



HOUSE OF LORDS



State Opening  
of Parliament



The State Opening of Parliament marks the start of the parliamentary year and the Queen's Speech sets out the government's agenda.

## Start of Parliament's year

The Queen's Speech, delivered at State Opening, is the public statement of the government's legislative programme for Parliament's next working year. State Opening is the only regular occasion when the three constituent parts of Parliament that have to give their assent to new laws – the Sovereign, the House of Lords and the House of Commons – meet. The Speech is written by the government and read out in the House of Lords.

### Parliamentary year

A 'parliament' runs from one general election to the next (five years). It is broken up into sessions which run for about a year – the 'parliamentary year'.

State Opening takes place on the first day of a new session. The Queen's Speech marks the formal start to the year. Neither House can conduct any business until after it has been read.

### Queen's Speech

Members of both Houses and guests including judges, ambassadors and high commissioners gather in the Lords chamber for the speech. Many wear national or ceremonial dress. The Lord Chancellor gives the speech to the Queen who reads it out from the Throne (right and see diagram on page 4).

### Setting the agenda

The speech is central to the State Opening ceremony because it sets out the government's legislative agenda for the year. The final words, 'Other measures will be laid before you', give the government flexibility to introduce other bills (draft laws).

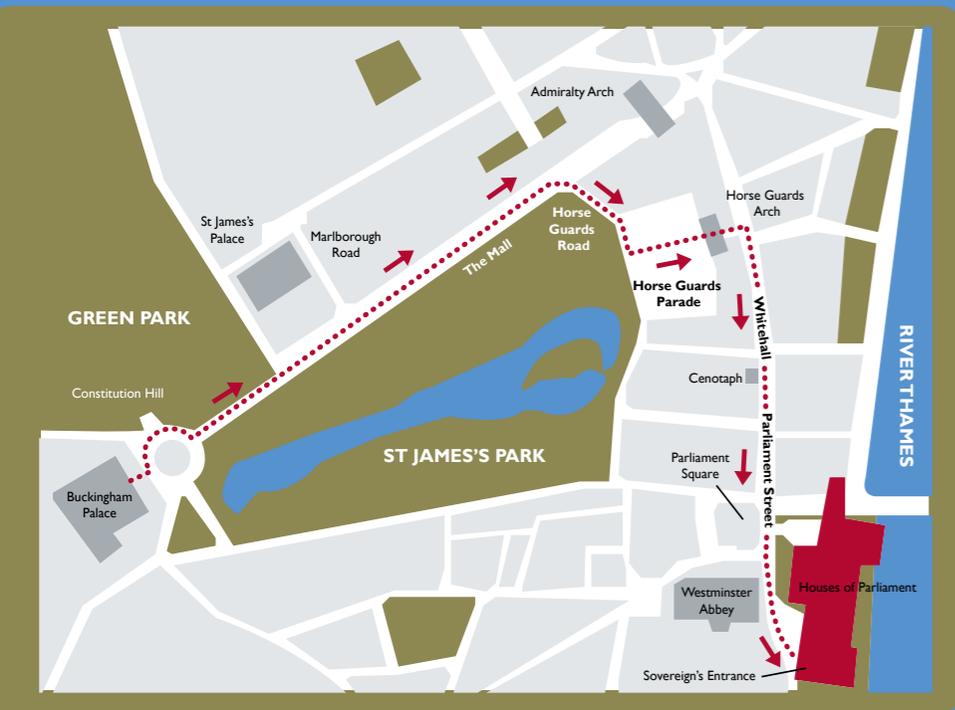


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# Buckingham Palace to the House of Lords

Escorted by the Household Cavalry, the Queen leaves Buckingham Palace in a carriage procession to the Houses of Parliament.



Route of the carriage procession



The Queen's carriage approaching the Houses of Parliament



The Household Cavalry

# Arrival at Parliament

The Royal Procession is characterised by many symbols of royal authority, the chief of which is the Imperial State Crown. The Queen enters a packed House of Lords chamber and Black Rod makes his ceremonial entrance into the House of Commons chamber. MPs proceed to the Lords to listen to the speech.

## Sovereign's Entrance

The Queen is met at Sovereign's Entrance (point 1 on page 4) by the Earl Marshal and the Lord Great Chamberlain (who have ceremonial and royal parliamentary duties). The Royal Standard is flown from the Victoria Tower and gun salutes are fired by the King's Troop in Hyde Park and the Tower of London.

## Royal Procession

Wearing the Imperial State Crown and the Robe of State, the Queen emerges from the Robing Room before leading the procession through the Royal Gallery (point 2 on page 4), packed with over 600 guests, to the House of Lords chamber. The Royal Procession is led by senior parliamentary and government officers, including the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Speaker. The Great Sword of State and the Cap of Maintenance, symbols of sovereign power and authority, are carried in front of the Queen.

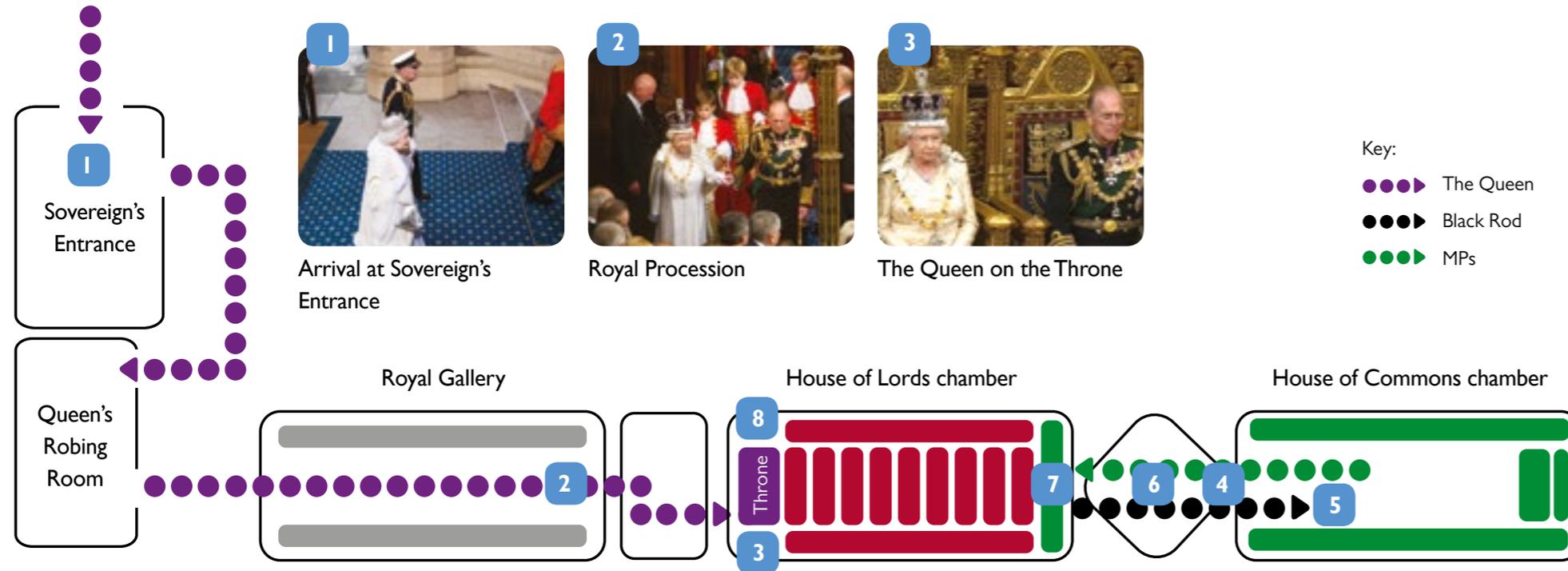
## Summons of the Commons

When the Queen is seated upon the Throne (point 3 on page 4), the Lord Great Chamberlain signals to Black Rod (the Queen's representative in Parliament) to summon MPs from the House of Commons.

The doors to the Commons chamber are shut in Black Rod's face: a practice dating back to the Civil War, symbolising the Commons' autonomy from the monarchy. He strikes the door three times before the door is opened (point 4 on page 5). Once the door is opened he enters the chamber and announces the Queen's summons (point 5 on page 5). The Serjeant at Arms, carrying the Mace, then leads the procession to the Lords followed by the Speaker and Black Rod (point 6 on page 4). The Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, MPs and senior Commons officials follow them.

MPs and House of Commons officials stand in the House of Lords chamber (point 7 on page 4) at the opposite end to the Throne, known as The Bar of the House, to listen to the speech.

# How it happens



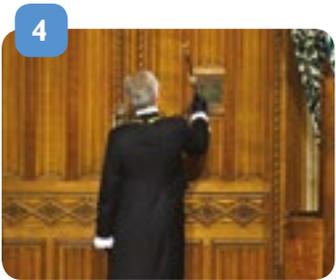
1 Arrival at Sovereign's Entrance



2 Royal Procession



3 The Queen on the Throne



4 Black Rod knocks on the doors to the Commons chamber



5 Black Rod summons the House of Commons



6 MPs, Black Rod and Commons officials make their way to the Lords



7 MPs and Commons officials stand in the Lords chamber to listen to the speech



8 The Queen reads out the speech from the Throne

# Back to work

When the Queen leaves, a new parliamentary session starts and Parliament gets back to work. Members debate the content of the speech and agree an 'Address in Reply to Her Majesty's Gracious Speech'. The House continues the debate over several days, looking at the different subject areas.



# Find out more

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- on BBC television and radio

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