

New Chamber of the House of Commons

by Hilary St. George Saunders
Librarian of the House of Commons

"On the stone which I am about to lay I trust there will arise a building which all the world will ever see and know and recognize as the home of liberty; the House of free debate; the very citadel of true democracy."

Having ended his speech with these words, Mr. Speaker Clifton Brown laid the foundation stone of the new Chamber of the House of Commons on May 26, 1948.

The ceremony took place in the presence of, among others, workmen who were already at their task of rebuilding. Its setting was of a kind undreamt of by Queen Victoria, in whose reign the present palace of Westminster was built.

In the midst of Sir Charles Barry's pseudo Gothic walls and pinnacles was a void, a desert newly garnished with steel girders and fresh hewn stone, and the tubular rods of modern scaffolding. Seven years and 16 days it had held a blackened ruin of wood and stone in which the flames of destruction still smouldered.

On the night of May 10-11, 1941 505 bombers belonging to the 2nd and 3rd Air Fleets of the German Air Force carried out the most determined of their many assaults upon the capital of the British Empire. When the last Heinkel 111 and Junkers 88 turned away toward the East and the fatal Russian campaign, they left behind them a pall of smoke, mistaken by distant observers for a thundercloud. The hurts inflicted that night were grievous, but far from decisive. London was still substantially intact, pitted with the scars of recent wounds, but grimly triumphant.

With the pall of smoke before their eyes, and the tales of the destruction wrought in the Palace of Westminster in their ears, many of its citizens not unnaturally concluded that the home of Parliament had been the Luftwaffe's main target. This was not so.

RINGED WITH FIRE
Its pilots had been instructed that night to bomb an area stretching from Waterloo Bridge to the eastern boundary of the Docks. A number of crews had also been briefed to attack the Battersea Power Station and it was probably their bombs which did the damage.

How many hit the Chamber in which Gladstone had roared under the slings and arrows of Disraeli is not precisely known. The first of

them fell some time between 1 and 2 a.m., but did not explode; a second shower crashed down about 2.30 a.m., and Chief Superintendent MacDuell, already summoned to deal with incendiaries which had fallen upon Westminster Hall, noted "a dull explosion in the House of Commons Chamber which was almost instantly lit from end to end."

By then the Palace was ringed with fire. A burning gas main flared near Lambeth Bridge; Westminster School was blazing; and there was a flicker of flame on the top of the Victoria Tower.

The firemen, reinforced though they were, were only just not overwhelmed. By dint of great exertion they saved Westminster Hall, even though the great hammer beam roof was a light; but they could do so only at the expense of the Chamber hard by.

Four years passed, and exactly on the anniversary of its destruction workmen employed by the office of works began to clear away the ruins and prepare the foundation of a new building.

They were there as a result of the report of a Select Committee presided over by Earl Winterton, "father" of the House, and adopted earlier in the year, when the Commons decided that their Chamber should be rebuilt as far as possible in the original form. The architect appointed was Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, and Dr. Oscar Faber was the engineer.

Three years later the present Speaker laid the foundation stone. On October 26 next he will take his seat in the finished building.

Its floor has precisely the same dimensions as that of the old House, 68 feet by 45½ feet; but the galleries have been increased in size, and in the new Chamber it will be possible for 939 persons all told, of whom 437 will be Members, to find seats.

A UNIQUE FEATURE
As in Sir Charles Barry's Chamber and in the old chapel of St. Stephen, lost to the Commons by Edward VI in 1547 and destroyed by the fire of 1834 the accommodation will, as they say, be "strictly limited." For the Chamber has always been too small for every member to find a seat in it simultaneously.

To one unfamiliar with the Commons this may seem strange; but a small Chamber promotes and encourages that air of intimacy which is the essence of debate and which has been a unique feature of English Parliamentary life.

The new Chamber is higher than the old, and above its ceiling, and below its floors there are rooms for the officers of the House, for Ministers and for secretaries. These are

urgently needed. Although Sir Charles Barry's Palace covers four acres, the amount of office space in it is quite inadequate for the needs of Parliament in these days.

In appearance, the new Chamber like the old, is Gothic. But whereas to the present generation the work of Sir Charles Barry and Pugin seems dull and unimpressive because the richness of detail was evenly spread throughout and no attempt was made to obtain contrast, the new interior has been embellished by "horizontal bands of enrichment alternating with plain areas," and thus, it is hoped, will achieve a more striking effect.

To cover the walls, English oak "treated to give a mellow, but pleasant colour has been used." The seats, in deference to a tradition said to have originated in the days of Cardinal Wolsey, are coloured green and made of hickory.

Most important perhaps of all, from the point of view of Members is the new system of air conditioning. In the old Chamber air was pumped through the floor, and thus carried with it all the dirt and dust brought in on the shoes of members or inherent in the elderly carpet. The ducts gave on to the Thames, and this once led to a sudden adjournment of the House when a cargo of sewage was inadvertently dumped off the Terrace.

In the new Chamber clean air enters from the sides through ducts immediately under the galleries and vitiated air is expelled through holes in the roof.

Those responsible for this system hope to reproduce the atmosphere of a fine spring day out of doors, and the temperature will therefore be 65 degrees in daytime and 70 degrees at night. The air will be cleaned automatically, and the volume of new air adjusted so as to provide 1,500 cubic feet per hour for every occupant of the Chamber.

THE CHURCHILL ARCH
One feature will be obvious at once to all who enter the Member's Lobby: this is the Churchill Arch, constructed from damaged stones from the old building and placed there as a memorial of a night of fire and fury and of the triumph of a great Prime Minister who led his country through peril to victory.

The destruction of the old Chamber involved that of its furnishings; gone, alas, are the old despatch boxes, dented so it is said, by the signet ring of Gladstone. They are being replaced by boxes provided by New Zealand. Every Dominion and Colony of the British Empire has contributed to the embellishment of the new Chamber, from Australia, which has given the Speaker's Chair, to Zanzibar, whose gift is a solid silver ashtray. When, therefore, on Oct. 26 next,

Norval Juniors Meet At Eleanor Starks

Norval Junior Farmers met Tuesday night, October 17 at the home of Eleanor Stark.

Guest speaker for the boys' meeting was Mr. Frank Stark of Milton. He spoke on the Maple Cattle Breeders Association.

In the girls' meeting Jessie Wingfield took the topic "Make your head save you heels." She used excellent illustrative material which showed the proper ways to do household chores to save work and make what has to be done easier. One way of saving time, she pointed out was to have utensils for each activity grouped. For example, all baking dishes together, and table dishes together are real time and shoe leather savers.

The House occupies its new home for the first time. Members will be surrounded by objects which cannot but remind them that they are at the heart of a great Empire, battered by two world wars, but still held upright by the age and strength of England of which their new Chamber is a not unfitting symbol.

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AROUND THE HOME

Chart for planting your FALL BULBS

FORCING BULBS FOR WINTER BLOOM

DEPTH	GOOD TIME - MID-OCTOBER	GOOD SOIL - SANDY LOAM
1"		
2"		
3"		
4"		
5"		
6"		

NOSE JUST ABOVE GROUND
TOO DEEP
SATISFACTORY

FILL THE POT 2/3 WITH SOIL (EQUAL PARTS OF SHARP SAND, LOAM AND LEAF MOLD, WELL MIXED). PLACE BULB; ADD EARTH; GENTLY FIRM INTO POSITION. MOISTEN EARTH AND PLACE POT IN COOL, DARK ROOM FOR ABOUT 10 WEEKS, THEN MOVE TO A WELL-LIGHTED WINDOW.

RYACINTH 6 IN. APART
NARCISBUS 6 TO 12 IN. APART
LILY 12 INCHES OR MORE APART

CHRISTMAS
JONQUIL 6 IN.
TULIP 4 IN. APART

Never break up an orange crate

REMOVE LABEL; SAND DOWN ROUGH SIDES. BOTTOM MOVED 4" HIGHER; NAILED FROM SIDES. CENTER SECTION MOVED UP TO SUPPORT DRAWER AT TOP.

SOMETHING NEW FOR A STOVE PIPE... A LAUNDRY BASKET

FULL LENGTH STOVEPIPE. FALSE BOTTOM OF CARDBOARD, FASTENED WITH SUMMER TAPE. COVER PIPE WITH CARBON OR CHINTZ RUNNING HALFWAY DOWN INSIDE. CEMENT IN PLACE.

A WASTEPAPER BASKET

PIPE CUT IN HALF. FASTEN FALSE BOTTOM. DRAPS WITH REMNANT MATERIAL. AROUND TOP, PLACE NARROW STRIP OF CARDBOARD, COVERED WITH SAME MATERIAL OR A SOLID COLOUR.

There are many other interesting little ideas like these in the booklet "AROUND THE HOME". Write for your copy to Tom Gard, c/o MOLSON'S (Ontario) LIMITED, P.O. Box 490, Adelaide St. Station, TORONTO.

Tom Gard's Note Book

One thing common to good gardeners is the ability to plan for the future. Now is the time to prepare for those harbingers of a new gardening year - spring bulbs. There is still time to plant some. If you didn't place your order early, you will likely still find some available at the store. The planting chart and instructions given will prove helpful to the uninitiated.

Forcing Bulbs

While on the subject of bulbs, why not resolve to try your hand at forcing some for winter bloom. It isn't as difficult as it would sound and information on the subject is usually abundant at this time of year. The simple instructions given here will get you started, but check planting guides before you select your varieties - some will force better than others and rigid forcing dates should be followed.

Stovepipes

With cooler weather, we begin the annual tussle with stovepipes and stovepipes. I am reminded of my first ordeal - back in the days when I thought all stovepipes were the same. Instead of buying six-inch pipe, I bought some seven inches in diameter. Before it was time to use it the bill was lost and, rather than face the clerk again, I have been trying to think up uses for it ever since. Two of the best I have hit upon are illustrated. They sound rather "screwy" but they have proven satisfactory.

More About Orange Crates

My young son surprised me by walking in with a table for his bedroom - all painted and ready for use. Evidently they are teaching shopwork in lower grades than they used to, as he made it at school. Shown is a copy of his finished product.