

Everyone loves a wedding!

Camera supervisor **Rob Sargent** was delighted when he was invited to look after the camera coverage of the Castle Route section of the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. The build-up to the big day involved a delicate balance of pushing for permission to rig and operate cameras in the optimum positions to ensure great coverage for the millions of viewers at home, while at the same time remaining unobtrusive and sensitive to the needs and wishes of those personally involved in the wedding as well as the many people who live and work within the castle grounds. For Rob, it is a true perk of the job that it grants him the opportunity to be involved in such memorable and enjoyable occasions.

With thanks to all crew members who supplied the photos.

In April 2011, I was lucky enough to be part of a crew in Westminster Abbey for the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. My tool on that day was what I can only describe as a cross between a Merlin arm and a periscope, with controls and the viewfinder at eyeline rising to 10ft above me, and a rather clunky 40:1 lens behaving a bit like my dog when he doesn't want to go on a walk –

slow, stubborn and erratic! I did get the ring shot but overall the whole experience was nerve-wracking due to the kit. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, the feeling was one of joy to have been involved. So when BBC Studios rang up early this year to ask if I would like to look after the Castle Route section of their coverage of this year's Royal Wedding, of course I said I would love to.



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BBC Studios' coverage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's wedding in May involved three scanners, three directors and three separate crews, altogether comprising around 80 cameras. Fantastically facilitated by NEP UK, one crew (headed by Bruce Miller) would cover inside St George's Chapel and the exit of the couple to the royal carriage; Chris Goor and his crew would be in the two presentation studios; while our crew would cover the Castle Route, arrivals of guests into the chapel and the procession of the carriage within the castle walls. Sky and ITN then took over, following the happy couple as they travelled around Windsor town, and the BBC picked up the coverage again as they re-entered from The Long Walk for their arrival at their reception in St George's Hall.

Windsor Castle, it would appear, rarely closes. It is a place of work for many and, moreover, it is a home to many more than just the Royal Family, plus of course it is a very busy tourist attraction. The setting up of this wedding had to take place within those parameters. The working environment was not going to be able to just stop in order to let us put up our cameras in our own time, wherever we wanted them. And, although this was a wedding the nation was very keen to see (not to mention many millions overseas as well), it was not always the case that those organising the wedding on the Royal Family's behalf from Kensington Palace and Windsor Castle wanted to see the cameras! Therein lies the challenge. Impossible, of course, but it has to be very much in your mind when you decide where to place equipment.

Pushing ahead on the technology front

The BBC Events team obviously has a long history of covering royal and other national events and had been asked by Kensington Palace to provide the core coverage of the events in the castle on a pooled basis. BBC Production Engineering Manager Peter Taylor was responsible for designing the architecture of the TV coverage and for gathering together the technical team to deliver it, so I'll leave him to outline the engineering side of the operation: "Ever since the Coronation in 1953, royal events have been occasions when TV technology has had a very public opportunity to up its game. In 2011, it was 3D but that hasn't fared very well. In 2018, the broadcasters had the opportunity to push ultra high definition (UHD) formats and, while the Windsor event wasn't exactly a first, the challenges of delivering event coverage in a royal residence in 4K HDR 2020 were not slight. As always with these national events, there is some pooling of resources between the UK broadcasters, and Sky was very keen to deliver everything in 4K for its UHD channel. The BBC too has been experimenting with UHD formats and almost inevitably has chosen a different spec to Sky. After some discussion and also fairly careful thought, given the profile of the event, it was agreed that the BBC would provide all its pool coverage in 4K HDR, while Sky would continue with its established format of 4K SDR. By happy chance, this neatly matched the availability of 4K trucks within the UK market as the wedding clashed with the FA Cup Final.

"Whilst attempting to push the boundaries with all this, we also had to be careful to protect the coverage the majority of the public would be enjoying, which was in 'plain old' HD. So the workflow had both the HD and 4K HDR outputs of the camera CCUs delivered to separate vision-mixing crates, which were slaved together to produce the two separate but identical outputs, differing only in format. The racks engineers concentrated mainly on the HD pictures but the



GTC member Prav Shetty ready for action

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Each camera position usually ends up as a slight compromise of where you would ideally like to put it – after all, we were not the only gig in town that day.

operation was set up to ensure that the same pictures from the same cameras all worked in HD, UHD SDR and UHD HDR with some very clever and careful conversion work carried out by the BBC R&D team. This was in reality so much at the cutting edge that some of the code for the conversion process was rewritten on site."

While the engineers grappled with formats, I got down to placing what turned out to be 31 x Sony HDC-4300s, 2 x HDC-P43s and 3 x PXW-Z450 camcorders. The latter were our RF cameras, supplied in this instance by Timeline. There were 36 cameras in all, to include six jibs, two remote heads, a Steadicam and two handheld RFs.

All about planning

The process of camera positioning was made a whole lot easier by the presence of Peter Taylor, Richard Lancaster (Lead Technical Project Manager, NEP UK) and Simon Staffurth, the director. The simplest and most logical way to approach it was to walk the route and we did this on two occasions in early March, followed up with a day-long tech meeting in April. Peter had a template camera plan based on previous events at the Castle and Simon, being an ex-TVS cameraman, is familiar with lenses and what shots they can achieve. On

top of this, Simon was very clear about what he wanted and Richard was well clued up as to where he could realistically get SMPTE and power.

Stripped down, the procession of the carriage from the chapel to the reception comprised a sequence of 36 panning shots. At home, the viewer likes to see this in a series of wide and tight shots, showing off the fantastic venue, seeing the newly-weds up close, and capturing the great atmosphere and happiness of the crowds and guests. Sounds simple – but, of course, it rarely is.

Each camera position usually ends up as a slight compromise of where you would ideally like to put it – after all, we would not be the only gig in town that day. The world's press would be there in force, as would hundreds of news crews from both the UK and abroad, all vying for the best positions. Simon or I would ask: "Peter, we'd like to put two cameras on top of the Guard Room roof, both with 8x4 platforms, one in the middle and one on the end." The answer would come back: "Sure, you can have two cameras on top of the Guard Room, but do bear in mind there will be three studios occupying the same space – BBC, Sky and ITN."

So, this was the process, and the example above was just the beginning: Cameras 1 and 2. Compromises were arrived at and the debate would move on to the next desired position: "A jib would be fantastic here, looking up towards



Top: GTC member Phil Nixon operating at the top of one of the historic towers
Bottom: Discreetly placed tracking camera – a ROC head supplied by GTC sponsor Matt Gladstone of Cammotion

would be in the form of lovely people who normally look after anything from clocks and rugs to gardens or electrics, and had been seconded to show us to the different locations and then wait for us throughout our three-day visit.

Home to many

As we all tend to be in our own homes, Her Majesty the Queen was often out and about during our reces and rehearsals. Sometimes this would stop our work and at other times we were able to carry on discreetly. And, as mentioned, we had to be constantly aware that this is the residence of many others too. The conversation would go:

"Peter, can we put a camera here, please?"
"But that's someone house" ... roll of the eyes... "OK, let me ask..."

At least three of our cameras ended up positioned within the houses or gardens of people who work at Windsor. On the 'If you don't ask, you don't get' basis, Peter would make a note to pursue the idea once it had been raised. Not surprisingly, the residents in question were at first a little wary of our disrupting their enjoyment of the day, but eventually after some gentle reassurance, both the Royal Librarian and his family, and a Lieutenant General were kind enough to agree to Tony Keene, Pete Johnson and Bill Ashworth camping out on their roof and garden respectively. Bill quickly turned the conversation to dogs – spaniels, to be precise – and, before you knew it, the camera assistant had rigged the 86:1 on the patio. The next time I looked (although I have no actual recorded proof of drinks in hand), the army officer and the cameraman were both enjoying something red!

One can only ask – and the softly, softly approach can work miracles in obtaining permission in such circumstances. One request even involved filming through someone's bedroom window: "Give me two minutes to clear it up!" was the

response. I am convinced that in the end our presence actually enhanced the enjoyment of the day for all those involved and they certainly couldn't have been more accommodating.

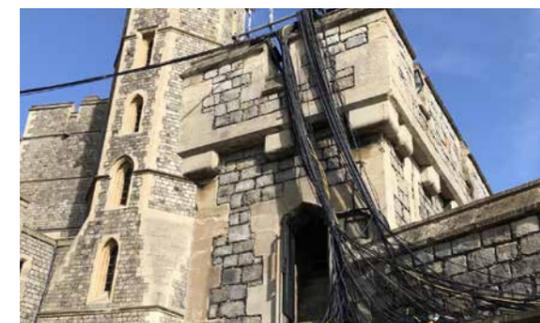
The really big ask was still to come though. We had planned seven cameras for the Quadrangle, a private area of the Castle. The idea was that these cameras would receive the couple back from The Long Walk and see them disappear in for the reception. This would be the natural end to our coverage. It was nevertheless a sensitive area. In the end, some gentle persuasion and a little reassurance enabled us to place our cameras in the desired positions: a towercam, two RF handhelds and some long lenses. A towercam is not the most discreet piece of kit to sell on such occasions!

Rigging and prep

The cable rig was well underway by the time we turned up on the Tuesday prior to the event to start the camera rig. We had two whole days ahead of us to rig 36 cameras – which may sound generous, but the time soon ran away, plus, of course, plenty of obstacles cropped up. We were aiming for our first look-see/rehearsal of the horse and carriage at midday on the Thursday.

In the event, the whole of Tuesday was taken up with labelling boxes and equipment, made even more necessary by the very tight police security. We then dropped the boxes off at three or four spots within the walls. By Wednesday, some operators had turned up to get their hands dirty and the rig started in earnest. Thursday morning was a scramble to get the six jibs rigged and into position, plus the Steadicam and two RF handhelds fired up.

The rehearsal was an important exercise. It allowed the Kensington Palace organisers to see where the little dots on the paper camera plan were actually sited and what that really looked like in practice. How discreet were these cameras and how obtrusive was the towercam? Were the tracking camera

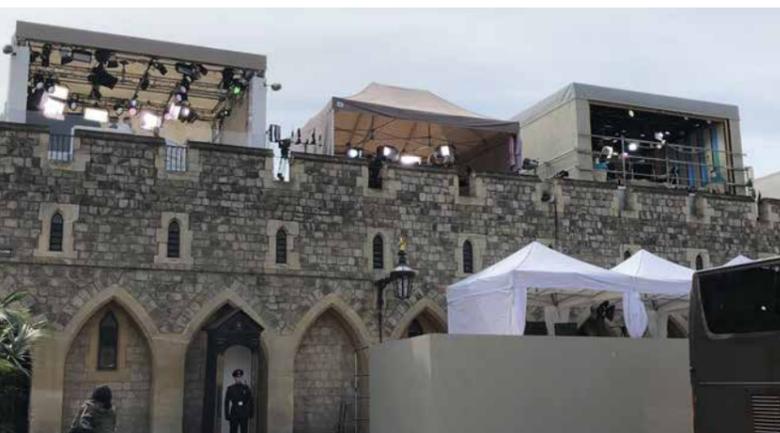


The cable rig – again designed to be as unobtrusive as possible – was a complicated exercise that took careful planning and several days to put in

or jibs going to spook the horses with their movement? Were any camera platforms too high or too low? What speed did the carriage travel at? It answered a lot of questions and, as a result, we did move one of our RF cameras to improve the coverage down Chapel Hill and also avoid seeing too much hardware. Thankfully, neither the sight of Jo Oliver on a jib nor indeed Paul Davis scared the horses and all positions were given the green light.

Crewing up

Everyone loves a wedding and I knew that finding a crew was never going to be a problem. The issue I would grapple with was where to place everyone. Every cameraperson I know wants to be among the action and the old adage 'Happy



On the first planning trip, the realities of having to share the best vantage points with other broadcasters became clear

the chapel, with the band playing foreground and the crowd waving flags..." But, in that exact spot, there would be news cameras, hence our jib site had to move a little. Each position was carefully discussed, numbers becoming etched on our brains so eventually no camera plan was needed. Decisions were made on the choice of lens (we used a combination of Canon CJ12s, 20s and 86s) and each position was established with a role in mind for both before and after the ceremony.

A sense of history

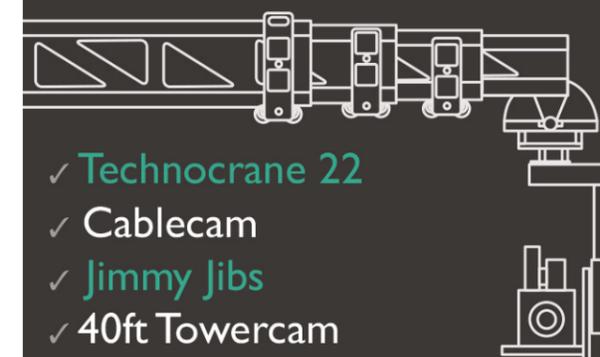
We did have great access to some wonderful spots: high up on the many towers, including Mary Tudor, Salisbury, Garter, Edward III, Round, Lancaster, York and Henry VIII – we were surrounded by history. It was undeniably hard work carrying the equipment to positions such as these, but they are views we will probably never get to see again and a reminder of just how lucky we are to do this job.

As well as the high towers, the private areas brought a different kind of access challenge. At least a third of our positions required an escort from the Castle at all times. These



Top: One Castle resident was kind enough to allow Bill Ashworth to set up camp in their garden
Bottom: Not surprisingly, security was at the highest level, meaning that all the hundreds of boxes had to be very carefully labelled

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Top: There were six jibs in action – Jo Oliver preps his position on the rehearsal day
Bottom: Marcus Leon Soon operating his jib in The Lower Ward

to do the wide shot' is actually a myth! Out of 36 cameras, some will obviously see more action than others, while some positions inevitably mean a lot of waiting around unable to leave the post while the party is happening at the other end of town – and that can be hard to bear.

I wanted this to be an opportunity for old friends to meet and enjoy this one-off experience as it's unlikely some of us will work on another Royal Wedding on such a scale. I definitely wanted my old bosses involved: Martin Hawkins from my time at Limehouse Canary Wharf and David Fader from the Trocadero Limehouse days and Wembley. In the end, there was a great mix of old and new, and it just adds to these occasions when you can catch up with many you haven't seen for a long time. Such events don't come along often – and I was grateful to Martin for his constant reminder to me to enjoy it, something I often forget while running around.

None of the above would have been possible without our amazing camera assistants either, all trusted members of the team and extremely hard-working and conscientious. The amount of derigging and rigging was more than you can imagine. Since thefts at the Boat Race earlier this year, quite rightly, OB companies have become more nervous about leaving equipment rigged over night – even when there is security present. Large lenses are heavy bits of kit to run off with but events have proved that this is possible and something that will unfortunately impact our rig days from now on.

Suited and booted for the day

The wedding day itself went fantastically well. Suited and booted (another myth is that camerapeople don't like dressing up!), and nervous about the traffic, we all arrived early (06.00 on site) – but wow, how the time flew. There was just time to clear the tight security, grab a quick egg roll, rerig quite a few cameras, and we were off. Next it was time for the routine last plea to the press photographers in front of me not to stand on their ladders.

But then an unexpected hitch arose – Camera 6, the discreet remote camera at the South Door, couldn't see anything! The florist Philippa Craddock had been a little too expansive with the arrangement in that area and some of it was going to have to go as it was obscuring the lens. But who was to do the rearranging? The door was policed by two burly policeman so, looking a bit sheepish and feeling rather nervous, I approached one of them and explained the situation. He was more than happy to oblige, offering to shield and hide me while I pushed the offending foliage out of the way. Such fantastic and much appreciated cooperation!

From then on, the day moved fast. The sun was out and you could feel the happiness, joy and expectation in the air. After all that planning and rigging, the chances were you would maybe get just one shot – a pan if you were lucky – and then they were gone. The carriage travelled so fast at the beginning, even the guests flowing out of the chapel missed them speeding up the hill. But nevertheless these are shots we will remember for a lifetime.

I was very lucky in that my wife had acquired a ticket via the Royal Household ballot to watch from within the grounds of the Castle and, as luck would have it, she was very near my position. It's not often your partner can join you at work and what a joyous occasion for this to happen. As camerapeople, we often work long unsociable hours, away from the family – but these hours are spent with our other family: the camera crew. I feel very lucky that I was able to introduce Amelie to many members of my 'other family' on such an occasion. You can't do any of it without this family of close crew members and I salute them all.

My abiding memories of the day are of colour, sun, happiness, smiles, joy and a degree of relief that everyone's planning and hard work had come to fantastic fruition. In my mind, the BBC no longer exists as a whole; instead, it seems to be a collection of departments and studios spread across the country. But what the BBC Events team can still do brilliantly



Relief once it was all over: Rob with camera assistants, L-R: James Lockhart, Matt Ford, Alfie Evans, Zak Hooker and Nikki Graves – and some of the troublesome flowers from the South Door



Rob Sargent on camera, bottom right of the picture

is call upon all the pockets of skill from engineering, cameras, sound, floor teams old and new, veterans and debutants, and bring these ingredients together and make it feel whole again to produce memorable results. It simply was a privilege to be involved – after all who doesn't love a wedding? Oh yes, and a massive derig!



Rob (right) with GTC members Martin Hawkins and Prav Shetty

Fact File

GTC member **Rob Sargent** trained at Limehouse Canary Wharf and moved with Limehouse to The Trocadero Studios and Wembley. After that he joined Planet 24 before going freelance in 1995. He now supervises and operates mostly on live events and studio shows.

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