GAME OF THRONES

The real test was the Coronation itself, of course. Partly because the King's death had been relatively unexpected - they knew he was ill, but no-one expected him to die quite so soon - the ceremony spent a long gestational period with multiple committees planning it out in the minutest detail, under the umbrella of the Coronation Commission (chaired by the new Queen's husband, the Duke of Edinburgh). This included broadcasting. With the addition of Kirk O'Shotts and Wenvoe, television could finally be called a national service. Not every blade of grass was covered (Cornwall and some of the extremes of Scotland and Wales still had to wait) but the vast majority now had a signal worth a damn. The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II was therefore perfectly timed, not to mention perfectly symbolic - the crowning of a new Queen and elevation of a new medium at the same time.

So naturally, this time - unlike with her father - the cameras should be allowed into Westminster Abbey itself to capture every second of the ceremony, both for posterity and for the new Queen's millions of present-day subjects, dying to pay homage but otherwise unable. Shouldn't they? Well, that was the question, and one that occupied the country for quite some time, as the preparations dragged out. Newspapers speculated feverishly for months on the broadcasting arrangements, veering between excitement at the coming spectacle (however much of it they'd end up seeing) and despair at yet another inevitable step towards obsolescence.

Broadcasting, and television in particular, had never been so much the centre of attention. The issue dominated Parliament for a while - where the newspapers could only speculate, they were the ones who could make the actual decision. Or *a* decision, at least. Or maybe just a recommendation to the Coronation Commission. There was a certain amount of reluctance to make a definitive statement and therefore take responsibility.

There was a growing sense that, now that (almost) the entire nation could receive it, television was as much a fact of life as radio had been for almost thirty years, and something as massive as the Coronation of a new Monarch of the British Empire, I mean Commonwealth, simply couldn't ignore it or tiptoe lightly around it without embarrassing itself, the country, the Queen, or all three.

In the face of this argument, many members - of both Houses - were all for keeping the doors closed and just filming the processions and so forth, just as had been done fifteen years earlier for her father. Just because television was unavoidable as an established medium, it didn't follow that it should enjoy freedoms of and access to certain places and processes the ordinary Briton wouldn't have. Televising the Coronation, it was argued, would vulgarise the entire process, which was actually very solemn, meaningful and important. It would make it seem like it was just a thing

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that was happening, when in reality it was much more than that.

The anti-camera side had one very useful ally, in the round shape of the Prime Minister. Churchill spoke on the subject in Parliament on October 28th, 1952. While he did acknowledge that the public wanted the ceremony on television:

"*There is I feel a broad general opinion, in this country…that fuller advantage should be taken of the modern mechanical arrangements now available through television, to enable the many millions of people outside the Abbey to see what is seen by the congregation of notables in the Abbey...It is our hope that it will prove possible in practice to carry into effect the principle that the world should see and hear what the congregation in the Abbey see and hear.'*⊕

Followed barely a breath later with the qualification:

"*Certainly it would be unfitting that the whole ceremony, not only in its secular but also in its religious and spiritual aspects, should be presented as if it were a theatrical performance.'*⊕

As if the Prime Minister's endorsement wasn't enough Churchill's view was shared by several pretty crucial figures. The Duke of Norfolk, for example - who also happened to be the Earl Marshal, the Royal officeholder responsible for organising state occasions, Coronation included - and even the Archbishop of Canterbury. However, there was one person in particular even more important than them, without whom the Coronation couldn't go ahead at all. And she was the Queen of everyone in Britain and the Commonwealth - every man, woman and child, all of whom had a right to participate in the glorious ceremony of her crowning. She insisted on the doors being opened and the ceremony broadcast (barring the eerie, occult ritualistic part where she stripped to a white gown and was anointed with oils), and when a Queen insists there's really no recourse, even if you're Churchill.

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