facing the Chair, one of the tellers for the winning side reads out the numbers. The Speaker then repeats the numbers and announces the results of the division in the following way: “The Ayes to the right, 307. The Noes to the left, 271. So the Ayes have it, the Ayes have it. Unlock.” This is the signal for the doorkeepers to unlock the doors to the division lobbies, and the Commons moves on to the next piece of business.

Reforming the division procedure is a perennial subject of debate within the House of Commons, and particularly for the House of Commons Procedure Committee. Critics see it as archaic and inefficient. Proponents argue that it is an important tradition, it affords Members the chance to gossip and network, and affords backbenchers a rare opportunity to ‘buttonhole’ ministers. Most commentators who have studied the issue report that it is favoured by most Members (see, for example, Griffith and Ryle 1989: 207; Rogers and Walters 2006: 174).

3. BILLS AND LEGISLATION

Debating and scrutinising bills and legislation is one of the major duties of Parliament. This section describes aspects of passing bills and legislation, and some bills themselves that can be characterised as ceremonial or ritualistic. Some of the information will be familiar to readers already to the extent it overlaps with earlier entries.

Outlawries Bill

As discussed in the entry for the State Opening, the Outlawries Bill is a purely ceremonial bill symbolising the Commons’ independence. The House of Commons gives a formal first reading to the Outlawries Bill in the afternoon of the day of the Queen’s Speech. The Outlawries Bill is “‘for the more effectual preventing of clandestine outlawries,’ whose purpose belongs to the distant pass but which is a symbol of the right of the House to proceed with its own business before considering what the Sovereign has just told Parliament in her speech” (Rogers and Walters 2006: 139).²⁴

Ten Minute Rule Bill

Most legislation passed by the UK parliament is legislation initiated by the government. But there are four ways that backbench MPs can initiate legislation, and the ten minute rule bill is one of them, though in reality, few such bills ever become law. Ten minute rule bills are bills introduced under Standing Order No. 23.

Because time slots for ten minute rule bills are limited, MPs who wanted to move a bill used to have to queue outside the Public Bill Office, usually overnight, to secure

²³ I believe Members used to have just six minutes to get to the division lobbies. But the expansion of the Parliamentary Estate over the years, including Portcullis House where many MPs have their offices, was seen as justification to extend the time. [find procedure committee report?]

²⁴ For a more detailed discussion, including the historical origins of, and challenges to, the Outlawries Bill, see HCIO Factsheet G21 (2008).

one (Flynn 1997: 133). Now the slots are allocated to parties in proportion to their representation in the Commons, and the bills' names and date for debate will be listed in the Vote Bundle. As the HCIO Factsheet (2006) explains, ten minute rule bills are not "always serious attempts at legislation. The process is used much more as a means of making a point on the need to change the law on a particular subject. Motions under this rule may also provide the opportunity for a Member to test parliamentary opinion on a subject upon which he/she or other Members may seek to legislate in later sessions." Because ten minute rule bills are moved after [Question Time](#) on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, the House is likely to be full and the MP can garner a lot of attention from MPs and the press for his/her cause. Members are often satisfied with the publicity achieved by their speech in the Chamber, and do not actually wish to take it further.

On the day itself, the Member whose bill it is has ten minutes to make a speech on the bill and to ask the House to introduce it for first reading. If there is opposition to the bill, one MP is allowed to make a speech of not more than ten minutes. If necessary, there is a division. If the House approves the motion for the bill, it is "introduced in a little ceremony that involves the MP walking from the bar of the House to the Table, bowing three times en route. (In a strange historical survival, the second of those bows, halfway up the Chamber, is just at the point where the great chandelier hung in the Chamber destroyed by fire in 1834, where MPs presenting a bill would stop and bow two centuries and more ago.)" (Rogers and Walters 2006: 227). If the House doesn't approve the bill after a division, then it is not introduced and read. Ten minute rule bills can become law but this is rare: between 1983 and 2006, twelve ten minute rule bills have become law, out of 1,154 introduced (HCIO 2006).

'Walking' a Bill to the 'Other Place'

Bills may start their life in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Once they have been passed by one House, they must go to the other House for consideration. Although this now happens electronically (an electronic version of the text of the bill is sent from the Public Bill Office of the Commons to its counterpart in the Lords, or vice versa), a formal ceremony occurs as well. Suppose a bill has received its third reading and has been passed by the Commons. The doorkeepers shout, 'Message to the Lords,' throw open the doors of the Chamber, and one of the Clerks at the Table, wearing a wig and gown, proceeds "in stately fashion" through the Members' Lobby, Central Lobby, to the Bar of the House of Lords. He carries a paper version of the bill, "tied up in Commons green ribbon (known as a 'ferret', from *fioretti*, a sixteenth-century Italian name for a kind of silk)," and hands it to one of the Lords Clerks (Rogers and Walters 2006: 224-5).

Acknowledging the archaic nature of this ceremony, Rogers and Walter point out that it has a practical – as well as symbolic, traditional – function: "near the end of a session, with the 'ping-pong' of amendments between the Houses, that the exact moment of a bill's formal arrival is of some importance. Handing it over in the Chamber makes this publicly evidence in a way that its electronic appearance in a distant office does not" (2006: 225).

Royal assent

When a Bill has completed all its parliamentary stages, it requires Royal Assent from the Queen before it can become law. Bills that receive Royal Assent become Acts of Parliament. Although the Queen can give Royal Assent in person, this has not happened since 1854. The Queen's Assent to a Bill is now automatic. The last time Royal Assent was refused was in 1707/08 when Queen Anne refused her Assent to a Bill for settling the militia in Scotland. When Royal Assent has been given to a Bill, the Speaker in the Commons and the Lord Speaker in the Lords announce the Royal Assent at a suitable break in each House's proceedings. Here is the Hansard entry for a bill which recently received Royal Assent in the Commons (on 21 February 2008):

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Banking (Special Provisions) Act 2008.

The Royal Assent Act 1967 mentioned by Speaker Martin, was passed as a result of events in the 1960s. From the sixteenth century, under the rule of King Henry VIII, until 1854, monarchs could give Royal Assent either in person or by commission. When granting Assent by Commission, the Sovereign authorises three or more (normally five) Lords who are [Privy Counsellors](#) to grant Assent in his or her name. The Lords Commissioners, as the Sovereign's representatives are known, wear scarlet Parliamentary Robes and sit on a bench between the Throne and the [Woolsack](#), with the Speaker and the Commons attending at the Bar of the Lords. The Lords' Reading Clerk reads the Commission aloud; the senior Commissioner then states, "My Lords, in obedience to Her Majesty's Commands, and by virtue of the Commission which has been now read, We do declare and notify to you, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and Commons in Parliament assembled, that Her Majesty has given Her Royal Assent to the several Acts in the Commission mentioned."

However, in 1960, [Black Rod](#) arrived to summon the House of Commons to hear the Commission of Royal Assent during a heated debate, and several members protested against the disruption by refusing to attend the ceremony. This occurred again in 1965; this time, when the Speaker left the chair to go to the House of Lords, some members continued to make speeches. As a result, the Royal Assent Act 1967 was passed, creating an additional form for the granting of the Royal Assent. Under the Royal Assent Act 1967, Royal Assent can be granted by the Sovereign in writing, by means of 'letters patent,' that are presented to the presiding officer of each House of Parliament. Then, the presiding officer makes a formal, but simple statement to the House (as seen above), acquainting each House that the Royal Assent has been granted to the acts mentioned. Thus, the granting of Assent by the monarch in person, or Commission is still possible, but this third form is used on a day-to-day basis.

To summarise, during the 1960s, the ceremony of assenting by Commission was largely discontinued, and is now only employed once a year, at the end of the annual parliamentary session, or Prorogation, when Black Rod interrupts the proceedings of the Commons and summons MPs to the Lords Chamber to hear the Lords Commissioners announce Royal Assent for each Bill.²⁵

²⁵ The House of Lords publishes a briefing called 'Bills and How They Become Law' which describes the stages in each House, and an image of the Queen's signature, signifying Royal Assent to a bill: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/HofLBpBillsandhow.pdf>

4. OFFICERS' AND STAFF CEREMONIES AND RITUALS

We are not only interested in ceremonies and rituals involving MPs and Peers; officers and staff are also integral to the ceremonial and ritual life of Westminster. This section describes some of the roles and duties that they play. However, it has been difficult to find detailed information about who actually executes some of the rituals, and my feeling is that this reflects the low(er) status accorded to some of these individuals – cleaners, doorkeepers, messengers – within such a hierarchical institution.

Prayers

The Speaker's Chaplain delivers prayers for parliament every day that the House sits. The prayers are one of the final elements in the ritual of the Speaker's Procession. The only people in the Chamber during prayers are the Chaplain, the Serjeant at Arms, the Speaker, and MPs. After the Speaker and his or her retinue have processed through the Palace, they take up their various positions in the Chamber for prayers. The doorkeepers close the doors to the Chamber while shouting 'Speaker at prayers!' and ring the bells. The Chaplain reads Psalm 67 and says, 'Let us pray.' The Serjeant at Arms kneels, facing the back of his chair by the bar entrance to the Chamber. Members of Parliament turn to face the walls. This custom is attributed to "the difficulty Members would once have faced of kneeling to pray whilst wearing a sword" (HCIO 2004: 3). "From their positions at the opposite sides of the Table the Speaker and Chaplain bow to the empty Chair, turn inwards, bow to each other and then take their places at the Table" (Thorne 1980: 2). Interestingly, the prayer that the Chaplain reads today is somewhat shorter than that read 30 years ago.²⁶ When prayers are over (they last an estimated three to five minutes), the Chaplain and Speaker rise, and bow. "As the Speaker rises, the doorkeepers shout 'Prayers are over'; the galleries are opened to guests and visitors; the Clerks' chairs are set at the Table; and, as the Speaker rises to begin proceedings with 'Order, order,' television coverage starts" (Rogers and Walters 2006: 150).

Here is Betty Boothroyd on the changes to the ritual during her tenure as Speaker: "Before [Chaplain Donald Gray retired], we discussed changes to the daily Prayers for Parliament. They had done yeoman service since the late seventeenth century, but some parts of them were overdue for retirement. Instead of praying for the Queen's 'health and wealth', we now ask that she be granted long to live. And a separate prayer for members of the royal family has been replaced by a prayer for the Queen, her Government and all those in positions of public responsibility, that they may 'never lead the nation wrongly through love of power, desire to please, or unworthy ideals'. After John Smith's death, I also authorised a new prayer to be said for Members who died in service of the House" (Boothroyd 2001: 264).

Filling the snuff box

²⁶ The prayer recoded on the Factsheet consists of 79 words, whereas the one recorded by Thorne in his booklet on ceremonial is 146 words.

There is a snuff box situated by the doorkeepers' box at the entrance to the House of Commons Chamber. Someone – probably a doorkeeper but I have been unable to confirm them – checks, and refills if necessary, the snuff box so that Members and Officers of the House can help themselves if they need some tobacco. According to House of Commons Factsheet G7 (2004), this tradition originated in the eighteenth century. The snuff is paid for by taxes. This is the only form of tobacco permitted in the House, as smoking has been banned – in the Chamber and in committee – since 1693.

Hoisting the flag

When Parliament is sitting, the Union flag is flown from the Victoria Tower of the Palace of Westminster. When Parliament is not sitting, the flag will not be flown, except for on a set of sixteen appointed days, which generally correspond with royal birthdays and other royal dates, such as the anniversary of the Queen's coronation or wedding day (see HC Library standard note SN/PC/4474 Oct 2007). Major Mike Charlesworth, Staff Superintendent, House of Lords is responsible for flag flying in the Palace of Westminster (Kevin Williams, HC Information Office, personal communication, June 2008).

Cleaning and maintenance of the Chamber

Unsurprisingly, little is to be gleaned from official documents about traditions and rules surrounding how the Chamber and other rooms in the Palace are routinely maintained. I say 'routinely' to distinguish the cleaning that takes place overnight from the more 'glamorous' maintenance of the decoration of parliament – more about that in a moment.

The only reference to cleaning that I have come across during this research is in relation to the Mace: "The Mace remains on the Table when a sitting is suspended, although during an overnight suspension it is removed to allow the cleaning of the Chamber to take place and is put back on the Table shortly before the sitting resumes" (Thorne 1980: 46). Thorne does not explain this curious statement. It is unclear how the Mace would impede cleaning of the Chamber. Is it going to spring to life and clunk cleaners over the head? One explanation is that only members of the Royal Household, such as the Serjeant at Arms, are allowed to touch the Mace since it symbolises the Sovereign. Another, more prosaic, explanation is simply that people were worried the Mace would be stolen. Either way, there are distasteful overtones to this ritual.

As is well-known, the Palace of Westminster's ornate interior – woodwork, wallpaper, furnishings, etc. – was designed by Augustus Welby Pugin. In a television interview with the BBC, Speaker Michael Martin, who used to be a sheetmetal-worker, listed as one of his proudest accomplishments the creation of an apprenticeship programme to specially train people for the upkeep of the Palace.²⁷

²⁷ See <http://search.bbc.co.uk/cgi-bin/search/results.pl?tab=av&q=speaker+michael+martin+exclusive&recipe=all&start=2&scope=all&link=next>

REFERENCES

- ABÉLÈS, M. (1988) Modern political ritual: Ethnography of an inauguration and a pilgrimage by President Mitterrand. *Current Anthropology*, 29, 391-404.
- BELL, C. (2005) Ritual [Further Considerations]. IN JONES, L. (Ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Religion*. Second Edition ed. Detroit, Macmillan Reference USA.
- BELLAH, R. (1968) Civil Religion in America. IN MCLOUGHLIN, W. & BELLAH, R. (Eds.) *Religion in America*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.
- BLOCH, M. (2005) Ritual and deference. IN BLOCH, M. (Ed.) *Essays on Cultural Transmission*. Oxford, Berg.
- BOOTHROYD, B. (2001) *Betty Boothroyd: The Autobiography* London Century.
- CHAMBERS, C. (2007) *Sex, Culture and Justice: The Limits of Choice*, University Park, PA, Penn State Press.
- CREWE, E. (2005) *Lords of Parliament: Manners, rituals and politics*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- CREWE, E. (2006) Rituals and the Usual Channels in the British House of Lords. IN CREWE, E. & MÜLLER, M. G. (Eds.) *Rituals in Parliament*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang.
- CREWE, E. & MÜLLER, M. G. (2006) Introduction. IN CREWE, E. & MÜLLER, M. G. (Eds.) *Rituals in Parliament*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang.
- FLYNN, P. (1997) *Commons Knowledge: How to be a backbencher* Bridgend, Wales, Poetry Wales Press.
- GALLIE, W. B. (1956) Essentially Contested Concepts. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56, 167-198.
- GEERTZ, C. (1973) Ritual and Social Change. IN GEERTZ, C. (Ed.) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York, Basic Books.
- GLUCKMAN, M. (1962) Les Rites De Passage. IN GLUCKMAN, M. (Ed.) *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- GOFFMAN, E. (1967) *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behaviour*, Middlesex, Penguin Books.
- GRIFFITH, J. A. G. & RYLE, M. (1997) *Parliament: Functions, Practice and Procedure*, London, Sweet and Maxwell.
- HOUSE OF COMMONS INFORMATION OFFICE (2003a) The Speaker (Factsheet M2 Members Series). London, House of Commons Information Office.
- HOUSE OF COMMONS INFORMATION OFFICE (2004) Some Traditions and Customs of the House of Commons (Factsheet G7 General Series). London, House of Commons Information Office.
- KING, O. (2007) *The Oona King Diaries: House Music*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing.
- KÜRTI, L. (2006) Symbolism and drama within the ritualisation of the Hungarian parliament. IN CREWE, E. & MÜLLER, M. G. (Eds.) *Rituals in Parliament*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang.
- LANE, C. (1981) *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society: The Soviet case*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

- LIPSITZ, L. (1968) If, as Verba says, the state functions as a religion, what are we to do then to save our souls? *American Political Science Review*, 62, 527-535.
- LUKES, S. (1977) Political ritual and social integration. IN LUKES, S. (Ed.) *Essays in Social Theory*. London, MacMillan.
- MANN, A. J. (2006) The Scottish Parliaments: the role of ritual and procession in the pre-1707 parliament and the new parliament of 1999. IN CREWE, E. & MÜLLER, M. G. (Eds.) *Rituals in Parliament*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang.
- MOORE, S. F. & MYERHOFF, B. G. (1977) Introduction: Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings. *Secular Ritual*. Amsterdam., Van Gorcum.
- MÜLLER, M. G. (2006) Parliaments and their liturgies. IN CREWE, E. & MÜLLER, M. G. (Eds.) *Rituals in Parliament*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang.
- OLSSON, S. & TREMAINE, M. (2002) The “Maiden Stakes”: Ritual and Rhetoric as Masks of Political Diversity in First-time Political Speeches. *New Zealand Sociology*, 17, 258-281.
- ROGERS, R. & WALTERS, R. (2006) *How Parliament Works*, Harlow, Essex, Pearson Education Ltd.
- THORNE, P. F. (1980) *Ceremonial and the Mace in the House of Commons*. London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- TURNER, V. (1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York, Aldine De Gruyter.
- VAN GENNEP, A. (1909) *The Rites of Passage*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- VERBA, S. (1965) The Kennedy assassination and the nature of political commitment. IN GREENBERG, B. & PARKER, E. (Eds.) *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.
- VERBA, S. (1968) If, as Lipsitz thinks, political science is to save our souls, God help us! *American Political Science Review*, 62, 576-77.
- WALKER, A. & WOOD, E. (2000) The Parliamentary Oath (Library Research Paper 00/17). London, House of Commons Library, Parliament and Constitution Centre.
- ZEUSSE, E. M. (2005) Ritual. [First Edition]. IN JONES, L. (Ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Religion*. Second edition ed. Detroit, Macmillan Reference USA.