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 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 1981, 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 intimate, 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 closeup details to help sensitively represent the stories that are printed on traditional camera cards or sent in PDF format as numbers and descriptions, she also creates a set of cards for each camera showing just that camera’s shots. These may be 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 very 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 ‘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 Royal approval
For the broadcast, there are a total of 16 cameras, which include 3 on cranes, a slung head and a radio (RF) Steadycam. 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’s fireworks. 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 very 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 ‘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 Royal approval
For the broadcast, there are a total of 16 cameras, which include 3 on cranes, a slung head and a radio (RF) Steadycam. 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’s fireworks. 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 very 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 ‘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
A day to remember

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION/JAMIE SIMMONDS

A great shot of the arena where, along with Arthur and Dave’s arena ped cameras, you can look hard, starting from the left, you see a camera and a HJ14 on his rig. The final camera based on the arena floor, next to the stair case 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 44f 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 artists 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 ability to briefly rehearse a shot, note it down and then repeat 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 HJ4. 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 lift 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

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.

www.gtc.tv
A day to remember

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 H114 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 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.

**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, Towercanns and hotheads.

Contact Nigel on: email: nigelwsaunders@hotmail.com; mobile: 07973 261381

With thanks to: Francine Holdgate and The Royal British Legion

Claire Popplewell and BBC Events

---

**A day to remember**

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’.

---

**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