To help us better estimate the length of your article, please retain the margins/fonts and spacing as shown. Keep the general format and head titles as indicated by the yellow highlights. Do not add extra paragraph returns between paragraphs and do not type with the cap lock on unless the word or words must be set all caps (as with Boolean terms).

Advisor Reviews--Standard Review

House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online (HCPP) - Nineteenth century

Date of Review: February 3rd, 2006

Composite Score: ****

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Pricing Options

$90,000 (USD) one-off purchase (list price for nineteenth century version) plus modest annual hosting fee

Product Description
The House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online provides an index to all British parliamentary papers from 1801 to 2004. Searchable full text is currently provided for the period 1840-1891 and 1901-1904. The nineteenth and twentieth century papers are available separately although the index covers the full period. It is intended that full-text content provision for the entire nineteenth century collection will be completed shortly. Twentieth century full-text provision will be completed by the end of 2006; updates to current parliamentary proceedings will be made quarterly. This review covers the nineteenth century section.

Critical Evaluation

This is a superb, if high cost, resource and vital to any institution whose patrons have a strong interest in the primary sources relating to the history of the nineteenth century. Given the world dominance and global activities of Gt Britain during most of that period, the content is of very considerable value to global historians and especially those with an interest in any events and developments that transpired in that momentous period whether in Britain or on the world stage. The system interface is intuitive and capable of advanced manipulation; output is customizable in a variety of ‘quick read’, ‘readable’, PDF and TIFF formats for maximum utilization. The product has emerged from the almost indigestible yet indispensable microfiche versions of British Parliamentary Papers.
produced by Chadwyck Healey between 1980 and 1983. The fiche version carried the attraction of being a major shelf space-saver for libraries and was built on the accurate assumption that microfiche offers a truly long-term preservation solution. However, Chadwyck Healey was acquired by University Microfilms International (UMI) (forerunners of Proquest Information and Learning) in 1999. UMI itself was already part of the Bell & Howell Company (now renamed Proquest Company) from 1985 onwards. The resulting concentration of the world’s best expertise in the field of large scale digitization and record preservation has produced a world class resource in HCPP. We should be clear that providing a full-text version of these papers on this scale is a considerable undertaking. Proquest’s own product description further confirms this both in value of content and the size of the task in producing it:

“The House of Commons Parliamentary Papers are vital to the historical record of Britain, its former Colonies and the wider world. They are among the richest and most detailed primary sources for the history of the past two centuries, and are fundamental to an understanding of current legislation, policy making and the political environment. HCPP online, with searchable full text, and detailed subject indexing, makes it possible to fully exploit the enormous potential of this resource for the first time. The origins of HCPP online lie in the Chadwyck-Healey microfiche edition of the nineteenth century House of Commons Sessional Papers. Published between 1980 and 1983, the microfiche edition
includes filmed images of 79,527 papers, covering 4.2 million pages. The accompanying 5 volume index, Peter Cockton's 'Subject Catalogue of the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, 1801-1900', was the first thematic listing of the complete set of parliamentary papers.'

The design of HCPP provides an example of current best industry practice in a number of ways.

First, the product is easy to access regardless of the variation in the type of local authentication system in use. Proquest offers a variety of alternatives to cover the login process ranging from IP-based authentication to referring URL and, in the UK, ATHENS/ATHENS DA. Given Proquest’s considerable involvement in this market through other information products, it would be reasonable to expect a timely, shibbolised access point in due course.

Second, the interface has been highly customized for the specific purpose of identifying the materials in question. It is totally fit for this purpose. British Parliamentary papers are not the easiest materials for a beginner to use. Even use of the earlier fiche version required the user to understand the difference between House of Commons Papers, Command Papers (and their various sequences), House of Lords Papers, Bills, reports, debates in each house etc – not to mention a trawl through substantial, printed index volumes to get there. In contrast, the
search interface for the online version is truly intuitive (even for those with no great knowledge of parliamentary papers) and has been clearly designed with the user in mind. There is a quick search box for general enquiries and even that has context-sensible delimiters (such as limit to full-text records only). For more detailed search requirements there are means to search by paper title, subject index, chair or author and session (parliamentary ‘year’); all with the sensible option of limiting search by document type (bill, paper, report etc.) and optional A-Z lists. Furthermore there are a number of additional search and limit options. The ability to limit by Paper Number is very useful. The mysteries of the various sequences of command papers, for example, c, cd, cmd etc. are therefore avoided - although it would be even more helpful if the search engine recognized an ‘open’ format e.g. cd33 as well as it retrieves the technically correct cd.33. Searching can also be limited to a range of years, by format of document (Maps/Plans, Tables/Graphs, Illustrations/Photographs). Additionally, the results sort and display options can be set before the search is made and ‘clear search’ allows the user to enter entirely new search options without the need to clear a number of input boxes. Following a successful search, the user only has to select an item or items from the ‘browse’ list of records. The link ‘by title’ leads to a descriptive ‘bibliographic’ record (with a
'next record’ option as well as a link to full text and a durable URL (for personal listing purposes)). The display list also provides direct access to both of the latter. At any point, it is very easy to navigate out of the search session, back to the list of retrieved records or to other parts of the system (including a new search). It is also possible to save results (and search strategies) to an online ‘archive’ for retrieval at a later date or to download bibliographic citations – remembering that this type of material is not otherwise easy to describe correctly. Records can also be ‘marked’ for later downloading as a group, e-mailing, printing, viewing, or adding to the personal online ‘archive’.

Additional flexibility is provided by a series of viewing and download options. Full-text results permit download in .pdf or .tiff format (a greater variety than many other information systems) together with an enhanced-quality ‘reading’ viewing option. Immediate printing from the .pdf file version is also available. The full-text view also allows you to further search within the displayed document for additional search terms or to jump to a specific page or range of pages.

It should be clear by now that HCPP is a feature rich resource totally fit for the purpose of interrogating and exploiting its complex data sets. But there is more. By using Peter Cockton’s Subject Catalogue of the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers,
1801-1900 as the indexing source, it has been possible to
establish a three-level subject catalogue which can be browsed
and expanded easily at the whim of the researcher. This is useful
in identifying resources whose indexing (however sophisticated)
may not always retrieve them to the best benefit of the user,
especially those looking for records relating to broader subject
areas. It is perhaps a minor weakness that the system loses its
trail once a record has been retrieved in full text (although not
at description level) so the user has to re-enter the subject
browse system if looking for similar records.

In terms of help systems, HCPP once again excels through the
availability of an online demo and easy-to-follow ‘pop-up’ online
help screen invoked from a well-situated drop-down menu. If
required, technical support is available using e-mail or phone
contacts and, in my experience, is not only well-informed but
promptly delivered. To aid those unused to British parliamentary
terms there is an online glossary of terms and a useful summary
description of parliamentary papers organization and even a list
of the principal ministers in the British parliament of the
nineteenth century. It is equally good to find a product of this
size with very acceptable response times and which can be
accessed using Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer and Firefox.
As might be expected from such a well-defined product, HCPP is
compatible with EndNote, ProCite, Reference Manager and RefWorks.
In conclusion, HCPP is a fully-featured resource which has greatly improved scholarly access to much of the world’s most important primary materials relating to the history of the nineteenth century.

**Contract Provisions**

Institutional access on- or off-campus. No restrictions on concurrent user numbers.

**Authentication**

Available on- and off-campus; in the UK authentication can be arranged using ATHENS or ATHENS DA, alternatively by IP address range and/or username and password and referring url.

**Author’s Selected References**

None.

**Advisor Additional References**

More references to be supplied by The Charleston Advisor.

**Author’s Biography**

Martin Myhill is currently Acting University Librarian at the University of Exeter UK. A library science graduate, Martin is specifically charged with responsibilities for library staff,
space utilization, systems and special projects. His career to date has involved considerable international library and
information systems activity, especially in Europe and also countries which are part of the former Soviet Union and Mongolia.
He has published regularly, particularly in studies relating to the procurement, use and evaluation of library systems. See <http://www.ex.ac.uk/~MRMyhill/lib/mm.html> for a fuller description of his professional activities and recent publications and conference participation.

Composite Score Box:

Your Product Name Review Scores Composite: ****
The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.
Content: ****

Full-text provision for the nineteenth century papers is not yet complete (but imminent)

Searchability: *****
Both searching and results management are the epitome of best practice

Pricing Options: ***

This is a huge resource which provides the major primary evidence relating to the events of the nineteenth century; the list price unfortunately reflects the value of the data and the quality of the resource
Contract Options: ****

Subject to user licence. The Higher Education licence terms can be regarded as standard within the industry

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