

The Festival of Remembrance: a day to remember

The past few years have marked key milestone anniversaries of significant global conflicts, such as the centenary of both the outbreak and subsequent Armistice of WW1, while 2019 saw D-Day's 75th Anniversary and 80 years since the beginning of WW2. 'Never Forget' is often associated with the horrors of such past wars, but the role of remembrance is kept painfully relevant as long as conflicts continue to wreak tragedy around the world. GTC member **Nigel Saunders** tells **Rob Emmanuel** about returning to supervise the talented camera team that once again excelled in capturing the magnificent staging of The Festival of Remembrance.



THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION/ALISON BISHOP/VIEWE

Arthur Ross squatting down at the bottom of K Stairs for the arrival of the Commonwealth flags



The whole crew feel a great sense of occasion and are driven by the need to create a faultless, polished show.

As one of the UK's longstanding flagship televised annual events, The Festival of Remembrance, which is staged in the Royal Albert Hall (RAH), is traditionally broadcast on BBC One on the evening before Remembrance Sunday, and I had regularly watched it since I was a child. So in 2012, I was delighted to be asked to operate the Technocrane (Moviebird) on this landmark programme that was so familiar to me as a viewer. I have been involved with Technocranes since they were first used by the BBC in 1991, and over the years I've operated them on various events at the RAH, so I know how much they can bring to a production, especially in this iconic venue. One of the standout qualities of the Festival is how it blends the grand scope of military pomp, ceremony and tightly choreographed set pieces with more sombre, low-key sections. It has been rewarding to fully explore the Technocrane's flexibility to offer variety, ranging from developing shots that reveal the precision and majesty of the spectacle from unique perspectives, to intimate moments observed from otherwise unobtainable angles, complementing and adding to the beautiful shots from the rest of the team.

A real sense of occasion

Since 2017, I have had the pleasure of camera supervising as well as operating the Technocrane on this major BBC Events show. The camera crew work with RTS award-winning director Bridget Caldwell to bring the coverage of the Festival to viewers across the world. The shots need to convey the scale of the event as well as draw the audience in with all the closeup details to help sensitively represent the stories that are being told. This all needs to happen smoothly and seamlessly without any of the moves and cuts distracting from the content. The whole crew feel a great sense of occasion and are driven by the need to create a faultless, polished show. The pre-shot VT inserts give us as crew a moment to reflect and the entrances of both the Chelsea Pensioners and the bereaved families are key moments that really bring home to us the true importance of remembrance. Just a brief chat with any of the service or ex-service men and women taking part makes you realise how each and every one of them has stories of such immense bravery and sacrifice that you soon realign how you view your own problems in life.

Royal approval

For the broadcast, there are a total of 16 cameras, which include 3 on cranes, a slung hothead and a radio (RF) Steadicam. We rig on the Thursday and rehearse on the Friday, but only have limited time for a rehearsal on the morning of the Festival itself, and to add to the pressure, there is only a short delay between recording and transmission. Starting early, we're in the truck for camera notes after which we go straight into a full dress rehearsal on the morning, before recording the afternoon performance, which is effectively a complete dry-run for us with a full audience which lacks only the evening show's VIPs. A quick turnaround and we're into the evening performance, attended by Her Majesty The Queen, other members of the Royal family, and many politicians and dignitaries.

Military precision

As is the way with scripted multicamera shoots, Bridget will have been through the script and videos of rehearsals and allocated a camera, shot number and description to every moment of the performance, including the musical sections. In scripted music, each shot has a bar count; counting in bars rather than seconds allows us to be perfectly in time with the orchestra should they speed up or slow down. Each shot is numbered sequentially and not only will script supervisor Annie McDougall have produced Bridget's camera scripts with all the text and lyrics on them along with the shot numbers and descriptions, she also creates a set of cards for each camera showing just that camera's shots. These may be printed on traditional camera cards or sent in PDF format as operators can now use iPads to display and edit their cards. Vision mixer Morag McIntosh marks up her camera script, making additional notes, such as when a camera has a very quick reposition, and she may need to fractionally delay the cut to allow the shot (and operator!) a fraction of a second to settle. During the performance what matters most to us is being able to hear Annie's shot numbers and bar counts nice and clearly, not just so that we know where we are in the script but, very importantly, to enable the timing of any planned shot developments as well as a 'pre roll' of moves so that they are started just before Morag cuts to you. In 2019, we had 559 scripted shots and additional ad-lib shots cut in during 'as directed' moments.

The advance guard

The process all starts for me in December, when I get a call from Claire Popplewell's team at BBC Events asking me to put together a camera crew of 26 operators for the following November. The camera positions have changed little over



I consider myself very lucky to work on The Festival of Remembrance – not only do I have the privilege of directing such a special event, but I also get to work with the best in the broadcast business. Every year the editorial and technical demands increase, and rightly so, while the rehearsal time remains tight. However, thanks to the talent and sheer brilliance of the team, I'm always proud of what we achieve.

And this is especially true of the camera team, led by Nigel Saunders who, with minimal rehearsal, do an incredible job of translating sketchy shot descriptions into beautifully crafted shots that perfectly capture the emotion of the event. Whether it's a solo artist at a piano or several hundred military personnel coming down the many staircases in the Royal Albert Hall, the whole crew care immensely about getting the right shot and always offering the best. I'm spoilt for choice when I look at all the previews and my only regret is I can't get to all the wonderful images. It's such an important evening and thanks to this amazingly talented camera team I can relax in knowing that it's the best it could possibly be.

RTS award-winning Festival of Remembrance director Bridget Caldwell

the years because they all work well and many of the cameras have very specific roles at certain moments in the performance.

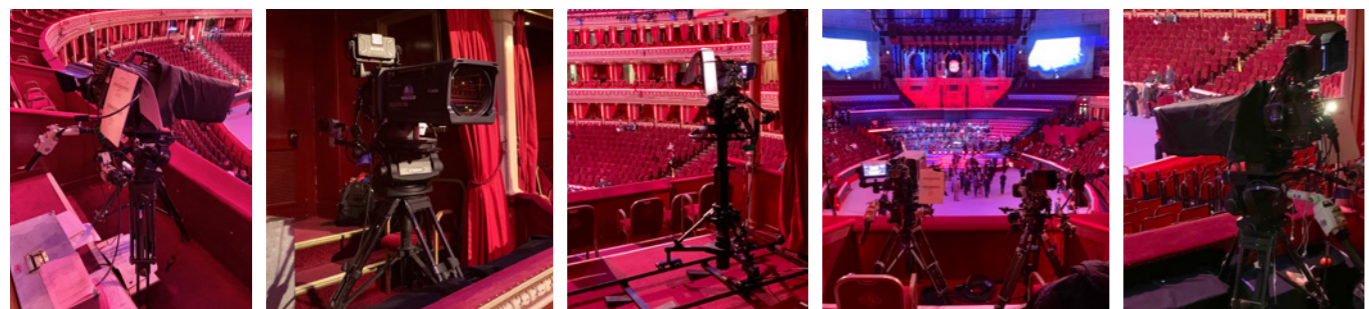
That said, Bridget and I are always exploring any new possibilities with the potential to elevate our coverage. Whilst the cameras in the Grand Tier are positioned at the front of the boxes to achieve unobstructed views down into the arena, we wanted a means to give the broadcast a more immersive live event feel. In 2018, we put forward a strong case for adding an extra camera to achieve this, and were delighted when we got the go-ahead! By adding a camera on an Osprey on track at the back of one of the boxes, we could get lovely drifting shots with the heads of people seated in the box in foreground, thereby helping to introduce a real sense of being part of the audience in the venue for the viewer at home. Even if space restricts us to an 8ft length which limits the scope of travel, this still comes into its own when it gives us views including all the Grand Tier pillars sweeping round the Hall that the other cameras can't capture as well.

Final preparations

In the October, with the crew having been booked for many months, I attend a planning meeting at the RAH. This is a big meeting with members of the military, the police and security, event production, radio and television broadcast production and technical teams, The Royal British Legion and members of the RAH team. We go through the running order and discussions are held about key moments and how to solve any issues around them. We then split into smaller groups to discuss the finer details for our own departments. Key to the production for me is the engineering manager who, for the last three years, has been Graeme Robson of Telegenic. Graeme is responsible for supplying all the kit for the OB, some from Telegenic stock and other kit hired in from various suppliers. This year, the full complement of 16 cameras in play was a mixture of Sony 1500 and 2500 bodies, with one P1 camera.

Roll call of cameras

Starting on the arena floor, we have Lewis Mutongwizo and Charlie Bryan operating the two handheld RF



Cameras positioned around the Royal Albert Hall

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A great shot of the arena where, along with Arthur and Dave's arena ped cameras, if you look hard, starting from the left, you can also spot: Hendo's jib position (at the foot of K Stairs behind the flags on the left); Box GT22 with Vince Spooner and Pete Johnson's cameras (at the top of K stairs); then to the right, Emma Millen's position in the box above the curtain at the top of the stairs; unfortunately, Andy Watts' camera is hidden by the truss

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION/JAMIE SIMMONDS

cameras, who can get in amongst the orchestra and offer some spectacular reverse shots of the Hall as well as being able to get up to the Organ Loft.

Dave Hill and Arthur Ross operate the two Osprey-mounted radio cameras, also down on the floor. They have a particularly tricky job as being in the wrong place at the wrong moment down there could mean the whole of the Queen's Colour Squadron bearing down on you with nowhere for you to escape to! The Ospreys have a specially built base attached that can carry two large batteries that power the cameras and transmitters. Obviously, with so much activity and movement on the arena floor, cabled cameras are not an option.

RF Steadicam operator Martyn Porter has the unenviable task of travelling through the marching bands before disappearing down one set of stairs from the arena, only to appear from another set for his next shot! The show is still shot in HD rather than 4K, so Martyn has a P1 camera with a HJ14 on his rig.

The final camera based on the arena floor, next to the staircase known as K Stairs, directly opposite the stage, is a short over-slung jib on 10ft of track. The track gives 'Hendo' the ability to sit over the stairs for a square-on shot of the arena, or to track back to get the camera head beside the stairs to allow people to enter. Equipped with a wide lens, this achieves a stunning range of shots.

The next layer up from the arena is the Stalls, home to just two cameras. Paul Jarvis operates an Osprey ped with a 40:1 lens to give shots from camera left of the stage and the arena as well as to look over to the Royal Box, and by turning around he can look back up H Stairs, used for the entrance of various participants within the show. There is not a year goes by without Paul striking up a conversation with one of the veterans and learning all about their story. When you hear what they did and what they went through, you are really humbled and appreciate why The Festival of Remembrance is so very important.

The other Stalls camera is the 44ft Technocrane; its base stands on a scaffold platform purpose-built by Trans-Sport, specialists in media structures. The Technocrane is a telescopic camera crane supplied by Technovision, which is part of Panavision. Technician Felix Pages is in charge of the 'rack', which is the arm extension and retraction part of the crane that can take the camera anywhere from 12ft to 44ft from the crane base. This ability to make the crane shorter or longer has a multitude of benefits. It enables it to hide from other wide shots in the Hall and then rack out over the orchestra or arena to get the camera head close to the artistes and action. We can, with grips John Kolthammer and Kelvin Lee swinging the counterbalanced arm, get within a few feet of the organ console, directly over centre stage or well into the arena. We can 'fly' over The Royal British Legion standards and swoop over the Stalls audience down to the arena. This all requires timing, coordination, communication and a good working relationship with lighting to help avoid shadows, and the

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Dave Hill on the arena floor with one of the radio cameras on an Osprey, with adapted base for holding large batteries

ability to briefly rehearse a shot, note it down and then repeat it each performance. The close cooperation between the four of us on the crane is essential to achieve the maximum visual impact from the crane shots without appearing in all the other wide shots. I sit at a desk behind the crane with two monitors, a viewfinder and a mixer out feed, and operate the head of the crane from a console. I control zoom and focus as well as having a joystick to control pan and tilt.

At the back of the Stalls all the way around the Hall are the loggia boxes and we have taken over two of these, installing one camera with a 95:1 lens in each. One of these, operated by Adrian Homeshaw, provides Huw Edwards' main mid-shot, whilst the other camera, operated by Andy Watt, covers the Royal Box and K Stairs as well as the arena.

Moving up to the Grand Tier, we have four more cameras. Box GT22 is square on to the stage and so here we place Vince Spooner's camera with a HJ14. With a horizontal angle of view of 96.3 degrees, this lens produces an impressive central wide shot of the Hall. Alongside Vince in GT22, is Pete Johnson with a 95:1 lens that can easily pick up any closeups on stage. Also on the Grand Tier are Ginnie Bridgstock and Emma Millen. Emma's camera was the one added in 2018 and is set back behind the seats in GT15. As mentioned already, the 8ft section of track in the box means that tracking is limited, but combined with the ability of the Osprey to ped up and down, even a small amount of movement can be effective with the heads big in foreground and so the shots can be varied and sustain four or eight slow bars. Being set back, the shot also accentuates the beautiful sweep of the columns that go around the Grand Tier.

Ginnie is on the opposite side of the hall and can capture action in the arena from camera right; however, her position and my Technocrane are on the same side of the hall, so it's very easy for me to cross through her shot. Careful notes are taken during rehearsals of when we are at risk of sailing



Technician Felix Pages and grip John Kolthammer testing the 44ft Technocrane during the rig

through one of her shots, so we can avoid any disasters on the night. The main role of her camera, though, is during the sequence known as ‘the muster’, which is the point when service men and women enter from almost every staircase in the Hall to meet in the arena, in preparation for the service and the solemn moment of the poppies falling. The entrances are accompanied by stirring marching music. The muster is a tricky sequence; Huw has names and distinct groups on which he needs to comment and we all need to provide shots on the right staircase at the right moment. No retakes, no second chances. Ginnie’s camera is the one covering K Stairs as we all listen intently to Bridget and Annie, who is shot calling and shouting out helpful reminders such as ‘pointy hats’. When everyone has arrived on the arena floor without a shot being missed there is a great sense of relief.

Just two cameras left. The Gallery is home to Dave Brice’s jib. With an 18ft arm in overslung setup, he can slide past the magnificent pillars and reveal the beautiful chandelier in the bay, high above the Hall. He also has a great view of all the stunning floor projections provided by graphics and Nigel Catmur’s lighting team. From Normandy beaches to Lancaster bombers and Spitfires, all manner of graphics are projected onto the floor. The beautiful shots produced by the jib in the Gallery are simply breathtaking.

Another shot that will take your breath away – especially

if you have a fear of heights – is Wayne Ratcliffe’s overhead shot. Looking directly down on the arena, the slung Peepod head with a HJ14 gives the perfect plan view of proceedings. The head is attached to a T-shaped truss to minimise the amount of swing when the head moves. The cables go up into the dome of the Hall before dropping down to Wayne’s operating position at my desk behind the Technocrane. Predictably, the moment you put a camera 60ft up in the air that is so difficult to access, you know that will be the one that needs attention! We do have some back focus issues with this camera as it doesn’t like pointing directly down all day long. Getting it down to adjust is always a problem, as cables in the dome need to be released and we need a clear arena floor, which is a rarity over the two days.

Lights, camera, projection

BBC Events produce the show for The Royal British Legion and, in conjunction with the Legion and the military, they put together a running order to make sure significant anniversaries are remembered. Each sequence in the running order is produced and, from that, a brief is sent out for the graphics.

Items can involve choreographed live action interacting with imagery projected on the floor: perhaps a military band marching to positions outlining a bomber aircraft, or a poem recited at the sea edge of a beach. Just as on *Strictly* or *Dancing with the Stars* in Ireland, the graphic designer produces floor graphics, often animated and in different layers so that, on the day, some individual elements can be moved to fit the arena or action. For instance, the plane could be resized to make it as big as possible for the band to stand on, or the ratio between the beach and the sea altered. The separation of elements also allowed a Spitfire and Lancaster to be ‘flown’ across the sky-coloured arena floor, accompanied by suitable sound effects, all shown from a high-angle wide shot, of course. The initial collaboration is between production, lighting and graphics, as well as the director. With rehearsal time very limited once we are in the Hall, this is why such careful planning and a flexible system for graphics is so important.

The Festival makes full use of the RAH’s extensive lighting rig with additional lighting supplied by Elstree Light and Power, all of which is controlled jointly by grandMA3 and Road Hog 4 programmable lighting consoles, under the guidance of lighting director Nigel. The Hog 4 takes control of 16 layers of a Hippotizer Karst media server, in order to use the floor projection as a lighting tool on top of the projection capability.



Dave Hill and Arthur Ross have a particularly tricky job as being in the wrong place at the wrong moment on the arena floor could mean the whole of the Queen’s Colour Squadron bearing down on you with nowhere for you to escape to!



The Pee Pod remote head, slung over the centre of the arena, showcases the interaction between the projected graphics and the performers

Festival of Remembrance Crew 2019

CAMERA SUPERVISOR
Nigel Saunders

CAMERA OPS
Adrian Homeshaw
Vince Spooner
Pete Johnson
Andy Watt
Paul Jarvis
Ginnie Bridgstock
Arthur Ross
Dave Hill
Lewis Mutongwizo
Charlie Bryan
Emma Millen

JIB OPS
Dave Brice
John 'Hendo' Henderson

HOTHEAD OP
Wayne Ratcliffe

STEADICAM OP
Martyn Porter

STEADICAM ASSISTANT
Toby Miles

CAMERA ASSISTANTS
Steve White
Jordan Osborne
Neil Davis
Phil Hogg
Donald Eke

JIB ASSISTANTS
Peter Newman
Josh Codner

TECHNOCRANE GRIPS
John Kolthammer
Kelvin Lee

TECHNOCRANE TECHNICIAN
Felix Pages

HOTHEAD TECHNICIAN
Will Daniels



Just part of the crew after morning camera notes

The display of the impressive graphics sequences on the arena floor is powered by 12x 31k Panasonic laser projectors installed overhead, into a grid of six. Once lined up and calibrated for seamless edge blending, a composite of all the projectors' individual outputs is created so that a full rendition of each sequence covers the entire floor as designed. This is achieved by the Hippotizer Karst sending a 4K feed of the animated graphics sequences into a Barco E2 unit, which is a live screen management system that does the splitting up of the 4K images before distributing the correct section to each appropriate projector. All the LED screens are fed directly from three additional Karsts. The projectors and E2 were supplied by Creative Technology and the Hippotizers and control supplied by Cat's Life Media.

2018's show featured a beautiful sequence reflecting back on WW1, which involved various readings and songs being performed around the arena floor, as montages were projected onto a 'box' of four tall semi-opaque 'silks' that were hung in the centre. A brilliant idea that was very effective, but did these 'roller blinds' cause a lot of stress! They compromised the overhead camera, and spent the rehearsal morning refusing to operate reliably, but in the end they were worth all the worry when they performed perfectly on the night. Whether it was the three-dimensional effect that came from the jib, Steadicam and crane 'flying' around them, or Nigel's inspired use of light and shade that gave an ethereal quality to the images hanging there, shining out from the darkness, almost holographically bringing to life those who have long since passed, their effect was simply stunning.



Careful notes are taken during rehearsals of when we are at risk of sailing through one of Ginnie's shots, so we can avoid any disasters on the night.

Medal of honour

The event really is a triumph of logistics, precision planning, discipline and creativity, where everybody involved pulls together and applies themselves and their skills with the utmost professionalism and dedication, but such endeavour unquestionably pays off. Rarely do you feel such pressure to cover something as perfectly as we all know The Festival of Remembrance deserves. I am proud of the whole team and being a part of that is a great honour for me. We are all delighted that the 2018 Festival of Remembrance won a BAFTA in the Live Event Category as well as an Entertainment Craft BAFTA for Sound, Lighting, Graphics and Music and that Bridget won an RTS award for her direction (2019's coverage has been nominated for a GTC Award for Excellence).

The crew is booked ready for 2020 and I'm just waiting for the date to be set for the planning meeting that will signal our very own call to arms, peds and cranes – it's a national service for which it is our privilege to be 'called up'.



Fact File

Nigel Saunders first wrote to the BBC asking to work on cameras at age 11 – and did so every year until finally, aged 18, he got the job. After training at BBC Wood Norton in 1978, he worked on numerous much-loved programmes from *Play School* to *Top of the Pops*, before supervising anything from *Rentaghost* to *Never Mind the Buzzcocks*. He is currently working as Technocrane operator for Shinawil on RTE's *Dancing with the Stars* in Dublin, as well as jib operating and camera supervising *Pointless* at Elstree and *All Round to Mrs Browns* in Glasgow. In April he will supervise and operate a Furio on *The Olivier Awards*. Nigel has extensive experience with Technocranes, jibs, Furio and Junior dollies, Towercams and hotheads.

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