

HANSARD, which has been adopted as the name for the published record of parliamentary debates, was the family name of key figures in the establishment of parliamentary reporting in the late eighteenth century in Britain. Commonwealth countries such as Australia have maintained the British tradition.

IN the early eighteenth century in the United Kingdom the publication of what was said in Parliament was regarded as a breach of privilege. An enterprising printer named Cave, however, produced a newsletter reporting Parliament based on the recollection of members and surreptitiously taken notes that were later edited by people such as Dr Samuel Johnson. Even after Hansard began, rival publications continued, such as *The Mirror of Parliament* (which employed Charles Dickens for a time).

THE association of the Hansard family with the collation and printing of parliamentary debates of the House of Commons dates back to the 1700s, with Luke Hansard, a compositor in the office of the printer to the House of Commons. In 1800 the business came completely into his hands. Meantime, William Cobbett began to include reports of parliamentary debates in his *Political Register* from 1803, a business which he sold in 1811 to Thomas Hansard, son of Luke. In 1813, Thomas published the first “Hansard” reports of the House of Commons debates, but until 1889 the published debates were not independent reports but consisted of revised extracts from newspapers and reports made by shorthand writers. Parliament began subsidising the reports after 1878 but were never really satisfied with the outcome, even though specific parliamentary reporters were now being employed.

THE Hansard family involvement ceased in 1890 and subsequent contractors proved equally unsatisfactory. Finally, in 1908 official Hansard staff were appointed to the House of Commons. In the early days Hansard reporters were recruited almost exclusively from newspaper journalists. The career path for New South Wales Hansard reporters today is generally via court reporting services and other Hansard staffs, Federal and State.

NEW South Wales Hansard commenced on 28 October 1879 with the reporting of the Legislative Council at the opening of the Third Session of the Ninth Parliament. At that time the Principal Shorthandwriter, his assistant and four reporters comprised the full complement of reporting staff. Though the New South Wales Parliament is the oldest of Australian Parliaments, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland had some form of *Hansard* report before New South Wales.

THE author of a report on the establishment of a Hansard staff for the New South Wales Parliament expressed considerable doubt whether competent men would be available. Perhaps the operative word is “men” as for more than a century the Hansard staff comprised solely men until the appointment of the first women in February 1986.

IN addition to reporting for the two Chambers of the New South Wales Parliament, Hansard reports parliamentary committees (standing, statutory, joint, select, legislation and estimates), ministerial conferences and special conferences, meetings or seminars. Meetings which are reported by Hansard are usually held when the Houses of Parliament are not sitting.

OVER the decades the sitting hours of the two Houses and parliamentary committees have increased substantially. Following passage of a popular referendum proposal in 1978 the appointment system for the Upper House changed to a proportional election system. The sitting hours of the Legislative Council are now more similar to those of the Legislative Assembly, resulting in a substantial increase in the total sitting hours of the Parliament.

FOR more than a century the basic system of pen shorthand reporters dictating to typists using manual typewriters remained unchanged. Use of electric typewriters was the first step in the progressive adoption of new technology as it became available and advantageous. The standard period of notetaking for reporters is ten minutes. This is commonly referred to as a turn.

UNTIL 1987 all New South Wales Hansard reporters used the system of pen shorthand developed in 1837 by Sir Isaac Pitman. Since 1987 reporters have been appointed who use the Stenograph and Palantype machine shorthand systems, which in appropriate circumstances allow the production of a computer assisted transcript (CAT) without the reporters having to dictate to a word processing operator. More pen writers have also been appointed.

IN 1989 the Parliament’s own printing services took over the function which was previously carried out by the Government Printer. Today Hansard has modern desktop publishing, word processors and a computer network. Whereas previously pen reporters dictated to a word processing operator, these days they dictate to computers using voice recognition technology.

SUBEDITORS then process the turns and send them on line to the formatter. The formatter does all the formatting functions previously carried out by the Government Printing Office, after which the electronic copy is sent to Parliamentary Printing Services. In this way *Hansard* is now produced completely “in house”. *Hansard* is by no means simply a verbatim transcription of a member’s remarks; it reflects the differences between spoken and written English and has obvious mistakes corrected and redundancies removed. In the early days of *Hansard* there was a tendency towards sterilisation of the report. Professor Walter Murdoch wrote, “A *Hansard* man, in good form, could make a bullock driver’s remarks to his team sound like a vicar’s address to a mothers’ meeting” Today such a degree of change would not be tolerated, and reports accord with the definition of the *Hansard* report published by Sir Erskine May, the authority on the parliamentary system:

... though not strictly verbatim, is substantially the verbatim report, with repetitions and redundancies omitted, and with obvious mistakes corrected, but which leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument.

HANSARD is a historic document presenting a literate, accurate and verified document of the proceedings of the Parliament. A document that is lacking in purport, accuracy, verification and literal care would perplex and confuse users.

IT is not *Hansard*’s task to interpret or apply the Standing Orders but *Hansard* does observe the

general rule that interjections are disorderly and that members are entitled to have their speech printed in the permanent record free of such redundancies. Interjections are not reported unless they are acknowledged by the member addressing the House or their reproduction is made necessary by a subsequent event, such as a ruling from the Chair.

HANSARD gained increased importance after the law was changed to allow judges to refer to the Minister’s second reading speech and the subsequent debate following the introduction of the Bill in order to determine the intent of the legislation.

TODAY *Hansard* officers report up to 18,000 words an hour when both Houses of Parliament are sitting. *Hansard* appears as a proof daily, a weekly pamphlet copy and, after prorogation of the Parliament, bound copies for each session. *Hansard* is also available on the Parliament’s website. Copies of *Hansard* are kept in most public libraries and are available for sale to the public.

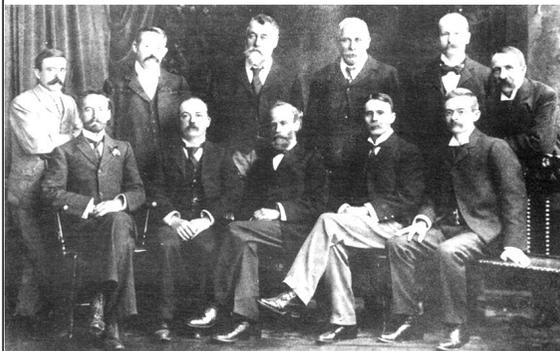
APART from the simple principles referred to earlier, *Hansard* has no editorial policy but the pursuit of accuracy and consistency. *Hansard* is not hampered by conceptions of news value, and no bias towards either persons or parties enters into its pages. When a member rises to speak, *Hansard* staff work for that member. Above all, the editorship is not a political appointment. These are the traditions of *Hansard* in New South Wales, and they continue.



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES

HISTORY **7** BULLETIN

Hansard in the Parliament of New South Wales



New South Wales Parliament Hansard Staff, c.1884