

BBC Morning Service from
Holy Trinity Church - Bradford on Avon
August 9th 1970

BRIGHT THE VISION THAT DELIGHTED

Curtains drawn to shade the sun.
That oft accursed box beside the hearth,
Flickering, monochrome or colour.
BBC at half past ten.
Morning Service, poker voice.
Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire.
For nine million viewers, another programme.

For Holy Trinity it started weeks ago.
Monday meeting with producer.
Vernon chose the hymns and anthems.
David timed the sermon; kept it short.
Script on yellow paper - foolscap size!
Twenty pages, give or take a few.
Camera cue sheets, four in all,
Long shot, close up, pan and zoom.

Church in chaos days before.
Cables snaking down the aisle,
Link lighting console to organ console.
Floods and spots, and inkie-dinkies;
Light from a score of man-made suns.
Sheets of black, shut out God's sun
from God's house.

Full rehearsal Saturday.
The church is full, but not with worshippers.
Scaffolders and electricians,
Cameramen and general porters,
Producer, his assistant and floor manager.
Clergy, choir and servers wait.
Four in congregation,
David, Rachel, Pamela and Catherine
To practise their offertory procession.
Manager in head-phones talks to those unseen.
The service starts and follows the plan.

*Face west to say the sermon blessing.
I'd rather not.
Of course, we wouldn't press you.
Then say it here, one pace before the step.
We'll move the mike...
No. Move the choir*

*Choir, form up procession here.
It can't be done - no room.
The Crucifer...
The choir goes first."*

No lost nerve, a change of plan.
Is that OK, Vic?
Vic, outside in an armoured van,
Mixing sound and vision,
Gives silent *Yea* or *Nay*.

Kevin looks angelic, so do Mo and Nin.
John Boyce is losing interest - rapidly.
Choir boys, once impressed,
Grow more blasé by the minute.

A break before recording.
Visits to the vicarage to answer calls of nature,
A cigarette or cough sweet for the voice.
Cassocks off.
Now the boys behave as others do
before the camera at football matches
Forget they are in church.
Remember boys, the ends of words.
A quick run through, then held on tape.
And finally the rehearsal ends.
Until tomorrow. No late nights.
It all depends on you.

Sunday morning, of the ninth.
Banns are read at ten fifteen.
Psalm rehearsal loosens voices.
Cameras scanning over test cards.
Candles lit.
Two minutes. Congregation stand.
Choir boys, forgetting Howard has a beard,
Concentrate on looking nice for God and mum.
Smoothing surplices, tucking ruffs.

Choirmen joke with workmen, idle for an hour.
Clearing throats with nervous coughs.
Then, after silence,
Vernon starts to play, as Keith - in suit!
is tackled by the choir.

The ten-mile walk - no turning back.
And then the psalm - we're under way.
Our Father, who art in Heaven...
Camera three on dolly, tracking down the aisle,
Unseen at home, but the congregation know.
Hallowed be Thy name... or can it be?
The camera crews are silent - a good sign -
Or so producer says.

Debra waits for her Collect cue.
Then faultlessly reads, all Britain's eyes upon her.
Choir and people let off steam.
Then, Tony telling Gospel truths,
In Oxford accent;
No trace of northern living here.

Now David facing camera two,
Remembers where to stand and what to say.
Little boy with teddy bear
Looks and laughs around the church.
Children should be happy in their pew.
Camera shows him yawning - bored!
Producer laughs - it can't be helped.

The moment they've been waiting for.
The Halls walk down with offertory.
The choir sits back and listens to itself.
Michael and Lloyd are happy
(they were singing yesterday.)
Pictures of faces, and stained glass windows,
Candles and a pretty girl -
Rosemary, for remembrance.

Cameras winking small red lights.
Unknown man before the monitor
Fiddles with the brilliance.
The final prayer.

A clever choice of hymn - a subtle pun?
Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones
Thunders out across the ether
Into everyone's front room.
Then treble voices raised in descant
Bring the service to a close.

The choir recesses,
Vernon plays,
Announcer speaking
Fades away.
All the money, time and effort
Gone to glorify our God.

But what reactions did it gather?
Producer happy -
It went well.
The vicar off to choir camp.
The choir is half its strength at evensong.
And letters from unknown viewers trickle in.

*Dear God, we gave our best
Amidst the unfamiliar
The unaccustomed heat and glare!
Forgive our lack of concentration.
We hope we helped a few along the way.*

(Reprise February 2011)