



Lyings in state

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On Friday 5 April 2002, the coffin of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother was carried in a ceremonial procession to Westminster Hall, where it lay in state from the Friday afternoon until 6 a.m. on Tuesday 9 April.

This Standard Note gives a history of lying in state from antiquity, and looks at occasions where people have lain in state in the last 200 years.

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A. History of lying in state

The concept of lying in state has been known from antiquity.

In England in historical times, dead bodies of people of all classes “lay” – that is, were prepared and dressed (or “laid out”) and, placed in the open coffin, would lie in a downstairs room of the family house for two or three days whilst the burial was arranged.¹ Friends and relations of the deceased could then visit to pay their respects. In part, the delay between death and burial, which gave rise to this practice, is said to derive from the need to confirm that death had actually occurred, and that the corpse would not again spring to life.

The nobility and gentry elaborated this practice, at least up to the early nineteenth century, by placing the body in some more public place, and with grander furnishings, and extensive hangings of funerary and mourning black material. The retainers of the deceased would mount a vigil, and the public, or selected public, would be admitted to view the body. By the later nineteenth century, the practice of lying in state appears to have died out. Commentators point to the lying in state of Matthew Russell at Brancepeth Castle, Co. Durham in 1822 as one of the last recorded such occasions.² After this, undertakers began to acquire premises for use as chapels of rest, where bodies lay, in state on occasions, as with the Earl of Brownlow in 1853.³

The phrase *lying in state*, therefore, has nothing necessarily to do with a state funeral, as is generally supposed.

Some examples of public figures include Oliver Cromwell, who lay in state at Somerset House, and Charles I, at St James’s Palace (not a public occasion). The body of Nelson, when repatriated from Trafalgar, lay in state at Greenwich Naval Hospital. The Duke of Wellington, who died in 1852, lay in state at Chelsea Royal Hospital, and was buried following a state funeral seven weeks after his death.

B. Lyings in state in Westminster Hall

Lying in state in the Great Hall would not have been practicable whilst the Hall was in daily use as the Law Courts, and it was not until 1882 that this use ceased, when the courts moved to the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand.

¹ See, for instance, E. Roberts, “The Lancashire Way of Death”, in R. Houlbrooke, *Death Ritual and Bereavement*, 1989, p197

² J. Litten, *The English Way of Death*, 1991, p168, and *illus.*, p. 167

³ *ibid*, *illus.*, p168

1. Gladstone

The first lying in state in Westminster Hall was that of William Ewart Gladstone, who died on 18 May 1898. The death, which took place at Hawarden Castle, Flintshire, in the early morning, was reported to the House, which then adjourned as a mark of honour. On 20 May, the House resolved itself into a committee to discuss the funeral arrangements, though the question of a lying in state was not addressed at that time. Quite how this point was decided is not something that the biographers of Gladstone record, though the Queen, in whose gift use of Westminster Hall lay, must have been involved. No doubt the advice of Ministers was sought. Mr Gladstone's body was brought by special train, pulled by the Brighton Railway locomotive *Gladstone*, from Broughton Hall to Westminster Station on the District Railway, which was hung in black for the occasion, and then through into New Palace Yard and into the Great Hall. The [closed] coffin was then placed on a catafalque, and surrounded by candles and a brass cross. Members of the public were admitted to file past the coffin in order to pay their respects on 26-27 May. 250,000 did so, including Thomas Hardy, who recorded:

I went to see Gladstone lying in state ...though it can hardly be called "in state" – so plain, even to bareness was the whole scene – a plain oak coffin on a kind of altar covered with a black cloth ...the scene was, however, impressive, as being in Westminster Hall, & close to where his voice had echoed for 50 years.⁴

After the lying in state, the coffin was taken to Westminster Abbey for the funeral service and interment. The House appointed a select committee to consider the circumstances of the House's attendance.⁵ A copy of the *Order to be Observed* in the procession from the Hall forms Annex 2 to this paper.⁶

However the decision to allow Gladstone to rest in Westminster Hall had emerged, a precedent had been set. Queen Victoria was evidently worried by the Prince of Wales's appearance at the funeral as a pallbearer: he replied that he had consulted no precedent nor taken any advice.⁷ The same possibly applied to the lying in state, but the lessons were not forgotten when the Prince himself died 12 years later. What may have started as a tribute to an exceptional commoner near the place of his oratorical triumphs was remarkably soon transformed into a predominantly royal event and remarkably quickly, into a tradition.

2. King Edward VII

Queen Victoria, who died in January 1901, did not lie in state in Westminster Hall: that occurred at her place of death, Osborne, on the Isle of Wight. The next royal death was that

⁴ T. Hardy, *Selected Letters*, ed. M Millgate, 1990, p 123.

⁵ *Report of the Select Committee on Mr Gladstone's Funeral*, 23 May 1898, HC 218, PP 1898, x, p 25

⁶ This, and the notice from Mr Speaker, are preserved in *Records of the Death and Funeral of the Rt Hon William E Gladstone, May, A D 1898*, House of Commons Library, 1898

⁷ Quoted in H Matthew, *Gladstone*, 1995 p385 n.

of Edward VII, who died late on 6 May 1910. Parliament was not sitting at the time, and the arrangements for the lying in state were not notified to the House.⁸

David Cannadine alleges that much of the royal pageantry that to us seems ancient was in fact developed in early 20th century Britain in a context of international competition in state ceremonials.⁹ Reginald Brett, Secretary of the Office of Works from 1895 to 1902, who was responsible for planning every major state occasion for many years, praised King Edward VII for his promptness, imagination, and invention in the promotion of royal grandeur. It was Edward who made the state opening of Parliament an occasion of such grandeur once again after a break of 50 years, grandeur in which the monarchy still has a central part.¹⁰

The King's funeral was marked by the lying in state at Westminster Hall of the dead monarch. This was an important ceremonial innovation. Cannadine wrote that Edward had been eager "to show himself to his subjects, clothed in his attributes of sovereignty", and says:

... ironically, it was Edward's funeral...which was the grandest state pageant in which he was to take part. Of especial significance was the lying-in state at Westminster Hall – "an innovation that proved extremely popular." One quarter of a million people filed past the coffin...and it was this novel precedent...which was emulated at the funerals of both George V and VI.¹¹

Following a private lying in state in the Throne Room at Buckingham Palace, the body was brought across St James's Park to Westminster Hall on 17 May. The King lay in state in the Hall for three days, and, as mentioned in the quotation, 250,000 people were estimated to have filed through.

Special arrangements were made at this and at all subsequent lyings-in state in the Hall for the entrance of Members of Parliament, Peers, and staff of the two Houses to the Hall, with their friends and families, avoiding the extensive public queues. However, there was some complaint that Members had been excluded from the funeral itself. Keir Hardie said:

The House of Commons represents the nation, and as such, should occupy the place of honour at every such function. To assent to anything else without protest is to assume that we are still living in the feudal ages...¹²

⁸ The House was recalled for swearing of Members.

⁹ In E Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1983. The chapter on royal traditions, by David Cannadine (p 128ff) includes a consideration of the background, including detail of how Victoria disliked excessive ceremonial and how, at various points through her reign, the monarchy had been in low public esteem.

¹⁰ J. Bodley, *Coronation of Edward the Seventh*, 1903, p205

¹¹ D. Cannadine in Hobsbawm, *op cit*, p136

¹² HC Deb 15 July 1910, vol 19 cc758-9

In the same debate, Gibson Bowles MP (the Liberal Member for Lynn) stated that the cost of the obsequies for the late King (funeral and lying in state) had totalled £40,500. Lord Balcarras MP made the point that:

... for the first time in our history, the two Houses of Parliament, as such, were exclusively summoned [to the lying in state].¹³

Joseph Pointer (the Liberal MP for Sheffield Attercliffe) made the contention:

I say frankly...that I believe these ceremonials have been deliberately conceived in order to foster a love for pomp and ceremonial, and to inflate the importance of the Army and Navy to the disadvantage of the civil element in our government.¹⁴

The supplementary estimate, on which the debate arose, was approved without a division, but it was evident a certain degree of resentment among Members was current. There is no record of this on the file¹⁵, but no doubt it was borne in mind for future occasions.

At the end of the lying in state, the King's coffin was taken direct from Westminster Hall to Paddington Station for interment at Windsor.

3. Queen Alexandra

In 1925, the death of Edward's widow, Alexandra, brought another new approach - she also was afforded a state funeral, including lying in state and a procession through the streets of London. A consort's demise had never before been so treated. However, this time, the lying in state was in Westminster Abbey, not in the Hall. A quarter of a century later, in 1953, the royal dowager's funeral was to be further enhanced by transferring the lying in state to Westminster Hall – see section 7 below.

4. Victims of the R101 Airship Disaster, 1930

In many ways this was the most unusual lying in state. The R101 was a massive British airship, which crashed near Beauvais on 5 October 1930, with the loss of 48 of the 54 persons on board, including Lord Thomson, the Air Minister.¹⁶ The House was in recess at the time, and the decision to arrange the lying in state in Westminster Hall seems to have been taken by the King on the advice of ministers. The decision was perhaps a result of the shock felt by the whole nation, and also by the sheer number of coffins.. The coffins were brought from the mortuary to Westminster Hall on the early morning of 10 October and lay in state for that day only. The coffins were arranged head-to-head in two rows on a dais some eight inches

¹³ *ibid*, c763

¹⁴ *ibid*, c769

¹⁵ Details of Edward VII's lying in state given here are taken from HLRO file SAA/278, supplemented by contemporary press accounts

¹⁶ For more information on this see *The Times*, 10 October 1930, p 12d, and 11 October, p. 12c

high, covered in purple cloth. The Union and RAF flags were arranged over the north doorway.

89,272 people passed through the Hall and in front of the wide but low catafalque bearing the 48 coffins. The lying in state was accompanied on the same day by a procession, attended by the Prince of Wales, to, and a memorial service in, St Paul's Cathedral. The coffins were then taken on 11 October to Euston Station in a public procession lasting two hours. They were taken to Bedford St John's Station and then by road for burial in one grave at St Mary's Churchyard at Cardington, Beds., the village where the airship had been based.

5. King George V¹⁷

King George V died at Sandringham on 20 January 1936. The body was brought to King's Cross by special train from Wolferton. A lying in state in Westminster Hall followed, lasting five days, with again a quarter of a million people filing past. The press photograph (annex 3) has been annotated by the Serjeant to show where public, Members, etc entered the hall. On 23 January, a short service was held in the Hall, in the presence of the Royal family, to which Members processed behind Mr Speaker, and the mace borne by the Serjeant. After the service they returned to the Chamber. On 28 January, the King's coffin was taken in a ceremonial procession, drawn by sailors, to Paddington Station, whence it was conveyed to Windsor for burial.

6. King George VI

The King died at Sandringham on 6 February 1952. The House authorities received confidential notification half an hour before the public announcement at 1100.¹⁸ The coffin, transported by rail from Wolferton to Kings Cross, was received at 1600 on 11 February. A brief service was held, and afterwards the King lay in state in Westminster Hall for five days. At some times, the queue was four miles long, and the Hall was kept open till 0200 to ensure the throughput of mourners. 305,806 people were recorded as having filed past the coffin.

The lying in state was followed by a service in Westminster Abbey on 15 February, and the King's body was then taken to Paddington and thence to Windsor for interment.

7. Queen Mary

The Queen died at 1020 on 24 March 1953. The Prime Minister moved the adjournment of the House at 1110. It was not until the 25th that the House authorities received warning from Buckingham Palace that lying in state in Westminster Hall was to be arranged. On 29 March, the coffin was received, and a short service held at 1430. The public was admitted from

¹⁷ Details of lyings in state subsequent to 1930 are in HLRO files SAA/280 and 281. Details given here are taken from these files and from contemporary newspaper reports.

¹⁸ Note on HLRO file SAA/280

1615. The Hall was closed at 0300, and the coffin removed at 0500, on 31 March. About 120,000 filed through.

8. Sir Winston Churchill

The lying in state of Sir Winston Churchill, and arrangements for his funeral, were planned some years in advance. The team that discussed them included officials from the two Houses, and was styled “Operation Hopenot”. The first mention of the existence of this team on file was 1 July 1959, some five years before the actual death.¹⁹

For the first time, a provisional timetable was established.

D	=	Day of death
D+4	=	Coffin arrives
D+5	=	Lying in state begins
D+7	=	Lying in state ends
D+8	=	Departure for funeral service and burial

In fact, the plans were not adhered to in their entirety, mostly because of the need to hold the funeral, with attendant road closures, on a Saturday.

Churchill died on 24 January 1965 at Hyde Park Gate. The coffin was received in Westminster Hall at 2115 on 26 January, with a short service. TV and sound broadcasts were permitted from 0730 on 27 January, and the public was allowed access from 1100 on the same day. During the three days the Hall was open, 321,360 people filed past the coffin. The coffin was removed on 30 January in a procession to the funeral service, attended by Members and Officers of the House, as well as other guests from home and abroad, at St Paul’s Cathedral.

8. Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother

The Queen Mother died, aged 101, at Windsor, at about 3.15pm on Easter Saturday, 30 March 2002. The coffin was brought to St James’s Palace for private lying in state on 2 April. Arrangements had been planned for some time, under the description “Operation Marquee”, and were brought swiftly into force. The House, which was in recess, was recalled, with the House of Lords, for a short session on Wednesday 3 April for the paying of tributes by Members²⁰. The Scottish Parliament was also recalled that day, and the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies on the following day. The coffin was received at Westminster Hall at 12 noon on Friday 5 April, when Members were invited to be present. The public were admitted to the lying in state from 2 pm on the Friday (5 April), with three full days, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday following. In the event, crowds were so large that Westminster Hall was kept open all night, save for a daily 2-3 hour break for cleaning, and closed finally at 6 a.m. on

¹⁹ Details of Churchill’s lying in state are taken from HLRO file SAA/281

²⁰ *HC Deb*, 3 April 2002, vol 382, cols 799-828. The sitting of the House planned for the day of the funeral (9 April) was abandoned as a mark of respect.

Tuesday 9 April, the day of the funeral. The weather throughout the lying in state was fine, though not particularly warm, which did not deter the public from attending. Altogether, it was estimated some 200,000 people filed past the catafalque²¹. This included 185,984 members of the public²², plus 1691 group passes²³ issued to Members and staff of the House, which each on average admitted 3-4 people. This was the first lying in state where members of the public were subjected to a security check, which had the effect of slowing the throughput of mourners.

Members were again present when the coffin left Westminster Hall at 11 am on 9 April for the ceremonial funeral at Westminster Abbey. Thereafter, it was taken in a motor hearse direct to Windsor for a private interment.

C. The pattern

The pattern that has now emerged for lyings in state in Westminster Hall is fairly settled, but is varied according to the status of the deceased, the likely public interest, the days of the week, and whether Parliament is sitting. Five days duration of lying in state appears to be the norm for a sovereign, three days for a consort and for commoners. In the case of the Queen Mother, an extra half-day was arranged. Lying in state in the Hall may be considered the norm for reigning sovereigns in person, but for all others is at the absolute discretion of the Monarch. It must be stressed that it is an honour very infrequently bestowed, reflecting the standing of the deceased person and the love and esteem in which he or she is held by the public.

Planning for a lying in state, bearing in mind that a death may be unexpected, is a continuous process. There may also be a problem with continuum of expertise. For instance, very few people who were closely involved with the lying in state in 1965 were in post in 2002. In addition, planning nowadays involves considerations about telecommunications, computer capacity, media access, camera positions, and so on as well as the ceremonial and arrangements themselves, for which precedents exist and are drawn upon. A large number of people, from the two Houses, Buckingham Palace, the police and armed forces and elsewhere, are involved. The timing and circumstances of each individual case will naturally modify such planning, as will developments in public attitudes and in technology. The wishes of the family are also most important. It was this aspect that apparently led to the fairly rapid sequence of events following Gladstone's death, and the restriction of public access to two days.²⁴

²¹ Estimate from Black Rod's Office, House of Lords, 9.4.02

²² Figures from Metropolitan Police records of throughput of the public, provided by the Serjeant at Arms

²³ Information from Serjeant at Arms 11.4.02

²⁴ Matthew, *op cit*, p 383

Annex 1: *Lyings in state in Westminster Hall – Summary*

1898 May 26-27 William Ewart Gladstone
 1910 May 18-20 Edward VII
 1930 October 10 48 victims of the R101 disaster

3

Somerset Herald.

York Herald.

Members of the late Ministry.

Lancaster Herald.

Clarenceux King of Arms.

Representatives of Royal Personages (Foreign).

Sir Robert Collins, K.C.B.

(Representing Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Albany).

Colonel A. Collins, M.V.O.

(Representing Her Royal Highness The Princess Louise, Marchioness of Lorne).

The Lord Monson, C.V.O.

(Representing Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha).

Representatives of Foreign Sovereigns.

His Royal Highness Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, K.G.

His Royal Highness
The Duke of Cambridge, K.G.

His Royal Highness
The Duke of Connaught, K.G.

(Preceded by the Equerries to the Princes of the Blood Royal.)

The Earl of Pembroke, G.C.V.O.
(Representing Her Majesty The Queen).

The Earl Marshal.

Supporters of the Pall.

George Armitstead, Esq.

The Earl of Rosebery, K.G.

The Right Honourable
Sir W. Vernon Harcourt

The Earl of Kimberley, K.G.

His Royal Highness
The Duke of York, K.G.



Supporters of the Pall.

The Lord Rendel.

The Duke of Rutland, K.G.

The Right Honourable
Arthur J. Balfour.

The Marquess of Salisbury, K.G.

His Royal Highness
The Prince of Wales, K.G.

Garter Principal King of Arms
(Represented by Norroy King of Arms).

THE CHIEF MOURNER.

The Relations and Private Friends of the Deceased,
and
Private Secretaries to the Deceased during his late tenure of Office as Prime Minister.

The Physicians to the Deceased.

Servants of the Deceased.

Deputation from Hawarden.

