



State and ceremonial funerals

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This Note explains the arrangements for state and ceremonial funerals, including examples from the past. It shows the distinction between the two types of funeral, looks at what is known about the process to decide whether a state funeral will be held for a commoner, and provides some information on costs.

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1 State and ceremonial funerals

State funerals are relatively rare, and are sometimes mixed in the popular imagination with other funerals of senior royal figures, which are held in public with ceremonial features but do not constitute state funerals in a formal sense. Typically, in either type of funeral, there is a military procession carrying the coffin to Westminster Hall, a period of lying in state, and a service at Westminster Abbey or St Paul's Cathedral.

State

A state funeral is defined by the *Royal Encyclopedia* as “generally limited to Sovereigns, but may, by order of the reigning monarch and by a vote of Parliament providing the fund, be extended to exceptionally distinguished persons.”¹

Examples of people other than monarchs who have been given a state funeral include Sir Isaac Newton, Lord Nelson, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Palmerston and Sir Winston Churchill.

A state funeral is commonly held to differ from a ceremonial funeral in two respects: a parliamentary motion authorises it, and the gun carriage bearing the coffin to the lying in state has, since the funeral of Queen Victoria, been drawn by Royal Navy sailors rather than by horses.

Ceremonial

A ceremonial royal funeral is “for those members of the Royal Family who hold high military rank, for the consort of the Sovereign and heir to the throne”.² The Queen Mother was given a ceremonial royal funeral, and Princess Diana's funeral was also a ceremonial rather than state funeral. Baroness Thatcher had a ceremonial funeral with full military honours at St Paul's Cathedral on 17 April 2013.³ The coffin left Westminster by hearse, but was then transferred to a gun carriage for the final procession to St Paul's, drawn by the King's Troop Royal Artillery and met by a guard of honour at the Cathedral. Later, her ashes were to be laid beside those of her husband at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, after a private cremation.

2 Decision-making process

The process for deciding when a state funeral should be held for a person other than the Sovereign is relatively unclear, not least since it happens so rarely and at long historical intervals. There is no official process set out in public, but the Sovereign, Prime Minister, and Parliament have been involved in the past.

2.1 The Sovereign

The first day that Parliament sat following the death of Sir Winston Churchill, Prime Minister Harold Wilson brought a message from the Queen “signed by Her Majesty's own hand,” which stated:

I know that it will be the wish of all my people that the loss which we have sustained by the death of the Right Honourable Sir Winston Churchill, K.G., should be met in the most fitting manner, and they should have an opportunity of expressing their sorrow at the loss and their veneration of the memory of that outstanding man who in war and

¹ R Allison and S Riddell eds, *The Royal Encyclopedia*, 1991

² Ibid

³ [Information on arrangements for Lady Thatcher's funeral](#), press release, 10 Downing Street, 8 April 2013

peace served his country unflinching for more than 50 years and in the hours of our greatest danger was the inspiring leader who strengthened and supported us all.

Confident that I can rely upon the support of my faithful Commons, and upon their liberality in making suitable provision for the proper discharge of our debt of gratitude and tribute of national sorrow, I have directed that Sir Winston's body shall lie in State in Westminster Hall and that thereafter the funeral service shall be held in the Cathedral Church of St Paul.

ELIZABETH REGINA⁴

2.2 The Prime Minister

For the state funerals of former Prime Ministers, the current Prime Minister has moved a motion in the House. In 1965 Wilson moved:

That a humble Address be presented to her Majesty, humbly to thank her Majesty for having given directions for the body of the Right Honourable Sir Winston Churchill, Knight of the Garter, to lie in state in Westminster Hall and for the funeral service to be held in the Cathedral Church of St Paul and assuring her Majesty of our cordial aid and concurrence in these measures for expressing the affection and admiration in which the memory of this great man is held by this House and all her Majesty's faithful subjects.⁵

On the day of Gladstone's death Balfour, Conservative leader in the Commons, stated:

No persuasion need be exercised by me in inducing even the most scrupulous to join in an Address which we shall, I believe, unanimously vote this afternoon, for all feel that the great career which has just drawn to its close is a career already in large part a matter of history, and none of us will find even a momentary difficulty in forgetting any of the controversial aspects of his life, even though we ourselves may to some extent have been involved in them.

He went on to move the motion:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, that Her Majesty will be graciously pleased to give directions that the remains of the Right Hon. William Ewart Gladstone be interred at the public charge, and that a monument be erected in the Collegiate Church of St. Peter's, Westminster, with an inscription expressive of the public admiration and attachment, and of the high sense entertained of his rare and splendid gifts, and his devoted labours in Parliament and in great offices of State, and to assure Her Majesty that this House will make good the expenses attending the same.⁶

2.3 The funeral recipient

It appears that in at least some cases in the past, the funeral recipient has been asked whether they wish to receive a state funeral some years before they pass away. This was certainly the case for Sir Winston Churchill. John Brooke-Little, then Officer at Arms, stated in *Royal Ceremonies of State*:

It all began some five years before Sir Winston died. At that time his health seemed uncertain and it was the wish of the Queen and the Prime Minister to offer him the

⁴ HC Deb 25 January 1965 c667

⁵ HC Deb 25 January 1965 cc667-8

⁶ HC Deb 20 May 1898 c124-125

signal honour of a State Funeral. His son, the late Mr Randolph Churchill, was deputed to ask his father if he wanted such a splendid farewell. He did: guns, trumpets, soldiers, the lot! From that moment, discreetly and secretly, we began to plan what was code-named 'Operation Hope Not'.⁷

Disraeli was reportedly offered a state funeral, but declined the offer in his will.

Baroness Thatcher was consulted on her funeral arrangements. According to her spokesman Lord Bell, "she specifically did not want a state funeral and nor did her family. She particularly did not wish to lie in state as she thought that was not appropriate."⁸ Baroness Thatcher also reportedly asked not to have a military fly-past on grounds of cost. The Downing Street press release on her funeral arrangements described the choice of ceremonial funeral as "in line with the wishes of her family and with the Queen's consent."⁹

2.4 Cabinet, Parliament and the Opposition

It is not clear whether Cabinet is consulted, or whether the official Opposition is consulted before the announcement takes place. Parliamentary approval has been sought (primarily to authorise funds), but the House did not divide on the motions associated with the decisions to hold state funerals for Churchill, Gladstone and Wellington.

3 Examples and costs

The practical organisation of state funerals is the responsibility of the Earl Marshall and the College of Arms, although other actors such as parliamentary officials and the police will also be involved. The costs of state funerals are borne by the state. The general authorisation would be made in a motion, probably moved by the Prime Minister, and approved by the House of Commons (because of its financial privilege). The financial prerogative of the Crown means that the motion would have to come from the Government, and it is likely that a Prime Minister would want to lead the debate on a motion that would also express the respect of the House for the deceased. Subsequently, there would have to be a supplementary estimate for the money, which could be rolled in with the other supplementary estimates or taken on its own, and which would likely be moved formally in the name of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury.¹⁰

3.1 Examples of state funerals

Sir Winston Churchill, 30 January 1965

The most recent state funeral was that of Sir Winston Churchill in 1965.

On 6 March 1965 *The Times* reported that the "Churchill funeral cost £48,000":

A sum of £48,000 to meet the cost of the state funeral of Sir Winston Churchill is included in Supplementary Estimates amounting to £168,000 presented to Parliament yesterday.

The total is made up of £15,000 for the Earl Marshal's office to defray expenses connected with the funeral arrangements including the service in St Paul's Cathedral;

£19,000 for the Ministry of Defence to cover the travelling and other expenses of Service personnel;

⁷ J Brooke-Little, *Royal Ceremonies of State*, 1980, p109

⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 2013

⁹ [Information on arrangements for Lady Thatcher's funeral](#), press release, 10 Downing Street, 8 April 2013

¹⁰ *Erskine May*, 24th ed, 2011, pp716-7, 732-3, and 735-8

£2,000 to cover the expenses of fire, police and civil defence services;

£7,000 for the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works for expenses connected with the lying-in-state at Westminster Hall, and for works carried out along the route of the procession;

£3,000 for printing;

£1,000 to meet expenses of departments of the Queen's Household; and

£1,000 for miscellaneous expenses.¹¹

The Duke of Wellington, 18 November 1852

On 25 January 1965 *The Times* compared the likely arrangements for Sir Winston Churchill's funeral to that of the Duke of Wellington:

Although the state funeral for Sir Winston has no precise precedent, the honours paid to the first Duke of Wellington and to Gladstone have been borne in mind. The Duke died at Walmer Castle and his body was carried to Chelsea Hospital to lie in state there for several days. According to estimates made at the time, the funeral procession from the Horse Guards to St Paul's Cathedral was watched by about 1,500,000 mourners. A Bill was brought in to authorize public expenditure on the funeral and on a monument, and £80,000 was voted by Parliament.¹²

The House was asked to vote on the Supply for the funeral on 6 December 1852. The costs were broken down as follows:

The principal items were as follows: The accounts in the department of Public Works, including all that was done in the Cathedral amounted to 25,000*l.*; the Lord Chamberlain's and Earl Marshal's were not fully rendered yet, but were estimated at 33,000*l.*; the expenses connected with the removal of the troops were 8,500*l.*; and there were expenses connected with their lodging, which might make the amount something more. The accounts received at present exceeded 70,000*l.*, but he believed the whole expenses would not be 80,000*l.*¹³

3.2 Examples of ceremonial funerals

The Queen Mother, 9 April 2002

It is difficult to provide an accurate estimate for the total cost of the Queen Mother's funeral, but there is some information available on components. There may well be other costs that are not accounted for:

Lying in state

The costs for the lying in state of the Queen Mother were to be shared between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The Commons share was estimated at £495,000.¹⁴

Other joint funding arrangements between the two Houses tend to involve the Commons paying a 60% share. If this relationship held true for the lying in state, the total cost would be around £825,000.

Policing

¹¹ *The Times*, 6 March 1965, p10

¹² *The Times*, 25 January 1965, p12

¹³ *Ibid*, c1037

¹⁴ HC Deb 8 Jul 2002 c657W

Budget details from the Metropolitan Police Authority indicate that the total cost of policing the Queen Mother's funeral was £4.3 million, of which £2.3 million were opportunity costs (costs that would be incurred anyway if staff were assigned to other operations) and £2.1 million were additional costs directly attributed to the funeral arrangements.¹⁵

Ministry of defence costs

A letter in response to a Parliamentary Question from Gordon Prentice stated that the total Ministry of Defence budget was £301,000, and that all costs had been borne from within existing budgets.¹⁶

Mourning stationery

The Home Office covered the cost of the notification mourning envelopes and letterhead stationery, estimated at £1,817.¹⁷

Princess Diana, 6 September 1997

The Times the cost of Princess Diana's ceremonial funeral was greater than £3m and may have been closer to £5m.¹⁸

Baroness Thatcher, 17 April 2013

The costs of Baroness Thatcher's ceremonial funeral were borne by the Government and her estate.¹⁹ The public expenditure, aside from opportunity costs, was announced in a Written Ministerial Statement:

Lord Wallace of Saltaire: On 25 April 2013 the Cabinet Office published an estimate of the costs of Baroness Thatcher's funeral, and confirmed that the final amount of public money spent would be published before the summer recess.

The confirmed costs for the funeral are £261,976, which includes staff overtime, where appropriate. Original estimated costs (from April 2013) were around £500,000.

The costs for the organisations involved are as follows:

Organisation	Cost (£)
Cabinet Office	31,978
City of London Corporation	7,000
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	78,244
Greater London Authority	8,311
London Ambulance Service	20,445
Ministry of Defence	39,057

¹⁵ <http://policeauthority.org/metropolitan/downloads/committees/cop/cop-030307-04-appendix01.pdf>

¹⁶ Letter dated 25.06.2002 from Adam Ingram MP to Gordon Prentice MP regarding the estimate of the cost to the public funds of the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. Lords Location: HINF 2002/1455

¹⁷ HC Deb 21 Oct 2002 cc90-91W

¹⁸ *Times*, 16 March 2005

¹⁹ *Independent*, 8 April 2013, citing Downing Street sources.

Organisation	Cost (£)
Parliament	1,700
St Paul's Cathedral #	67,908
Transport for London	1,000
Westminster City Council	6,333

these costs were paid for by the Cabinet Office but are listed separately for greater clarity

The direct policing and security costs for the funeral are £943,833. Original estimated costs (from April 2013) were £1.1 million.

The costs for each police service involved are as follows:

Police service	Cost (£)
British Transport Police	25,233
City of London Police	73,000
Metropolitan Police	845,600

Both figures are the marginal costs, meaning money spent specifically on the funeral, as opposed to costs that would have been incurred in any case.

No public money was spent on the reception at the Guildhall, which was paid for by the City of London Corporation and not out of public funds.

Further costs were met by Baroness Thatcher's estate.²⁰

According to the *Guardian*, 29 July 2013:

The Cabinet Office also confirmed the "opportunity cost" of the policing – the cost of having 4,000 officers guarding the funeral and hence not available for duties elsewhere – was estimated at £2m.

More than 700 members of the armed forces were also involved in the event in April, but the Cabinet Office said it did not have an "opportunity cost" for their deployment because this was much harder to calculate than for the police.

²⁰ HL Deb 29 July 2013, c161WS. See "[Funeral of Baroness Thatcher cost £1.2m](#)," *BBC News online*, 29 July 2013.