

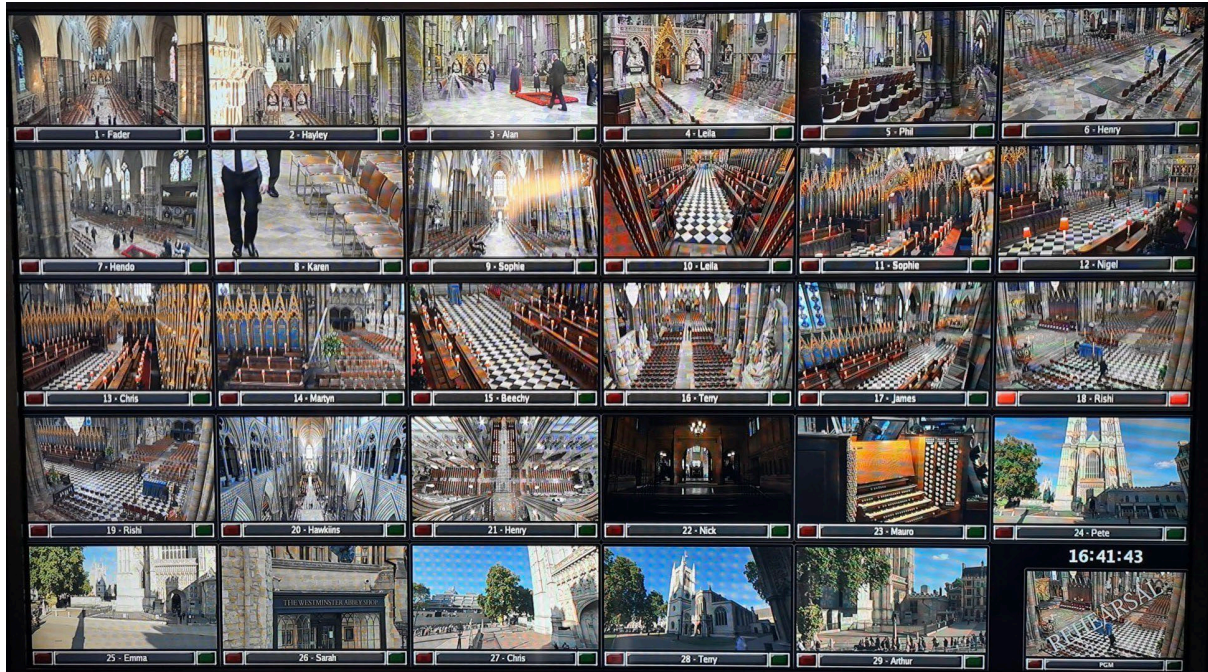
The Queen's Funeral
19 September 2022
By Martin Hawkins

Being a freelance television cameraman, I was honoured to have been asked by the BBC to be part of the camera crew on the Queen's funeral working at Westminster Abbey and going 'live' to your homes and around the world.

Although Her Majesty's death was sudden, her funeral (code name; London Bridge) had been planned for years. The BBC actually had over 200 cameras on the funeral day, with 23 of them inside the Abbey. I was operating camera 20 which was situated high up on the first-floor gallery looking down the nave towards the coffin and choir.



Although we had 23 cameras in the Abbey, I was one of only nine camera operators in the great building as all of the others were small remote cameras, controlled by an operator who sat outside in the outside broadcast truck alongside the director and her team.



The story goes that the royal family don't like big cameras and even bigger camera operators in their line of sight and so as the technology allowed and the cameras became smaller, they were clamped to columns and operated remotely.





All the outside broadcast trucks and cameras had arrived and were rigged during the week but I, along with the rest of the camera crew turned up on the Friday, four days before the funeral. Why four days early I hear you ask...

With all the hugs and “How have you been?” out of the way, we made our way to our cameras to rehearse the choir and hymns in the morning and then in the afternoon we checked all the speaking positions to make sure the cameras had a good and clear shot of the person talking. It turned out there were a number of microphones hanging from the ceiling in our way, (they were there to pick up the sound of the choir and congregation) but after some negotiations with our friends in BBC Radio who were mixing the funeral sound, the riggers hurried up into the roof and moved the mics ‘up a bit’ and ‘left or right a bit’ until they were clear of our shots.



Saturday morning was spent double checking these positions and then running through all the camera shots that the director had planned for funeral service. However, it was difficult to make out who was where, as there were so many cleaners and florists walking around with hoovers and bunches of lilies, not to mention a number of policemen and Abbey staff making sure all the chairs were in straight lines.

I also spotted a man walking round the Abbey with a Hawk on his arm, and so I couldn't resist asking the question why? He told me that a pigeon had been spotted somewhere in the Abbey and the Hawk was going after it! Before I thanked him, The Hawk had a quick selfie with the hawk.



During lunch I had the chance to walk round Parliament Square taking in the atmosphere which was rather quiet and somber. All the roads around that area had been closed to traffic and it was unusual to see it so calm.

Back to the Abbey and at 2.30pm on the dot, we did a complete dress run with all the military and officials in their positions but with 'stand-ins' for all the main royal family and those reading or preaching. No one is allowed to stand in for the King and Queen Consort though, so you have to imagine where they'd be walking and point your camera at two empty chairs.

With the great west door firmly closed, as no one outside was allowed to see in, the 8 soldiers carrying a replica coffin with a simple blue drape over it was sent down the aisle towards the altar and the dress rehearsal was underway.

You can imagine the confusion when the director asked for a shot of William and Kate... The people from the Palace office were not 'look-a-likes!' It was a moment of light relief in an otherwise sombre afternoon.

After a few beers in the hotel bar that night celebrating how well the dress run had gone, Sunday was spent going through the service bit by bit with the director making a few changes to camera angles having learnt a lot from the day before. Our BBC Floor Manager was kept busy running from the Lectern, to the Pulpit to the Altar allowing us to check our shots.



Then it was all back to the hotel (bypassing the bar) for an early night as our taxis were booked for 4.30am the next day.

Monday did not start well as most of our taxis didn't turn up but luckily someone had an Uber account so we were soon on our way and not that late, but it was stress we all didn't need. There was a ring of security barriers all around the Parliament area with road closures everywhere. Getting near wasn't easy and anyone working inside and outside the Abbey had to be through the security checking points by 5am.

As we walked to Parliament Square through the quiet streets of Victoria, I checked I had the correct passes; A BBC pass, an Interior Abbey pass and a gold wrist band. None of us were quite sure what that one was for - but we were all allowed through and we could breathe a sigh of relief.

It was far too early for breakfast but as we were to be behind our cameras at 7am, everyone grabbed a coffee and bacon roll and made their way inside. Gone was all the 'banter' that is normally associated with cameramen, this day was different. We were much quieter with most of us thinking about getting our shots right and keeping them in focus.

From 8am until the funeral was over, we had to offer pictures from inside the Abbey for the TV stations around the world to use when they needed them. It was going to be a long time until I could visit the toilet and about 10am I was wishing I hadn't had that coffee...

But it seemed like in no time at all, the Queen was arriving at the great west door and the real work and the reason we were there had begun. My heart started to beat a little bit faster and my hand gripped the panning handle a little bit tighter.

As the coffin was carried down the aisle, the director said, "Coming to camera 20", the red light came on in my viewfinder and my heart beat went up a couple more notches. My shot was 'live' around the world to four and a half billion people. It was a moment in my career I'll never forget, and like most people watching, it was a day I will never, ever forget.