Government Publications

A SUBCOMMITTEE of the A.L.A. Public Documents Committee has been made responsible for a section in College and Research Libraries which is devoted to various phases of work with government publications.

It is intended that the scope of the contributions which appear in the section shall include annotated lists of bibliographical aids, subject lists of public documents, and notes of general interest to persons engaged in work in this field.

The committee: Violet Abbott Cabeen, chairman, James B. Childs, Mary Brown Humphrey, Robert E. Scudder.

By GRACE A. CAMPBELL

British Government Documents: A Guide to Their Use

British official publications form a convenient and unequalled source of factual information on current political, economic, and social developments in the British Empire, owing to their wide range, good technical production, and authoritative character. They are, in fact, often the principal or sole source of information on particular subjects.

H. B. Lees-Smith in his monograph entitled A Guide to Parliamentary and Official Papers groups these publications as follows:

1. Parliamentary Publications.
2. Stationery Office Publications (Since 1922 called Non-Parliamentary Publications).
4. Parliamentary Debates.
6. The Bound Volumes of This Last Group of Papers Issued to Form a Permanent Record.

To these might be added an eighth classification, Acts of Parliament.

The major portion of the documents are published by His Majesty's Stationery Office. This office is also charged with their distribution and sale. Established at the latter end of the eighteenth century as a government stationer's office, its functions are similar in many respects to those of the United States Government Printing Office and of the Superintendent of Documents.

The following current official lists are issued by the Stationery Office:


Issued monthly (with a subject index through May, 1940). Includes Parliamentary and Non-Parliamentary Publications. Replaces Monthly List of Publications and Monthly Circular Divided as follows: first, Descriptive Notes on Chief Publications of the Month; second, Catalog of Publications Issued during the Month. The latter is divided into: first, Parliamentary Publications; second, Non-Parliamentary Publications (the departments are arranged alphabetically by the significant words in the

SEPTEMBER, 1941

355


These two lists correspond in a general way to the United States Government Publications Monthly Catalog, with its annual index. The British list had the advantage of an index to the monthly issues through May 1940, when it was discontinued owing to the pressure of the war situation in Great Britain. Departmental and subject lists of Non-Parliamentary Publications are also available from the Stationery Office. They are comparable to the Price Lists issued by the United States Superintendent of Documents Office. Outstanding examples of the British lists are those issued by the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Public Record Office (List Q), the Admiralty, and the Air Ministry. However, the publication of these lists has been discontinued for the duration of the war.

There are general indexes to Parliamentary Publications, each covering a period of years, but there are no indexes to Non-Parliamentary Publications for like periods. There is no British publication corresponding to the United States Document Catalog, which forms a permanent record of both Congressional and departmental publications since 1893. The need of such a catalog for British publications was not felt until the time of the first World War, because of the fact that so large a proportion of these documents had been included previously in the Parliamentary Publications and were thus covered by the general indexes to the latter.

Although Non-Parliamentary Papers have been issued for many years, no permanent lists exist previous to 1894. The lack of permanent inclusive indexes to Non-Parliamentary Papers is a handicap to the user of British government documents.

1. Parliamentary Publications

Parliamentary Papers are all those papers presented to Parliament ordered to be laid on the table of the House, and recorded and indexed in the Journals. Some of these re-
main unprinted. Those in circulation as printed papers consist of the papers, other than the Votes and Proceedings, and the Journal, ordered to be printed by either of the Houses and of printed papers laid before the Houses by Royal Command and incorporated by them in their collections of sessional papers.\(^5\)

Parliamentary Papers are numbered in a distinctive way according to the class of documents to which they belong. The numbers appear at the bottom left-hand corner of the title page. House of Lords Papers and Bills are numbered in one sequence and the number is inclosed in curved brackets. House of Commons Reports and Papers form one sequence and the numbers appear without brackets. House of Commons Bills have the word “Bill” prefixed to the number and the whole inclosed in square brackets. The above series are numbered afresh at each session of Parliament. Command Papers are numbered consecutively, theoretically up to 9999, when they start afresh with number one and a prefix. The number was inclosed in square brackets up to 1923. It is still so inclosed in the Numerical List and Index. The numbers of Parliamentary Papers at present appear thus:

- House of Lords Papers and Bills. (5)
- House of Commons Reports and Papers. 5
- House of Commons Bills. [Bill 5]
- Command Papers. Cmd. 5469

The House of Commons arranges its sessional papers for binding in a different fashion from that in which they first appear. They are arranged thus:

1. Public Bills.
2. Reports from Committees, Standing
3. Reports from Commissioner, Reports from Royal Commissions and Similar Bodies.
4. Accounts and Papers.

Private bills printed at the expense of the proposer are available only from these private sources and are not collected in the sessional papers. Inside the four groups listed above, the arrangement is alphabetical by subject. A general alphabetical index entitled, Numerical List and Index to Printed Sessional Papers, is published for each session. As a companion to this index there is published also sessionally Titles and Contents to the Sessional Papers. This includes a title page and index to each volume. Sheets are supplied showing the requisite lettering for the back of each volume when bound. A reference to both the unbound publication and to the bound publication should read, for House of Commons Reports and Papers: H.C. 90, p.2 (1887) XXXIX, 517; and for Command Papers after the period 1833: Cd. 1510, p.83, H.C. (1903) XX, 573.\(^5\)

The House of Lords papers are arranged similarly. To avoid duplication the practice has been followed since 1900 of binding the Command Papers only in the House of Commons Sessional Papers. A Table and Index for the House of Lords papers was issued for each session up through 1920, but for 1921 to date there is only a general table of contents in the first volume of each session.

The British Sessional Papers have many points in common with the Serial Set of the United States Congressional documents. The arrangement of the Sessional Papers is more logical than that of the

---


\(^8\)Ibid., p. 97-98.
Serial Set. United States Senate and House documents and reports, although printed in separate volumes, are combined in one numbered (serial) set with a numerical list and schedule of volumes published for each session.

Colors have been used to distinguish types of British Parliamentary documents.

While the Parliamentary Papers, particularly the series of bound sessional volumes, are generally though not universally known as Blue Books, only a small proportion of them today are issued in blue covers. All the smaller documents are issued without covers and the title page is printed on the same paper used for the text; such documents are known consequently as White Papers. Individual documents, then, may be either Blue Books, or White Papers according to their outward appearance. . . .

Command Papers

The Command Papers form the largest single class of annual Parliamentary Papers. These include papers which do not actually originate in the House. They are presented to the House nominally by royal command. Included here, among other things, are reports of the older or more important government departments, important royal commissions, and noteworthy statements of government policy.

The series have been issued thus:
First series 1818-1832  Not scheduled
Second series 1833-1868-69  [1]-[4222]
Third series 1870-1899  [C.1]-[C.9550]
Fourth series 1900-1918  [Cd.1]-[Cd.9239]
Fifth series 1919-date  [Cmd.1]-date

Some of the annuals in this class have been issued for many years. Among these are the Statistical Abstract for the British Empire and the Statistical Abstract for the United Kingdom. These abstracts supply for the British nation information similar to that furnished by the United States government in its Statistical Abstract.

Reports of Committees and Commissions

Although the reports of the various Parliamentary committees and commissions are published in the Parliamentary Papers, the minutes of evidence and appendices are sometimes published as Non-Parliamentary Papers. This fact should not confuse one accustomed to using United States documents since the hearings, on which reports published in the Congressional set are based, are very rarely published in the Congressional series. Royal commissions are appointed by the Crown, sometimes at its own discretion and sometimes on the advice or demand of one or both Houses. They differ from the select committees of either House which are appointed from the House naming the committee, and the departmental committees which are selected from the departments with an occasional outsider included. Another type of committee which is of interest, is the department advisory committee, which has grown increasingly common since 1918.

Royal commissions have played an important part in the government of Great Britain. The first one was appointed in 1386. Quite often the report of the commission is known by the name of the chairman, a fact which is often a source


358

COLLEGE AND RESEARCH LIBRARIES
of considerable confusion to users of these reports. For instance, the report of the *Indian Statutory Commission* is known as the *Simon Report* from the name of its chairman, Sir John Simon. Royal commissions are independent except for the control of the Treasury over their expenses. Sidney Webb says of them, ... They are frequently set up as a safety valve, or a channel for current agitations and counter agitations so as to enable the government, Parliament, and public opinion to test the value of, and to estimate the force behind, each of these agitations. From the standpoint of democratic control, and the education of public opinion, the British royal commission or committee of enquiry is the analogue of the American practice of public hearings. ...  

An example of a similar body in the United States is the recent U.S. Temporary National Economic Committee. A useful finding list of royal commission reports has been compiled by A. H. Cole.

**Official and Nonofficial Indexes to the Lords and Commons Papers**

The *House of Commons Papers* were printed as far back as 1641. From 1801 to 1835 some of them were included in the appendix to the *Journals*, where they could be examined by the public, but they were not put on sale until 1835. The *House of Lords Papers* were sold beginning with 1854. The *Sessional Papers* as such date back to about 1800. Collections of *Parliamentary Papers* date back to 1731, but only since the beginning of the nineteenth century have entire sets been preserved. Catalogs of the *House of Commons Papers* have been prepared covering the period 1751 to 1800, and of the *Reports* from 1696 to 1834. A compilation of the reports from committees of the House and an index to them has been printed by order of the House.


Besides annual indexes to the *House of Commons Papers* and the *House of Lords Papers*, there are also some general indexes, each covering a period of time, which facilitates the search for information.


The volumes are not numbered.


The index 1852-99 through a serious error omits the sessional and command numbers of the documents. This series is continued by the annual index to the *Sessional Papers.*

history and archeology, imperial and foreign affairs, medicine and public health, public administration, industry and technology, trade and commerce, transport and communications.

The tendency in recent years has been to transfer documents formerly issued as Parliamentary Papers to the Non-Parliamentary group. This has been done in response to demands for retrenchment. The following aids have been suggested to the searcher of public papers.

For a list of publications which were suspended, etc., by various government departments during the Great War, the reader is referred to the Report of the Select Committee on Publications and Debates' Reports, 1916 (H.C. 112/1916), Appendix I; whilst for those which were transferred as the result of the postwar economy campaign the report of the same committee for 1923 (H.C. 140/1923) should be consulted. 17

The John Crerar Library has prepared a list showing the transfers in the Sessional Papers from 1914 to 1933. 18 The prewar average total number of volumes of Sessional Papers at each session was approximately one hundred volumes; now it is about thirty. The Non-Parliamentary Publications have increased in volume correspondingly in the last twenty-five years. Among these are many publications which furnish the source material for the study of economic and social questions. A valuable series which provides an index to statistics contained in Parliamentary and Non-Parliamentary Publications is:


Such an index is urgently needed for

15 Ibid.
17 Horrocks, op. cit., p. 98.
United States government statistical publications.

3. Statutory Rules and Orders

The rules and regulations of general interest for any department are collected and published annually in the Statutory Rules and Orders. "... These regulations are made by government departments in the exercise of powers conferred upon them by some act of Parliament."19 They have the effect of law and are comparable to the regulations found in the United States Code of Federal Regulations. At present, two volumes a year are published. There is an index, issued triennially, to all Statutory Rules and Orders in force. The Statutory Rules and Orders issued before December 31, 1903, and which were still in force on that date, have been published in a series of volumes known as the Revised Statutory Rules and Orders. A separate collection, not in Statutory Rules and Orders, entitled Manual of Emergency Legislation and containing war legislation for 1914-18 was published in five volumes.

4. Parliamentary Debates

The record of Parliamentary debates for the period before 1803 is covered by Cobbett's Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803. This series, published by Hansard in thirty-six volumes, is a retrospective compilation rather than a current record.20 The Parliamentary Debates proper begin in 1803 and are divided into five series:

1. 1803-20, 41 vols.
4. 1892-1908, 77 vols.
5. 1909 to the present date.21

There is an index for each volume and a general index for each year. The debates were privately reported up to 1907, although the government gave financial aid beginning in 1855. The verbatim reports began in 1909, and since that date the debates of the two Houses have been published separately. The name of the early reporter and printer, Hansard, is often applied to the whole series. A supplementary series containing the debates in standing committees has been published since 1919. The entire set is comparable to the United States Congressional Record and the publications which preceded it.

5. Papers Dealing with the Day-to-Day Proceedings of Parliament

The Blue Paper which is sent to the homes of the members every morning contains a record of the proceedings of Parliament, business to come before Parliament, questions for oral answer, and much general information. One of the principal sections of the Blue Paper is the Votes and Proceedings, which consists of a record of the decisions of the House of Commons on the previous day. It contains the information corresponding to that found in "History of Bills and Resolutions" in the United States Congressional Record. The House Votes and Proceedings have been printed for sale to the public since 1680. The White Paper is issued to members after they reach the House. It consists only of those parts of the Blue Paper which make up the agenda for the day.22 It is comparable to the Daily Calendar of the United States Congress.

SEPTEMBER, 1941
The Blue Paper and White Paper are supplemented by four other documents which are furnished to members, namely, the Order Book of the House of Commons, the Weekly List of Public Bills, the list of Statutory Rules and Orders, and the Supply Lists, which show the account of the progress of the different Votes in Supply.23


The bound volumes of these papers differ in arrangement from the plan on which they are issued to members. According to Lees-Smith the arrangement is as follows: (1) Votes, (2) Supplements to Votes, (3) Notices of Motion and Orders of the Day, (4) Public Bills, (5) Public Petitions, (6) Private Business, (7) Amendments to Private Bills, (8) Standing Committees, (9) Divisions.24 The Divisions correspond to the Yea and Nay Votes of the United States Congress.

The House of Lords Minutes were printed beginning with 1824 but were not placed on sale until 1854.

7. Journals of Parliament

The Journals are the official proceedings of both Houses. The Journals of the House of Commons and the House of Lords were begun in their present form with the record for 1547 and 1509 respectively. They are printed for each session with an annual index at the end of each volume. The printing of the Journals (beginning with sixteenth century records) was first undertaken in the latter part of the eighteenth century. General indexes issued in volumes covering periods of approximately ten years each are available for both series. The general indexes are very full and are often used instead of the Journals themselves. They contain a collection of precedents which are useful in the business of both Houses.


Each act of Parliament is published separately first in the same manner as are the Slip Laws published by the United States Department of State. Local and private acts are issued only in separate leaflet form and must be bound by those collecting them. An annual bound volume entitled Public General Acts, containing the public acts, is issued. It is roughly comparable to the United States Statutes at Large. An annual publication of great importance is entitled Chronological Table and Index of the Statutes, in two volumes: (1) Chronological table of all statutes since 1235 with an indication of subsequent repealing acts, (2) Index to statutes in force. For the complete set of statutes in force, the following is also needed:


Covers the statutes 1235-1920, arranged chronologically. Kept up to date by the annual volume of Public General Acts which have been published separately since 1886.

For the period of the Interregnum the following compilation must be consulted: