I Spy Strangers:
Improving access to Parliament
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I Spy Strangers

"I Spy Strangers!" It's a call heard until very recently in the House of Commons. The famous words, now done away with, were simply a technical device to delay parliamentary proceedings by clearing the press and public galleries of "strangers", the voters and visitors who sit there not of right, but by kind permission of the Members. The phrase may have gone, but its legacy lingers on. At a symbolic level, it sums up the attitude to anyone who is not a member of that most exclusive of Britain's club, the House of Commons. Though Tony Blair promised a "people's government" when he came to office in 1997, Westminster is very far from being a "people's Parliament". The People are Strangers, not Owners. They are allowed to peer from the Strangers' Gallery, and if they are with an MP, to drink in the Strangers' Bar - one of the few bars of the many within the Palace where outsiders may go.

Back in the nineteenth century, a clerk to the House of Commons, Sir Reginald Palgrave, was trying to explain some of the quirkier rituals of Parliament: "The House conducts both its business and its manners according to chance remarks, or casual rules, recorded in the Journals of about three centuries ago; which rules were, in their turn, founded upon custom and usage of immemorial antiquity." Yet even today, in the new millennium, little has changed: in big ways and small ones, Westminster still runs on rules dreamt up in Elizabethan times, an accretion of pre-democratic instincts and prejudices which combine, despite many well-meaning efforts, to make the Palace feel cold, ritualised, unwelcoming and stuffy.

Indeed, in some respects, access to Parliament is far more restricted than it was historically. The corridors and lobbies of the Commons during the Restoration, Stuart and early Georgian periods, crammed with fruit-sellers, petitioners, passers-by and prostitutes, are unimaginable now. Part of the reason, clearly, is security and the terrorist (or lunatic) threat. But one has to ask to what extent 'security' has become a catch-all and lazy excuse for keeping doors shut and people out. Certainly, the Strangers themselves seem to notice how unwelcome they are: Parliament's relative inaccessibility must have some connection with today's cynical and uninterested mood about Westminster. Parliament is too remote from the British people, in style, in tradition, in language and in atmosphere. Unless it brings itself into the twenty-first century, it will inevitably become even more marginalised than it is today. That ought to worry everyone concerned with our democracy.

It clearly does not need to be this way. The new legislatures in Scotland and Wales with their relative informality and accessibility have put into even sharper focus some of Westminster's more archaic ways. New Labour came to power promising
to modernize the House of Commons as one of its manifesto commitments. The modernisation committee it established has done away with some of the more ridiculous quirks, such as the wearing of top hats to make a point of order during divisions. Yet even some of those on the committee admit reform has been slow to the point of grudging. Though there are many issues here, including the efficiency of parliamentary scrutiny, this paper will look at just how inaccessible Parliament is in three ways: physical access, access to information and television access.

1) PHYSICAL ACCESS

a) Access for the general public

For ordinary voters, the task of trying to get into the House of Commons to watch the proceedings and see what the MP they have chosen is up to, can be daunting. It requires luck, or great determination, or both. To see anything of interest, like Question Time, or a controversial debate, the only way to get in is through the offices of a friendly MP. Say, for example, that Mrs Vote wants to go along in person to see the spectacle she’s seen so often on television, Prime Minister’s Question Time. How does she go about it? Sorry, Mrs Vote, the tickets for the best show the Commons has to offer are strictly limited, and only available through MPs. The best she can do is join the queue outside St. Stephen’s Entrance, which consists mainly of tourists (as if the home of British democracy was merely another attraction, like Madame Tussauds, albeit slightly less lively)… and wait. There’s no chance at all of catching Prime Minister’s Questions, but she may get a glimpse of the debates afterwards. If it’s a controversial subject, the authorities suggest that two hours of waiting time is realistic, though after 6 pm, the queues do die down. And this is not a happy way to pass a couple of hours. When Mrs Vote finally makes it from the queue on the traffic-choked street through the famous portals of St Stephen’s, she’ll find herself sitting on a bench in yet another queue. From time to time, rude officials will order her to shove up the bench a bit until she reaches the top. Then Mrs Vote will be escorted by more rude officials, dressed in tails and a white bow tie, to the gallery where she’ll be “shushed” and ordered into a seat - to look down on, and try to fathom out the proceedings below. At regular intervals, she’ll be moved along by the officials to another seat - in theory to gain a better view, though in practice it seems to serve only to add to the confusion.

As it will most likely be a debate by the time Mrs Vote gets into the gallery above the chamber, she will find the chamber sparsely populated and have to work out for herself what stage of the debate has been reached and how long it will all go on for. She gets little or no help in understanding the arcane procedures. But Mrs
Vote, after all that waiting, is a resilient woman. She sticks the course, listens to a couple of speeches and a question then, little wiser, decides to reward herself with a cup of tea. Forget it. There is nowhere for Strangers to eat or drink - unless they have an "insider" to accompany them, and then it's only the Strangers' Cafeteria, where few of the famous or familiar faces can be spotted. Once you leave the gallery, there's no going back - well, not without joining that queue outside again. Even outside the building, there are precious few cafes or bars in easy walking distance. What about a call of nature? If Mrs Vote is most insistent, a grumpy official may accompany her to one of the few ladies' conveniences but she'll never find one herself - they're extremely well concealed. The introduction of debates in Westminster Hall has eased the situation a little with seating provided for thirty-five spectators. But these sessions only take place for a limited time on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and there is still a long wait for seats.

All this is set to change - a little. MPs have realised that they're not exactly making the voters feel welcome, so come the summer there's to be a new Visitor Centre with information about Parliament and how it works. There will even be somewhere for Mrs Vote to find refreshments. Unfortunately, at present, these homely touches are only to last for six politically unimportant weeks a year - during the summer recess when MPs are safely hidden hundreds of miles away in Italian villas or Provencal farmhouses. Apart from these six weeks, Strangers remain just that, unwanted and unwelcome. Even a tour of the historic buildings is only available to those who've been able to fix one up through an MP. For the main assembly of a modern, plural nation which prides itself on its vigorous democratic traditions, this is nothing short of a scandal.

What about using MPs, the other obvious route? They are allocated only two tickets each fortnight for debates in the Chamber, and for the most part they will give those up to constituency officials and other important characters they want to keep sweet. Even so, let us suppose that Mrs Vote is lucky enough to be given a ticket. Then, she may indeed find herself watching Prime Minister's Questions - but unless she's been a very keen TV student of the proceedings, she will find it hard to work out what's happening. The Order Paper she will be given contains a bewildering array of information, with such phrases as "Committee stage, 1st day", "Second reading" and "Adjournment debate" which come second nature to those who've lived in the highways and byways of Westminster for years, but mean nothing to a visitor from outside. If there is a debate on a bill in progress, the process of trying to work out what each amendment boils down to defies even regular Westminster watchers. There's no reason, other than tradition, why the Order Paper cannot be modernised and simplified.
Contrast this with the new Scottish Parliament. It is still in its temporary quarters in the Church of Scotland General Assembly buildings at Edinburgh's Royal Mile, while the arguments continue over the new structure going up (or, currently, not going up) close to Holyroodhouse. Even so, the determination to welcome outsiders is striking to anyone brought up on the Westminster model. There is security, but it is not so intrusive. Visitors are not looked upon suspiciously.

There is also a Visitors' Centre with large displays and interactive services, giving information about the history and work of Scotland's new parliament and its temporary home. It all adds up to the impression of an institution which welcomes the general public, rather than trying to exclude them. MSPs with Westminster experience say that the whole atmosphere is much jollier, more welcoming. It appears the new Parliament really does want the voters to see what's going on. Instead of "What the hell are you doing here?", the attitude is more "Hi, nice to see you, what can we do to help?"

A clear example of how the Scottish Parliament is more open to its people is demonstrated by the use of petitions. In Edinburgh, anyone can take a petition to the Parliament, calling for example, for a factory to be saved from closure. The public are allowed to go along in person to present it. At Westminster, petitions can only be taken in and read out by MPs - no matter how many signatures a petition has. But the real difference lies in what happens to the petition. At Westminster, after the words have been read out, the host of carefully collected signatures are deposited in a green bag behind the Speaker's chair, and never heard of again. In Edinburgh, there's a Public Petitions Committee, specifically charged with following up whatever has been suggested in the petitions. The petition may not always win its aim, but at least it's taken seriously.

b) Access for lobby groups and journalists

The situation for lobby groups is vastly easier than for the general public at Westminster. Though many smaller companies and badly-informed organisations still make use of expensive and unnecessary lobbying firms to obtain access to the Commons, the relative ease of booking rooms for meetings, obtaining official papers and meeting MPs is well understood by most corporate and voluntary sector organisations. Experienced lobbyists such as Charles Miller have produced accessible and easy to use explanations of civil service structures and it is not difficult to find the right level of official or politician to approach. Perhaps as a reaction to the corporate excesses of the Eighties and the resulting more cautious and disciplined approach of the ruling party, not to say tighter
parliamentary rules about declaring interests, there's far less crude lobbying of the party-giving, all-expenses-paid variety. Anecdotal evidence suggests that companies seeking to alter legislation or to raise some issue in the Commons are rather more sophisticated and knowing than they used to be. Although still in its early stages, the attempt to open the Civil Service to people from outside the public sector has produced a more open environment for voluntary and corporate groups. And the culture of excessive secrecy among civil servants is loosening. Today it's not unusual to find a senior civil servant addressing a conference alongside a government minister; thankfully the days when "Sir Humphreys" were kept locked away like some all powerful but mysterious genie, are receding.

Greater publicity for the work of Select Committees, partly as a result of televising, has similarly resulted in a greater awareness of their role and an increased readiness by lobbying groups to approach their staff and members with suggestions for inquiries or even requests to give evidence. On the other hand, the narrowing and professionalism of politics, described by Peter Riddell and other commentators, means that the MPs often have less primary knowledge about the issues on which they are lobbied. Professional lobby companies have been curbed in key areas, with less apparent exploitation of researchers' passes and less hubris about their ability to guarantee top-class access. To some extent, the scandals of the 'sleaze' era, magnified by the press and even in popular fiction, have changed the atmosphere in which parliamentary lobbying is conducted. At any rate, there are few serious complaints about a lack of access to Parliament - Commons or Lords - on the part of voluntary or corporate bodies.

c) Access for the press

When it comes to the media, the picture is far more complex. Physically, there have been new restrictions on the ability of journalists to mingle with MPs. The less important restrictions have been the formal ones, above all reduced access to the Terrace during the summer for lobby journalists and the ineffective Government ban on ministerial lunching with them - much trumpeted during the immediate aftermath of the 1997 general election victory and quietly forgotten thereafter.

More important is the informal restriction which has come about by the emptying of Parliament for much of the week and during many evenings. The crowded lobbies and corridors of the Eighties and early to mid Nineties, when Conservative ministers were easily accessible to the political reporters of any national newspaper or broadcaster, are long gone. There is far less mingling and far fewer chance encounters. It is even the case that the bars are emptier!
The reasons are obvious. The New Labour government learned lessons from its Tory predecessors and, does its best to ensure potential mischief makers do not while away the long evenings in the company of lobby hacks with expense accounts which feed the free flow of information. Loyalty to the party line is now ranked above ability and diligence as the most likely guarantee of future success. Ministers are more tightly scrutinised by the centre and perhaps worked harder too. Key ministers, unlike the majority of the governing party, are regularly excused from voting duties by the Government whip and the Prime Minister’s personal distaste for the Commons club has been influential in persuading others to stop spending much time there. It does still happen of course. When there’s an important division (or vote, in ordinary language) MPs can be found on their way to the voting lobbies, and it remains a chance for journalists to catch the person they’ve been hunting. This is still however, very much a white, middle class, middle aged man’s world. Despite the influx of Labour women at the last election, the atmosphere of the Commons and of the press gallery is predominantly male and unwelcoming to female, non-white or working class intruders. The old gentlemen’s club, old school tie era of the Tory governments has given way to a culture of football loving, beer drinking laddishness, which is just as exclusive in its own way as the previous regime had been.

New Labour’s suspicion of the press and parliament has led to less contact at Westminster between journalists and ministers than used to be the case. Indeed, it is often more productive for journalists to loiter around the television and radio studios of Number Four Millbank, than the often-deserted Members’ Lobby of the House of Commons. How much does any of this matter? It could equally be argued that by putting the daily Lobby briefings by the Prime Minister’s Press Secretary on the record (and making their contents attributable to Alistair Campbell), combined with the easily-accessed official information contained in the Parliamentary and departmental websites, the diligent journalist’s life is easier than it used to be.

Modern technology has made journalists’ lives simpler in another respect. MPs are much easier to get hold of - if they want to be found. Nowadays it’s a brave parliamentarian who doesn’t carry a pager for the whips’ instructions - and usually a mobile phone as well. So the days of leaving a message at Member’s Telephones, and hoping the MP would pass by one of the eagle-eye attendants who’d press the message into his hand, are gone. With deadlines ever more urgent in journalism, it’s important to be able to find MPs at a few moments notice - something which was simply not possible when the majority didn’t have a proper office, secretary, or message taking service. But the kind of information obtained is different in an
emptier, duller Commons: less is reported about divisions and debates inside government; and this is either a great management success by New Labour or a failure by the Fourth Estate, depending on your point of view.

2) ACCESS TO INFORMATION

As I have noted already, the Internet has increased access to Parliamentary information. Yet it remains the great missed opportunity: Through new technology, Westminster could, if it chose to, become a modern, accountable, accessible legislature. Yet many MPs still boast proudly that they're no more likely to surf the web than fly to the moon. They have failed to grasp the potential of the Internet, and are reluctant to adapt to the times.

Once, Hansard, the daily transcription of proceedings, was only available to a select few, and at a high price. Now it's to be found on the web, the day it is published. While roughly the same number of copies of Hansard are printed as before, there are enormous number of hits on the Hansard website. This will surely increase too, as voters become more Internet-friendly, with the Prime Minister now crusading for an almost wholly net-connected nation. Until fairly recently, the information was of great use to computer nerds or political obsessives, who took the time and trouble to find their way to the information, but still very hard to come by for your average voter. This has now changed: the Net has brought the most significant increase in public access to parliamentary business certainly since the arrival of television in the Chamber, and perhaps for decades before that. Unlike the TV cameras, the Net offers a huge back catalogue of information on every conceivable subject.

The Hansard sites, including the select committee coverage, are well organised, relatively easy to search, and in general more reliable than many of the websites run by government departments themselves. The main criticism to be made of them at the moment is that they are too closely related to the traditional paper layout and numbering of Hansard records and are therefore still hard for newcomers to find their way through. Now that newspapers are changing the architecture, design and presentation of their websites, diverging from the old medium, there is a question about whether Hansard (and other official sites) should do the same.

A more user-friendly format, colourful and more colloquial in its archival arrangement, would attract still more users and help open up the mysteries of
parliamentary democracy further. Going further, though many MPs run their own sites, Parliament will soon have to consider whether there should not be a general Westminster site giving full details of all Members, including their current parliamentary business, speeches, interests, career and feedback. A Commons website which was uniform in its layout and constantly updated would be easier for constituents everywhere who wished to track down their local member. Again, the Scottish parliament is showing Westminster the way with a standard e-mail format: each MSP’s is, name.surname.msp@scottish.parliament.uk. Westminster MPs have no such system; if they do have an e-mail address, it can vary from Btinternet to Compuserve to tory.org.uk, with only a few parliament.uk’s thrown in. Although every MP could have an @parliament.uk address, few take this up and a recent attempt to publicise every MPs e-mail address was met with horror by the parliamentary authorities. Scotland is also working towards a system of having a public computer in every constituency, where voters can find out what their MSP has been up to, and can quickly and easily e-mail him or her with any problems.

It’s a situation which may well be duplicated in the Greater London Assembly. Ken Livingstone may not be a “moderniser” in one sense, but he is promising to use the modern technology to make the Mayor’s office “truly open to Londoners.” Should he win, he wants all meetings of the Mayor’s cabinet to be broadcast live on the Net, and all documents going before the mayor; - except personnel files - to be electronically available. He would also encourage Londoners to e-mail him directly with complaints about issues such as late or overcrowded Underground trains. As this paper is being written, Mr Livingstone remains the clear favourite for the job. Whether or not he wins, he’s outlined the way forward for the new incumbent in London. How long will it be before Westminster decides it has to follow?

The opportunities are only beginning to be understood: within a few years, there is no sound reason why a voter in Huddersfield or Orkney should not be able to see and hear every recent Commons intervention by their MP through webcasting; lobby him or her online; check voting records, the declaration of interests and anything else. This would be a quantum leap in accountability, putting MPs and their constituencies back more closely together - which is why it may also be resisted by some Honourable Members. Similarly, there is a question about the excellent work currently done privately by the Commons Library research teams for individual MPs. Some of this research, done by public servants paid for with public money, is made freely available on the Net, but there’s no good reason why all of it should not be. Overall Parliament’s web pages are fairly primitive examples of what can be done in these technological times; yet the web could provide hugely better access to Parliament and its daily life than we have had in previous years.
This is not the case for Government generally. Early in 2000 the Prime Minister, amid a blaze of publicity, launched the updated all-singing, all-dancing Number 10 website. It features an impressive quantity of useful information: government statements, the line from lobby briefings, select committee reports, manifesto commitments and progress in meeting them, explanations of policy, an interactive service for consultation on government policy, an audio-visual tour of Number Ten, and a weekly Internet broadcast from the Prime Minister himself - a modern day equivalent of American president's fireside chats. The site hasn't come without problems. From its very first day, a number of jokers styling themselves William Vague, and Dead Alan Clark have been leaving unhelpful and sometimes obscene messages on the site. Then there have been the complaints from commentators that the site amounts to little more than cyberpropaganda - at taxpayers' expense. Certainly the idea of "soft focus" interviews with the prime minister and other prominent figures in the government which are done by Downing Street staff and then published as journalistic interviews, do raise serious doubts about the purpose of the site.

But and it's an important but - it does also hugely improve access to information which has previously only been available to a few. Launching the site, the Prime Minister's press spokesman Alastair Campbell insisted through bared teeth that the site would help journalists do their job better. No admirer of the practitioners of his former profession, Mr Campbell was no doubt hoping it would lead to fewer "unhelpful" stories about the government. But that apart, the site will enable journalists to access information more quickly. Foreign journalists, for example, will be pleased to find the "line" on issues of the day from the Number Ten lobby briefings, which only the select band of journalists who are member of the lobby can attend. The web site will also run audio-visual tapes of Prime Minister's questions, from the most recent to several weeks earlier; an invaluable tool for people wishing to check on what was said.

3) ACCESS BY TELEVISION

In the modern age, the most obvious way for the public to have access to what's going on in Parliament is through television. Yet today, despite the long battle to televise Parliament, the use of parliamentary pictures in news bulletins and programmes has reached an all-time low.

For many years, MPs were reluctant to let the broadcasting authorities anywhere near the Commons. There was a brief radio experiment in 1975, and radio
recordings became a permanent feature of the proceedings three years later. It took another fourteen years to get the television cameras in. When they finally arrived they came surrounded by fearsome restrictions designed to protect the dignity of the House. A clean feed of the proceedings is supplied to the broadcasters by a contractor approved by the House of Commons. Close-ups aren’t allowed - most of the time a medium shot of the MP speaking is broadcast. ‘Cutaways’ - to show reaction - are only allowed if an MP has been mentioned by name. Wide shots are allowed from time to time - but must on no account include the press and public galleries, the officials and clerks. Any disturbance or disorder must be ignored - the cameras must then switch to a shot of the Speaker’s chair. In other words, anything of unusual interest, the dramas, the reactions, the detail, must be ignored. If an MP is thrusting a vital piece of information into a minister’s hand, we mustn’t see it. When MPs of one side are baiting an opponent, we can’t look. Even David Blunkett’s guide dog must lie out of sight of the cameras.

One veteran broadcaster, Nick Jones, of the BBC, wants a wholesale review of the restrictions, whose abolition would, he believes, bring about a renaissance in parliamentary reporting on television. He wants to show “what’s really happening in the House of Commons: how the business is being conducted; how MPs vote, trooping through the lobbies; or any of the other parliamentary highs and lows which, if we had to the pictures to illustrate them, could be so revealing and informative.” He’s not alone. Yet the MPs who form the Broadcasting Committee are still remarkably reluctant to allow Parliament to be broadcast warts and all. As broadcasting and the Net converge, it is reasonable to expect that the appetite for political coverage will grow no less. With the arrival of multi-channel digital television, millions of homes in the UK now have access, should they wish it, to the Parliamentary Channel. This should be, in short, a time of reviving excitement and interest in broadcasting the Commons.

But what is happening? Walter Bagehot, the great Victorian constitutional writer, famously said that the best antidote to enthusiasm for the House of Lords was to go and watch it at work. The same is true of parliamentary broadcasting: any MP or other interested party who thinks the current restrictions are useful is encouraged to spend an hour watching BBC Parliament. Even when the debate is at a critical stage and involves something of wide public interest, such as restrictions on the right to jury trial, the coverage is virtually unwatchable and certainly unintelligible to the average viewer. It is partly a matter of the archaic language and rituals which bemused Mrs Vote when she arrived in the public gallery; but that problem is, if anything, compounded by the broadcasting restrictions.
The result can make a Japanese Noh play or a modernist opera seem positively accessible. Trying to find out the result of the debate on jury trials, the viewer will have had to cope with the following: "The question put that the Bill now be read a second time. As many as are of that opinion say "Aye"........(chorus of "Ayes") ...as many as are of that opinion say "Noe" .....(chorus of "Noes").......followed by "The Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No 63". And during the long ten minutes while MPs are voting, the sound is cut: viewers must watch the bewildering proceedings with patience in the hope that they may eventually discern what on earth is going on. While there are legitimate worries for MPs about cutaway shots, and an understandable nostalgia for old forms, the Commons must before long ask itself which is more important - fond traditions and personal vanities, or the urgent job of reconnecting with an increasingly turned-off and disillusioned electorate.

Much the same applies in the corridors, committee rooms and lobbies of Westminster. It is strange, given that so much of MPs work actually takes place outside the Chamber, how little access the broadcasters are allowed to anywhere else in the Palace of Westminster. Shots of MPs trying to deal with scores of letters as they perch on a corner of a bench in corridor is hardly going to strengthen the impression that politicians are just in it for the high life.

Within the last few weeks, a decision has been made to allow the cameras into MPs' offices - and negotiations are in progress about better TV access to Westminster hall and even the Central Lobby. But there is a strong body of opinion, including both MPs and Commons staff, against increased access: the broadcasters are well aware that they must advance softly, softly. For now, in spite of security fears, MPs for the most part have to troop over to St Stephen's Green, just opposite the Commons, for a television interview, or when the weather is bad to the TV studios at Number 4 Millbank.

Then there's the Select and Standing committees, where many an MP puts in hour after hour of hard work - interviewing witnesses, conducting inquiries, preparing reports or scrutinising legislation. Their proceedings are only televised - like the sittings of the House of Commons in Westminster Hall - if the broadcasters decide to club together to pay for it: there's no automatic assumption that the public should have the right to televised access to what goes on. With the growing number of television and satellite channels, it should not be beyond the realms of possibility for a viewer to watch the proceedings of Parliament whenever he or she wishes. And in the twenty-first century, the proceedings of Parliament should surely be updated so that the average viewer, or visitor, can easily comprehend what's going on.
CONCLUSION:

For members of the public Parliament can be an intimidating and even oppressive place. The tone is set from the moment you are greeted by a policeman at St. Stephen’s entrance asking what business you have in Parliament. Unless you are an MP or a parliamentary employee you are made to feel that your presence at the Palace of Westminster is tolerated rather than welcomed. Yet the greatest challenge Parliament currently faces is how to connect more effectively with the public. This process must begin with improving the way parliament treats and communicates with ‘strangers’.

Recommendations

1. Visiting members of the public should be given a restaurant or coffee bar, cloakroom facilities, information about the Commons and a civilised welcome when they arrive at Westminster to meet their MP or to watch proceedings. This should be organised as a Citizens’ Centre, or a Voters’ Centre, in Westminster Hall, open all year; priority for gallery seats should go to UK citizens rather than non-voting tourists.

2. Without a further overhaul and modernisation of parliamentary language and forms, the proceedings of the Commons will remain largely unintelligible, doing Westminster no good at all with the public. Parliament needs to press its Modernisation Committee for an urgent programme of fresh reforms in this area.

3. While the parliamentary websites are, in general, professional and informative, we are only at the very beginning of the opportunities the Net offers for explaining the work of the Commons, and restoring a proper link between electors and their representatives. The Government should create a team of web designers, MPs and officials tasked to achieve a world-class website for Parliament, giving full details of the work of every Member, updated every day. This is the most important single reform that is needed now. Without such an initiative the dream of a more accessible and popular Commons is an empty one.

4. The current restrictions on broadcasting parliament should be scrapped, as they render TV coverage of the Commons virtually unwatchable, so confounding the hopes of greater access to Parliament which the cameras were supposed to bring.
The Views expressed in this report are those of the author and not those of the Society. The Society, which promotes effective parliamentary democracy, has published this report and invites analysis and discussion.