



The Houses of Parliament



The British Parliament is often called ‘the mother of all parliaments’, because it was the first in the world. There are two houses, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. The politicians who work in the House of Commons are called Members of Parliament (MPs).

The Palace of Westminster

The Houses of Parliament are in the Palace of Westminster. It's most famous for Big Ben (this is the name of the bell inside the clock, not the name of the tower). The palace was first built for King Edward the Confessor in 1050 and now has more than 1,100 rooms on four floors, and over 100 staircases. There is also a hairdresser's, a pub, a gym and a post office.



The House of Commons

In the big chamber* here, the MPs sit on green benches. The government MPs sit on one side, and the other MPs opposite. The leader of the House is called the Speaker, and he has a special chair in the middle. There are 650 MPs, but only 427 places to sit, so on busy days over 200 MPs stand, sometimes for hours.



In front of the green benches there are two red lines, with 2.5 metres between them – the length of two swords. MPs can't cross these lines, so they can only fight with words! The King or Queen can never enter the chamber of the House of Commons, only the House of Lords.



Speaker's House

The Speaker is the only person who lives in Westminster Palace, in Speaker's House. This is under Big Ben. Downstairs there's a living room, and two big dining rooms, and an amazing bed the King or Queen can sleep in! They never do! Upstairs there's a modern apartment, with four bedrooms.



*chamber – old-fashioned word for room



Interesting note

Not many people know this, but under the Speaker's Chair in the House of Commons there is a toilet! It has curtains that you can pull around it! In the past, it was there for the Speaker when the business of the day was very long. Of course, the Speaker doesn't use it today!

