BACKGROUND - ENGLAND
In the English Parliament it was once illegal to take notes or to publish the debates of Parliament, but during the Civil War (1642-60) the Government appreciated having speeches published as propaganda. When this practice lapsed, and despite potential fines, some newspapers continued their publication disguising the items as fiction. The suppression policy was finally lifted in 1771.

In 1803 William Cobbett MP used 'reporters' in relays to write up what they could remember in his 'Political Register'. But in 1811 Cobbett sold his company to Thomas Curson Hansard, the government printer's son, who published these condensed versions of debates monthly as 'Hansard's Parliamentary Debates'.

Restrictions against note-taking in Parliament were relaxed, and between 1831 and 1835 special press galleries were constructed; one of the first to use this new gallery was Charles Dickens. In 1855 the Government rescued T.C. Hansard's failing commercial enterprise by taking out 100 subscriptions for departmental use. By 1878 Hansard received a special subsidy upon his employing special parliamentary reporters.

In 1888 a parliamentary select committee recommended that rather than let T.C. Hansard publish the debates an authorised version ought to be published. This appeared in 1892 and, although still condensed, had to contain a minimum of one third of every speech. This version was published without using the name 'Hansard'. In 1907 another select committee recommended the publication of a full version of the debates. The first editor was appointed in 1908 and the Official Reports appeared in 1909.

In 1943 it was decided to reintroduce the name 'Hansard' because of its popular usage. Perhaps because newspapers were beginning to reduce their political coverage, weekly editions were first published in 1946-47.

DEFINITION
Hansard was officially adopted by the English Parliament in 1907 as a 'full report, in the first person, of all speakers alike', a full report being defined as:

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

BACKGROUND - TASMANIA
While the other Australian States have operated Hansard services since colonial times Tasmania's Hansard did not officially commence until mid-1979. The Legislative Council Hansard began on 6 June 1979 and the House of Assembly Hansard on 12 June 1979.

However, the earliest reference located is on 4 February 1858 when a vote in the Legislative Council on the question 'That it is desirable that persons should be appointed to report the debates of Parliament' was lost (7:5). In 1876 a select committee of the House of Assembly unanimously supported a Hansard as an 'imperative necessity', but nothing eventuated. In 1905-07 a government cost examination found that a Hansard service was not justifiable and in September 1907 the Premier John Evans said that a Hansard would only be a 'luxury' and would simply amount to 'entombing' what Members said. The vote was lost (14:13).
MERCURY REPRINTS
In 1937 the Premier Robert Cosgrove said that the cost of Hansard was 'prohibitive'. In 1945 a joint select committee felt that the Mercury Reprints were a reasonable solution because a true Hansard, whilst desirable, was impractical. These Reprints appeared from 1920 to 1978 via an agreement between the Parliament and the newspaper. They contained almost verbatim reports, taken down by the journalists, rather than the edited newspaper versions.

Following an offer to the Government a private firm, Fidelity Recording Company, undertook at its own expense a two-week trial period of tape-recording the debates in September 1950. A report on this experiment however recommended a more orthodox and skilled shorthand system. In 1951 a select committee of the Legislative Council recommended publishing 'a weekly containing a reasonable synopsis of parliamentary debate'.

ESTABLISHMENT
In August 1960 Kevin Lyons lost a motion to establish a Hansard service (15:14), but the Liberal Party won government in May 1969 with a pledge for a Hansard service amongst its campaign promises. Liberal Premier Angus Bethune therefore announced on 17 July 1969 that he was seeking a report regarding Hansard. This report appeared in 1973 after he had lost office, and recommended that a shorthand reporting system be adopted for Tasmania.

The returned ALP Government led by Premier Eric Reece discussed but eventually postponed a decision because of a difference of views within Cabinet on the usefulness of a Hansard service. In 1977 Premier Doug Lowe, a vigorous proponent of such a service, revived the suggestion for a Hansard during major alterations to Parliament House, and provided funds for it. A suggestion was made to examine the Northern Territory system and thus use a tape system as an economy measure. On 26 September 1978 the first trial of this process occurred, with another in October—November 1978. Finally, amid some controversy, John Proud was made Tasmania's inaugural Editor of Debates in February 1979. In November 1979 the Tasmanian Parliament passed special resolutions allowing for the publication of Hansard to bring it within parliamentary privilege; formal legislation to confirm this status has still not been enacted.

On 10 June 1982 Premier Gray announced that he intended to axe Hansard as an economy measure but a public backlash arose against this proposal because it was seen as a form of censorship not suited to modern politics. Indeed, one view is that Hansard should not be assessed by the low number of issues avidly read or subscribed to, but by the democratic right it helps to maintain by providing easier access to parliamentary debates, both for citizens today and for posterity.

In September 1992 Hansard obtained new premises from which to operate - next door, but connected to, Parliament House.

STATEMENT OF OPERATION
Hansard's prime objectives are to:
1. provide recording and timely production of transcripts of the parliamentary debates of both Houses; and
2. provide reports and transcripts of evidence before the various parliamentary committees.

PROCEDURE
Both Chambers are wired with multi-channel digital audio equipment and the process begins with the recording of proceedings in each Chamber by monitors and the preparation of transcripts from these recordings by audio-typists. There is a limited amount of editing of drafts of the transcripts. Verification of their own speeches and the opportunity to clarify their comments is briefly available to Members via 'preliminary transcript' versions which they receive within 24 hours. The final version will usually be available on-line and in the Parliamentary Library within several days.

AVAILABILITY
Hansard was published in weekly versions from 1979 to 1995 and these are available in many libraries; printed indexes from 1979 to 1994 are also available. A hard copy version of the weekly Hansard is available in the Parliamentary Library. Hansard has been available on-line since 1996, with material since 1992 being accessible.

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