

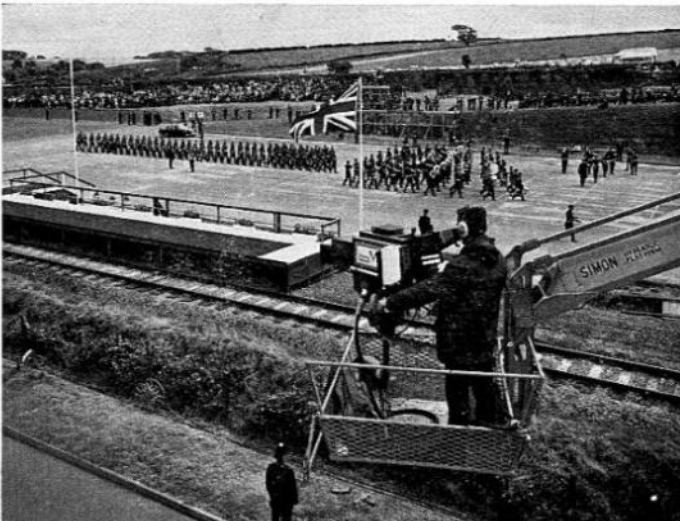
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INDEPENDENT TELEVISION AT CAERNARVON

In July, 1969, HRH Prince Charles was invested as Prince of Wales at Caernarvon Castle in North Wales, the scene of the first presentation of a Prince of Wales six centuries before. This splendid piece of pageantry was a natural subject for television and was seen by means of satellite and land links by fifty million people throughout the world.

There is no doubt that an outside broadcast of a State Occasion is a massive engineering exercise of the greatest complexity. When Independent Television decides to embark on a broadcast the size of the Investiture, one must add to this the difficulty of co-ordinating men and equipment from fifteen separate television organizations.

As producer of *The State Funeral of Sir Winston Churchill*, I got some idea of what this means. For that historic event we had the benefit of five years of planning and preparation, and also the geographical luxury of having London as the focal point. For the Investiture, the time element was much shorter, and the remoteness of that splendid Castle at Caernarvon presented a problem of communications and logistics.



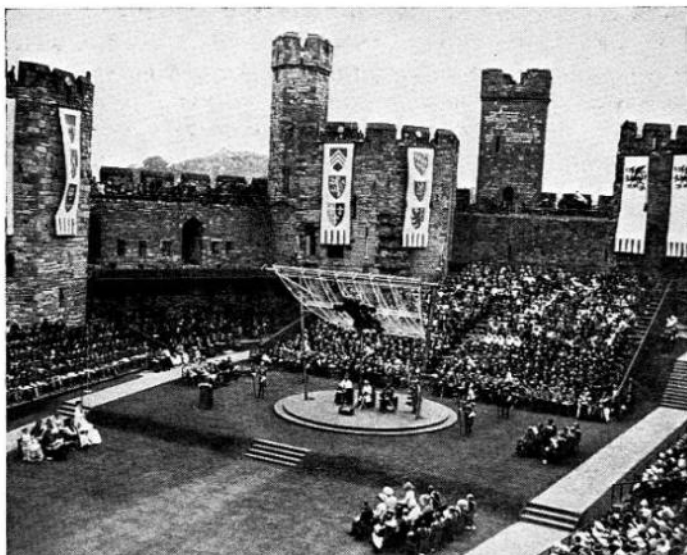
The rostrum at the railhead.

The basic technical requirements for any outside broadcast are well known – sufficient cameras to portray the events of the day as they unfold. In addition, however, the producer has to look ahead to the actual transmission and impose technical demands at an early stage to give him the facility to interpret the occasion as he thinks fit.

In this case, the historical significance of Caernarvon Castle and the reason for its choice as the arena for the Investiture, presented visual opportunities which had to be explored and decided upon right from the start. Nothing makes one more unpopular with engineers than to request extra camera positions at the last moment. The Castle is one of several fortifications built by Edward 1 in the thirteenth century, forming a strategic encirclement of the Welsh redoubt of Snowdonia. On my first visit to the site, camera positions suggested themselves which were able to show the relationship of the Castle to the Menai Straits, its position on the water's edge, and its proximity to the mountains of Snowdonia which dominate this little town of Caernarvon.

In addition, I felt it desirable to be able to stand back occasionally from the detailed scene of the day's events, a sort of visual breather, to collect one's thoughts and to re-establish the geography of the setting. In the end, one single camera was able to achieve all this. A quarter of a mile from the Castle, and overlooking the town, stands Twt Hill. From this elevated vantage point we could pan 360° and take in the mountains, the town, the Castle, the Straits and Anglesey. The repertoire of shots was immense, and it became a key position during the four hours we were on the air.

Curiously, I found that the ten cameras inside the Castle could create a claustrophobic effect and the more solemn moments such as anthems, prayers and hymns were in danger of losing some of their significance. Maybe this was due to the sustained high drama inside the Castle and the lack of light and shade in the ceremony as it unfolded. Somehow, going outside the Castle brought dramatic



The scene in the castle. Twt Hill can be discerned in the background.

relief, and when, for instance, the choir sang 'Land of our Fathers', as only a Welsh choir can, it seemed appropriate to go outside and show a long slow sweep of the mountains, then to the foothills, and as this glorious anthem ended, a slow zoom into the Royal Standard flying high on the Eagle Tower.

Another camera position which was requested early on was half a mile away, across the Menai Straits, on the shore of Anglesey. From this position one could look over the water and see the town and Castle against the backdrop of Snowdon. The cameraman was able to pan along the whole ceremonial route, 2½ miles of it, to the railhead at the Ferodo Works where the Royal train came to its halt. It is not very difficult to get the viewer geographically confused, and one long sustained shot, which connects one point of importance to another, helps to overcome this. In 1965, our camera at the very top of the dome of St. Paul's played a similar role in the Churchill funeral.

Altogether, twenty-eight cameras were used in Caernarvon on the day, supplied and manned by seven of the ITV companies. The initial technical planning had been carried out by Harlech Television, and early in 1969 Granada Television made itself responsible for the execution of the complex engineering details. Early in June, a huge television compound was constructed just outside the Castle on its south side. All the technical facilities usually associated with television studios had to be specially designed, built and installed in the Production and Engineering Control Complex inside this compound. From every point of view it was formidable, to say the least.

In the production control gallery, I was facing



The producer's control gallery, during rehearsal at Caernarvon, with the ever-present chief engineer symbollicay reflected in the glass partition.

twenty-eight monitors, with twenty-three separate incoming sources under my direct control. This was a minor nightmare which my very experienced Vision Mixer would readily confirm. The only way to avoid total chaos was to impose a very strict production talkback discipline. Unfortunately, the mixture of different types of equipment from the various companies made it impossible for the cue lights in camera viewfinders to be wired to the mixing panel. A cameraman, therefore, did not know when his output was being transmitted, and this placed a great responsibility on my production assistant, who had to 'call' each shot on the talkback and keep it up for four hours.

The producer's talkback had to reach every cameraman, the sound balancers and the two satellite directors who were controlling seven cameras between them at the Ferodo Works and along the processional route. To design and build all this, and to get it to function without a flaw, is without doubt, a major engineering triumph. Added to this was the problem of getting vision and sound signals back to the ITA transmitter at Winter Hill, the other side of that great mountain barrier. Sometimes I think it is just as well that the layman is unaware of the enormous effort that goes into the mounting of one single television programme.

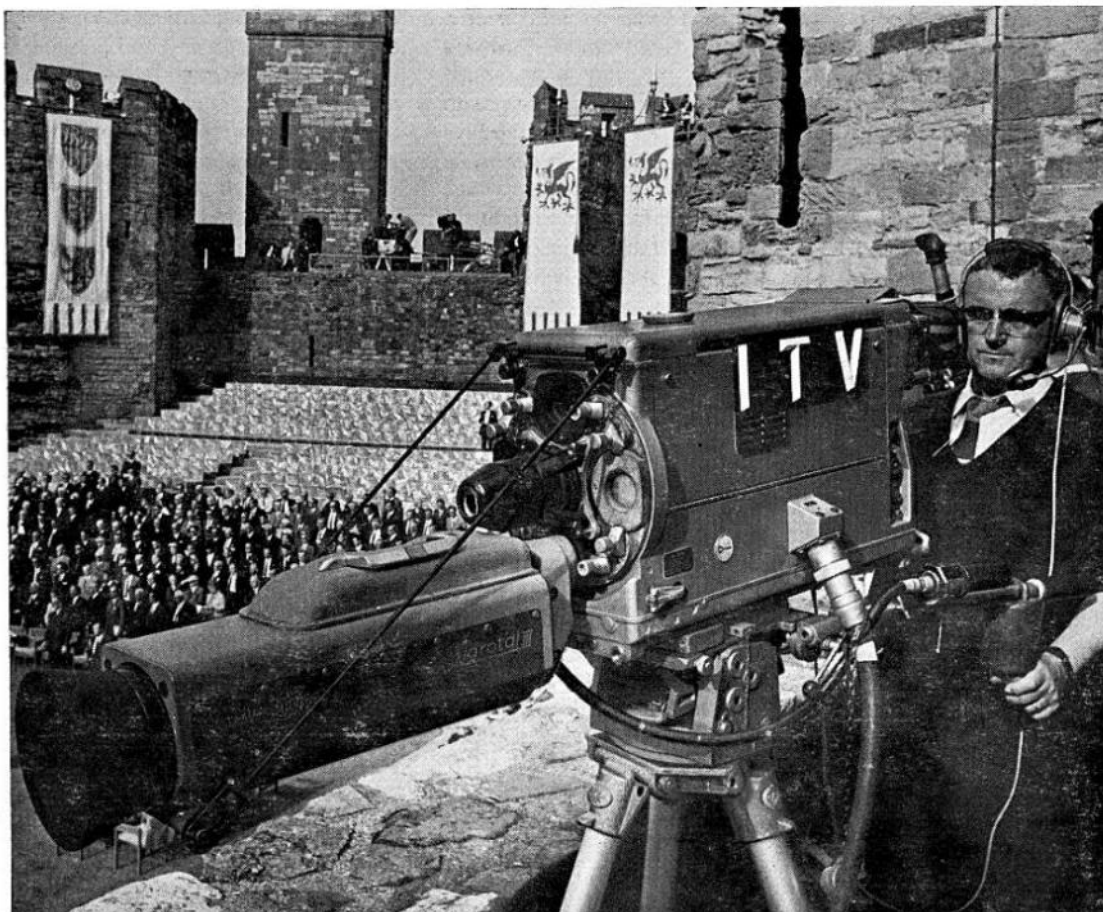
I learnt from past experience that unless production works hand in hand with engineering, all is lost. Close collaboration from the start is vital. Mutual

trust and respect must be established, or the chances are that it will end in tears. One has got to be able to justify each technical requirement to the engineers and be absolutely certain in one's own mind what one wants to do. In the same way, the engineers must communicate their problems in simple words. In this way, one side's enthusiasm stimulates the other, and what could be an agonizing period of work becomes an enjoyable partnership.

In 1965, Brian Connell was the main commentator for the Churchill Funeral, so for me he was the obvious and only candidate for the Investiture. The relationship between producer and commentator is difficult to define. It has to be of a very special nature, agreeing the interpretation of the event *before* it happens, and developing a mind-reading act *when* it happens. While the commentator is speaking into his microphone, he must at the same time listen on his headset to the producer's talkback and be aware of the decision-taking processes which go on continually throughout the broadcast – what is happening, what is about to happen, what camera I am going to cut to, the detailed timings and so on. This calls for enormous concentration, and, again, mutual trust. To make this possible we like to be in visual contact, and we had a commentary box constructed immediately behind me, with a glass partition separating us. He had a transmission monitor built into his desk, and through the glass shared my view of all the monitors.



A tense moment inside ITV's Production Control. On Peter Morley's right the vision mixer, Kay Stromquist. On his left, his P.A Pamela Humphreys and Mike Towers, the co-ordinating director.



The Investiture was a combined ITV broadcast – individual Company identity disappears.

For the Investiture I had the good fortune to have Wynford-Vaughan Thomas to back up Brian Connell as the second commentator. His knowledge of the Welsh and their history and his great experience in broadcasting made him the ideal person to explain and interpret those parts of the day's proceedings which only a Welshman, and an expert at that, could do. He shared the commentary box with Brian Connell.

The third voice used during the broadcast belonged to Richard Burton, whose role was that of narrator. Apart from the prologue and epilogue, his main contribution was a prerecorded set-piece, putting Caernarvon into its correct historical context, relevant to the 1969 Investiture. He described the iron ring of fortifications which Edward 1 had built around Snowdonia, using quotations and poetry of the time. I illustrated this historical sequence with shots of Snowdonia, the Menai Straits, and the six castles of Rhuddlan, Conway, Beaumaris, Caernarvon, Criccieth and Harlech. The most graphic way of portraying Edward's grand strategy was from the air and I chose to shoot the whole sequence from a helicopter. Normally this would have been done with a film camera, but I was reluctant to use film. No matter how well it is shot, processed and transmitted, it brings with it a quality which makes it look unmistakably like film. In a major outside broadcast I felt that this film quality would be an intrusion; it was important to retain

that special texture peculiar to the electronic image, and here I had a bit of luck. I was able to use that astonishing new videotape recorder ~~videotape~~ the Ampex VR-3000 (the size of an overnight suitcase) and a miniature camera not much larger than a home movie.

It was an exhilarating experience. A small modification made it possible to have a 9in monitor on my lap in the helicopter. I could see what the cameraman was seeing in his viewfinder, I could see what we were recording, and what is more, call for instant playback to assess what had been recorded. Intercom between the pilot, cameraman and myself converted the helicopter into a flying one-camera studio.

I have been told that this is the first time that this equipment has been used in the UK in this way. Obviously, there is a very useful role for it in the future, especially in the outside broadcast field and in newsgathering.

For me, the broadcast of a major State Occasion poses questions far removed from engineering and production. What I have briefly described gives a small idea of the effort involved. I will not mention the cost, everyone must know that this is staggering. What worries me is the wisdom of BBC and ITV separately presenting the same event to a split television audience. In terms of economics, it does not appear to make great sense.

One wonders what is achieved by having the

same event on three channels simultaneously. Should viewers who have no desire to watch a State Occasion not be given an alternative programme to look at? Duplication does not end with the viewer, it starts with the early planning. Heavy demands are made on those who are directly concerned with staging a complicated ceremonial like the Investiture. The Palace, the Earl Marshal's Office, the Welsh Office, various Ministries, Local Government, the three Services, the Post Office and so on. In this case, their work was

doubled by having two television organizations to satisfy.

Should all this effort not be pooled and the cost shared? State Occasions, which don't happen very often, are beamed to the whole world where they are seen by a massive and appreciative audience.

Would it not be better, for these rare occasions only, to scrap competition and let the BBC and ITV speak with one voice, and thus allow British Television to present to the world a uniquely British event?