British Royal Ceremonies

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British Royal ceremonies. Introduction.

British people are proud of pageants and ceremonies of the national capital – London. Many of them are world famous and attract numerous tourists from all over the world. They include daily ceremonies and annuals. Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace at 11.30 a. m., Ceremony of the Keys at 10 p. m. in the Tower, Mounting the Guard at the Horse Guards square are most popular daily ceremonies. Of those which are held annually the oldest are the most cherished are: the glorious pageantry of Trooping the Color, which marks the official birthday of the Queen (the second Saturday in June); Firing the Royal Salute to mark anniversaries of the Queen’s Accession on February 6 and her birthday on April 21; opening of the Courts marking the start of the Legal Year in October; and Lord Mayor’s Show on the second Saturday in November, when the newly elected Lord Mayor is driven in the beautiful guilded coach pulled by six white horses to take the Royal Court of Justice where he takes his oath of office and becomes second in importance in the City only to the Sovereign (Queen).

Trooping the color.

Trooping the color is one of the most magnificent military ceremonies in Britain and perhaps in the world. It is held annually on the reigning monarch’s “official” birthday, which is the second Saturday in June.

Queen Elizabeth II is Colonel – in – Chief of the Household Division of five regiments of foot Guards and two regiments of Mounted Guards. The Trooping marks the official birthday of the Queen and each year the color (flag) of one of the five regiments of Foot Guards is displayed to the music of massed bands.

The ceremony stemmed from the need of soldiers to recognize the colors of their regiment in battle. The Parade is complex and precise and all seven regiments of the Household division take part, but only one color is trooped each year.

Wearing the uniform of one of these regiments the Queen leaves Buckingham Palace and rides down the Mall to the Horse Guards Parade accompanied by the sovereign’s Mounted Escort from the two Household Cavalry Units – the Life Guards wearing scarlet tunics with white plumes in their helmets and the Blues and Royals in blue tunics with red Plumes.

Precisely as the clock on the Horse Guards Building strikes 11, the Queen takes the Royal Salute. After inspecting her troops, the sovereign watches a display of marching to the tune of massed bands before the solemn moment when the Color is trooped by being carried along the motionless ranks of guardsmen lined up to await the Queen. The Color is then “trooped” or displayed before her.

Afterwards, she returns to the Palace at the head of the Guards deputed to mount the Palace Guard. Royal Family appear on the balcony of Buckingham Palace to acknowledge the fly-past of the Royal Air Forces at 1 p. m. Only one Color is “trooped” annually, that of each regiment in strict rotation. Originally it was called “lodging” the Color: each regiment’s own Color being laid up, to music known as a “Troop”.

The five regiments of Foot Guards can be identified by the plumes in their caps or bearskins, and by the spacing of the buttons on their tunics. The Grenadier Guards have white plumes and evenly spaced buttons: the Coldstreams, red plumes and buttons in pairs: the Scots Guards, no plumes and buttons in threes: the Irish Guards, blue plumes and buttons in fours: the Welsh Guards, white – and – green plumes and buttons in fives. The Guards have been carrying out their duty of guarding the sovereign since 1660 (the time of the restoration of Monarchy).

Changing the Guard.

The spectacular ceremony of Changing the Guard at Buckingham Palace attracts numerous spectators from the country and tourists from different parts of the world. The Guard is changed at 11.30 a.m. daily. It is formed from one of the regiments of Foot Guards. A band leads the new guard from Wellington or Chelsea barracks to the palace forecourt and after the ceremony it leads the old guard back to their barracks.

The history of the Foot Guards goes back to 1656, when Charles II of England, during his exile in Holland, recruited a small body-guard, which was merged in the regiment of guards enrolled at the Restoration in 1660. On St. Valentine’s Day, 1661, on Tower Hill, what had been the Lord General’s Regiment of Foot Guards, formed by Oliver Cromwell in 1650, took its arms as an “extraordinary guard” for the Sovereign. Having marched from Coldstream, near Berwick – upon – Tweed, it acquired the title of the Coldstream Guards. Its motto of nulli secundus sufficiently denoted its denial of precedence to the first Guards. The latter acquired their title of Grenadier Guards and their bearskin headdress – later adopted by the rest of the Guards brigade – by virtue of their defeat of napoleon’s grenadier guards at Waterloo.

In 1661 the Scots Fusilier Guards became known for the first time as the Scots Guards. In 1707 they were put on the same footing as the other two Guards regiments.