**SIC TRANSIT GEORGE**

"*This is London. It is with the greatest sorrow that we make the following announcement."*

In a historic case of bad timing - or good timing, depending on how you look at it - all this upheaval at the BBC and discussion of the future of broadcasting coincided with some significant national upheaval as well. In February, while Haley was mulling over the new vacancy at the Times, King George VI unexpectedly passed away of a coronary thrombosis, leaving his daughter Elizabeth fast-evolving into a Queen while on what was supposed to be an extensive and highly-publicised tour of the freshly-named Commonwealth, but only got as far as East Africa.

The BBC, like the rest of the world, was caught on the hop. The King had died in his sleep overnight, so by the time the radio began broadcasting in the morning, the inner Palace staff knew of it and had probably informed the BBC as well. However, with the former Princess Elizabeth in the foothills of Kenya with her husband, it wasn't yet clear if she knew that she had regenerated into a Queen overnight. It would not do to inform the Commonwealth of the KIng's death before its new head even knew that was what she was. Besides, they really needed the God-voiced John Snagge to announce this news, but he was on holiday and they couldn't find him. So the BBC started February 6th, 1952 as if it was a normal day, albeit a very solemn one, permeated with a bleak atmosphere that was never acknowledged or explained. It was as if the entire Corporation had clinical depression.

Finally it was established that the new Queen had been informed of the tragic news, cancelled her abortive tour, and was on her way home. The Home Service and Light Programme faded their usual programming down (the Third still only ran in the evenings) and Snagge appeared with a voice combining authority and sorrow. At the words "This is London", a nation fell silent - those words in that tone of voice had become shorthand for "something world-changingly important just happened, so listen". Snagge passed on the sad news, extended the Corporation's sympathies to "Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family" (leaving it ambiguous whether he meant the new Queen Elizabeth II or her mother) and announced that the BBC was hereby closing down for the rest of the day, except for news.

Haley had to interrupt his pending departure to oversee an extremely delicate situation for the news department, climaxing with the coverage of the late King's funeral. George VI had been the first monarch to have his coronation broadcast on television - albeit only to the few dozen people in the London area who had sets, and with the ceremony itself taking place behind the pointedly closed doors of Westminster Abbey. Now he was the first (and to date only) British sovereign to be buried onscreen as well - although the doors to the ceremony itself (at Windsor Castle) remained

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closed.

It’s doubtful, however, that anything inside could have rivalled the eventual iconic image of the funeral: that of the three bereft Queens - the King’s mother, wife and newly regent daughter - veiled in black, in stoic mourning outside Westminster Hall. The BBC’s cameras were there along with those of the press, transmitting the historic image live to those so-equipped - a demographic that was growing all the time. Three new transmitters had gone up since the war, at Sutton Coldfield outside Birmingham and Holme Moss in the Pennines, adding twenty million new (potential) viewers between them. By the summer of 1952, towers in Kirk O’Shotts roughly halfway between Glasgow and Edinburgh and Wenvoe in the Vale of Glamorgan added another eight million. Everyone else had to wait for the following day’s newspapers to see those images, unavoidably after-the-fact. The upstart medium was starting to press home its advantage.

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