

# About Parliament 27

## Sergeant-at-Arms and Usher of the Black Rod

### Sergeant-at-Arms

The Sergeant-at-Arms is an officer of the Legislative Assembly who attends upon the Speaker on ceremonial occasions such as the Opening of Parliament. The Sergeant-at-Arms carries the Mace.

The formal role of the Sergeant-at-Arms is also to keep order, at the direction of the Speaker, during the sittings of the Legislative Assembly. The word 'Sergeant' derives from the Latin *serviens* which means 'servant'.

### History

The first record of a Sergeant-at-Arms dates back to the late 14th century when a Sergeant-at-Arms was appointed from King Richard II's personal bodyguard to protect the Speaker of the House of Commons.

The office originated in Medieval England to serve the Sovereign in a police role, much like a bailiff in more recent times.

The first Sergeant-at-Arms in the Legislative Assembly was Charles Kidson who held the office from January 1890 to January 1932. He had also held the post in the pre-1890 Legislative Council period of representative government.

### Role

The Sergeant-at-Arms:

- at the beginning of each sitting day, escorts the Speaker into the Legislative Assembly chamber whilst carrying the Mace;
- is the Constable of the Assembly, responsible for the security and maintenance of the Legislative Assembly Chamber, its galleries and committees;
- at the direction of the Speaker and the Legislative Assembly, may assist with the removal of a member of the Legislative Assembly for willfully disrupting the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly or disobeying the directions of the Speaker;
- at the direction of the Speaker, may assist with the removal of any person from the

galleries of the Legislative Assembly, its committees or Parliament House;

- delivers summons to witnesses on behalf of Legislative Assembly committees;
- delivers messages from the Legislative Assembly to the Legislative Council; and
- undertakes ceremonial duties for the opening of a new session of Parliament.



Mace of the Legislative Assembly

### The Mace

The Sergeant-at-Arms' mace had originally been part of the normal fighting equipment of mounted men at arms, together with their lances, swords and armour.

Over time the mace became ornamental and was recognised as the emblem of a Royal Sergeant-at-Arms. The Sergeant-at-Arms is the custodian of the Mace which symbolises the authority of the Speaker of the House.

The Western Australian Mace was designed by the State Works Department in 1887, and was manufactured in South Australia by Mr. S. Schlank's Beaver Factory in Adelaide at a cost of £70.

It is made of silver with gold gilt. It was first used in the Legislative Council in 1888, and was transferred along with the Sergeant-at-Arms to the Legislative Assembly upon its establishment in 1890. It is the oldest Parliamentary Mace in Australia.

## Usher of the Black Rod

The Usher of the Black Rod, known as 'Black Rod', is an officer of the Legislative Council who is appointed by the Governor.

The office is derived from the British Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod who is appointed by the Crown to attend the House of Lords.

### History

The Usher of the Black Rod is a position with ancient origins. Letters of Patent were issued in 1361 by King Edward II to create the Usher as a Court position involved in meeting with the Parliament.

By the sixteenth century, the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod had become a position entirely associated with the House of Lords, where he acted initially as the Monarch's representative in the House of Lords.

Later the position evolved to include the ceremonial and other duties associated with the position today.

### Role

The Usher of the Black Rod:

- at the beginning of each sitting day, escorts the President into the Legislative Council chamber whilst carrying the Black Rod;
- is responsible for the security and maintenance of the Legislative Council Chamber, its galleries and committees;
- at the direction of the President and the Legislative Council, may assist with the removal of a member of the Legislative Council for willfully disrupting the proceedings of the Legislative Council or disobeying the directions of the President;
- at the direction of the President, may assist with the removal of any person from the galleries of the Legislative Council, its committees or Parliament House;
- delivers messages from the Legislative Council to the Legislative Assembly;
- undertakes ceremonial duties for the opening of a new session of Parliament; and

- receives distinguished visitors or groups to Parliament House on behalf of the President.

### Opening of Parliament

At the opening of a new Parliament the Black Rod is the personal attendant upon the State Governor, and upon the Governor's instructions, summons the Legislative Assembly and its Speaker to the Legislative Council to hear the Governor's speech.

In this ceremony, the Black Rod knocks three times on the closed door of the Legislative Assembly. After being admitted, the Black Rod moves to the Bar of the House, bows and delivers a message requesting the members to go to the Legislative Council Chamber.



Black Rod of the Legislative Council

### Black Rod

The symbol of office of the Usher of the Black Rod is a black rod about one metre in length.

The Black Rod now in use was specifically designed for Western Australia by the Crown Jeweller and was presented to the Legislative Council to mark the visit of Her Majesty the Queen in 1954.

The Black Rod was the gift of the Hon. Harry Hearn, OBE, a member of the Legislative Council (1948 to 1956) for the Metropolitan Province.