

TRADITIONS OF A BRITISH ROYAL FUNERAL

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground, and tell sad stories of the death of kings

- Shakespeare, Richard II



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The world solemnly mourns and remembers the great royal monarch Queen Elizabeth II. Her royal funeral is to take place on the 19th of September. She was a wonderful lady who touched all our hearts with her alluring majestic charm and gentle radiance.

The royal funeral is more than a procession of mourners. It is laced with centuries of historic traditions. Through his interpretation of the political symbolism of funeral ritual, Giesey became the first historian to properly examine royal funerals as a complex ritual process. Ritual has traditionally been understood as an expression, and therefore an elucidation of belief. After 1307, the average interval of time separating the death and burial of English kings increased dramatically, in the process creating considerable scope for the development of greater and dignified elaboration in British ritual practice.

Before the nineteenth century, the last royal funeral to be performed in the traditional manner was held on the death of Queen Mary II, wife of William III on March 5, 1695. Queen Mary's entombment was celebrated on the grandest possible scale. As in the early seventeenth century, the funeral proceedings were divided into three parts: the lying-in-state, the procession, and the burial in Henry VII's Chapel. Although the Queen had died at the end of the previous year, the lying-in-state did not begin until February 21, 1695. Preparations for the obsequies had started immediately after the Queen's death. The cortege itself, which was marshalled by heralds strictly according to rank in order to reflect the social hierarchy, was led by 300 women in mourning gowns. They were followed by a huge contingent comprising members of the royal household, the lord mayor, and the aldermen of the City of London. An unmounted black horse symbolized the loss of the ruler. Behind the chariot marched the so-called chief mourner, the Duchess of Somerset, and eighteen noble women as assistants. At the main entrance to the church the cortege was received by the clergy and escorted into an edifice again entirely draped in black. The coffin was deposited at the crossing in an elaborate *castrum doloris*. At the end of the liturgy the coffin was transferred from the cross-



ing to Henry VII's Chapel, the customary burial place of the English kings and queens, and then lowered into the royal vault. The ceremony drew to a close with the breaking of the staves by the four main officers of the Queen's household, declaring that their respective offices and authorities ceased, and the proclamation by the Garter King of Arms.

After 1660 members of the royal family were interred in what contemporaries called 'a private manner', that is a scaled-down version of events. During most of the Restoration period only lesser members of the royal family, such as princes and princesses, had been buried. The details of the funeral arrangements were usually prepared by the Earl Marshall's office and, in particular, by its subordinate body, the College of Arms, whose duty lies in marshalling and ordering Coronations, Marriages and Funerals of the Royal Family.

In line with the increasing involvement of the monarch, the control which the Privy Council, the Earl Marshall, and the College of Arms exercised over the arrangement of the funerals weakened, in particular from the middle of the century, while the influence of the Lord Chamberlain grew considerably. None of the private funerals displayed mourning-horses or heraldic achievements, such as shield and sword, helmet and crest, gauntlets and spurs. The only remaining symbols were the coat of arms of the deceased shown, for example, on the pall over the coffin, and a crown (in the case of kings, queens, and queen consorts), or a coronet (in the case of princes of the blood). Rituals such as the proclamation of the style of the deceased and the

breaking of staves were adhered to in almost all royal funerals.

Another change occurred in the 1750s. From then on, only the household of the deceased participated in the obsequies. Despite this reduction individual royal establishments still formed substantial groups. Usually they included a large number of gentlemen servants (pages, gentlemen ushers), officers of the household (for example, physicians, chaplains, solicitors, and attorneys), and the four major court dignitaries, the so-called staff-officers (Comptroller, Treasurer, Lord Chamberlain, and Lord Steward). Characteristically, the last contingent in the procession, immediately behind the chief mourner and in close proximity to the coffin, always consisted of a group of servants from the bedchamber who had attended to the deceased on a regular basis.

In the past, the lying-in-state had taken place in various royal palaces throughout London. Mary had lain-in-state in her

bedchamber in the Palace of Whitehall; for the private royal funerals from Charles II's restoration to the reign of Queen Anne rooms in Somerset House, Kensington Palace, and the Palace of Westminster were chosen.

The new fashion of private royal funerals in the early eighteenth century certainly fitted this changing religious pattern. Whereas public funerals had been characterized more by the rituals of antiquarian feudalism than by those of Christianity private burials, almost by definition, emphasized the "inner devotion" of more exclusive Christian ceremonies.

The best-known example is without doubt George Frederick Handel's anthem for the funeral of Queen Caroline in 1737. A number of royal burials saw the composition of special funeral anthems. William Croft wrote the anthem for Queen Anne and William Boyce for George II. At burials of members of the royal family in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries anthems by Edward Blake and James Kent were played. Even more significant is the fact that, to a certain degree, the anthems replaced the abolished funeral sermons. Based on carefully selected passages from the Bible they carried the meaning with which the funeral had been invested.

The funeral ordo preserved in the Westminster manuscripts is a very short text which is concerned with outlining the preparatory arrangements for a royal funeral, particularly in respect of the aesthetic presentation of the corpse. The funeral ordo preserved in *Liber Regie Capelle* opens with instructions for the treatment and preparation of the royal cadaver. *Liber Regie Capelle* is essentially a customary - a written account of customs, of the English royal chapel. The chamberlains of the royal household are

ordered to wash and rub spices into the dead body of the anointed king, before wrapping the corpse in waxed linen cloth.

Next there follows precise instructions concerning the correct display of items of regalia on the dressed corpse of the king. The royal crown or diadem is to be placed on the king's head and a golden or gilded ring is to be put on the middle finger of his right hand. The king is to hold in his right hand a gilded ball surmounted by a long rod with the sign of the Lord's cross on top. A gilded scepter extending to the level of the king's left ear is to be placed in the king's left hand. Adorned in such a manner, the royal corpse should reverently be delivered by the bishops and magnates of the kingdom to the king's chosen place of burial.

The funeral text specifies that the clerical mourners at the obsequies-the funeral rites for a king should be seated in the choir of the sepulchral church, placing them further from the hearse than many of the secular mourners. The senior officiating cleric ought to be an archbishop, who should sit either in his seat below the choir or in a seat towards the right corner of the altar. The Bishops are instructed to sit in the upper stalls of the choir, whilst the clerics of the royal chapel are required to sit in the lower stalls. The ordo instructs the attendant ecclesiastics to remove their miters or black hats during readings made by the Archbishop. It is also prescribed that the funeral car should be led to the sepulchral church by six horses caparisoned in the royal arms, and that it should be escorted by a multitude of lords and other mourners all clad in black.

There are military saluting stations in London, Edinburgh Castle in Scotland, Cardiff and at Hillsborough Castle in Northern Ireland. In London salutes are fired from Hyde Park and the Tower of London. Salutes in Hyde Park are fired by The Kings Troop, Royal Horse Artillery using thirteen-pounder guns. This is the saluting battery of the Household Division. The guns fire the salute at 10 second intervals. To honour the late Queen the guns fired 96 times. This troop provides the gun carriage and black horses for State funerals.

The funeral of HRH Queen Elizabeth II will draw millions of mourners, united across global television. Her tremendous loss is felt by all nations. The *Daily News* extends its condolence to the members of the royal family.



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