



SERJEANT AT ARMS

THE MACE

When the House prorogues or dissolves the Serjeant returns the Mace to the Jewel Tower at the Tower of London and reverts to being a member of the Royal Household, rather than serving the Commons.

APPOINTMENT

The Serjeant was appointed by the monarch from Henry VIII's time until 1962 when the Commons' right to choose the Serjeant at Arms was restored.

Who is the Serjeant at Arms?

The Serjeant at Arms is responsible for the security of the House of Commons. This includes the Chamber, the public galleries, committee rooms and other buildings on the parliamentary estate. The post of Serjeant at Arms originated in the 13th century and has evolved over time to its present form while retaining some ceremonial duties.

The current Serjeant at Arms, Lawrence Ward, was appointed in May 2012. The Serjeant's team includes a Deputy Serjeant, Assistant Serjeant and Associate Serjeants.

Other offices under the Serjeant's authority include the Admission Order Office, the Doorkeepers and the Pass Office. The parliamentary official responsible for security in the House of Lords is Black Rod. The Serjeant and Black Rod work together to ensure the security of the Houses of Parliament and its out-buildings.

Access and security

The Serjeant must balance access to Parliament with security. The Serjeant is responsible for access to the public gallery of the main and Westminster Hall debating chambers, where visitors can watch debates, and for public access to select committee hearings.

Members of Parliament meet many groups and individuals at the House of Commons to learn about their concerns or discuss their views. Access for these visitors is also facilitated by the Serjeant.

Mass lobbies and large groups sometimes come to Parliament to express their views or to attend meetings.

The Serjeant liaises with the Metropolitan Police when large numbers are expected to ensure public order is maintained and Parliament remains secure.

Ceremonial duties and dress

The Serjeant at Arms' ceremonial duties include escorting the Speaker on the procession from his state apartments to the Chamber before each sitting of the House. The Serjeant at Arms carries the Mace which is an emblem of office and a symbol of the House of Commons' authority. It is placed on the table in front of the Speaker's Chair in the Chamber. The House can only sit and debate if the Mace is present.

The official court dress of the Serjeant at Arms was established in the late 18th century and consists of a black wool suit and patent leather shoes. Some changes were made when the first female Serjeant at Arms was appointed in 2008. On special occasions, a lace collar and cuffs are worn. For the Speaker's procession, the Serjeant wears white gloves, a sword, scabbard and sword sling. The Serjeant still wears the sword in the Chamber.

In the Chamber

Either the Serjeant or one of the Serjeant's team sits in the Commons Chamber while the House is sitting.

They are responsible for security in the Chamber which includes removing anyone causing a disturbance in the public gallery.

The Serjeant can also remove MPs from the Chamber if they have refused to leave after being asked to by the Speaker.

The Serjeant also oversees access to the parliamentary press gallery, supplying passes to broadcasters and journalists who work in the Palace of Westminster or those who need access to report on a specialist interest.

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