**British Royal Ceremonies.**

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**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.

In 1900 Queen Victoria, pleased with the fighting quality of the Irish regiments in the South African War, commanded the formation of the Irish Guards. In 1915 the representation nature of the brigade was rounded off by the formation of the Welsh Guards.

The Brigade of Guards serves as a personal bodyguard to the Sovereign. When the Queen is in residence at Buckingham Palace, there is a guard of four sentries. Only two are on duty when she is away from London. When the Queen is in residence at Windsor Castle, another Changing the Guard ceremony takes place in the Quadrangle there at 10 a. m. daily.

**Mounting the Guard.**

Mounted Guard takes part in another colorful ceremony which is held at 11 a. m. on weekdays and 10 a. m. on Sundays at the Horse Guards, a square facing Whitehall. The entrance to the Horse Guards is guarded by two mounted troopers who are at their posts daily from 10 a. m. to 4 p. m. The guard is formed by units of the Household Cavalry (Mounted Guard) – the Life Guards and the Royals (the Blues and Royals). When the Queen is in London, an officer, a corporal of horse, 16 troopers and a trumpeter on a grey horse take part in the ceremony. The Royals can be identified by the red plumes on their helmets and by their blue uniforms. The Life Guards wear white plumes and red tunics.

**The Ceremony of the Keys.**

Every night at 9.53 p. m. the Chief Warder of the Yeomen Warders (Beefeaters) of the Tower of London lights a candle lantern and then makes his way towards the Bloody Tower. In the Archway his Escort await his arrival. The Chief Warder, carrying the keys, then moves off with his Escort to the West Gate, which he locks, while the Escort “present arms”. Then the Middle and Byward are locked.

The party then returns to the Bloody Tower Archway, and there they are halted by the challenge of the sentry. “Halt!” he commands. “Who goes there?” The Chief Warder answers, “The keys”. The sentry demands, “Whose keys?” “Queen Elizabeth’s keys”, replies the Chief Warder. “Advance, Queen Elizabeth’s keys; all’s well”, commands the sentry.

Having received permission to proceed through the Archway, the party then form up facing the Main guard of the Tower. The order is given by the officer - in – charge to “Present Arms”. The Chief Warder doffs his Tudor – style bonnet and cries, “God preserve Queen Elizabeth”. “Amen”, answer the Guard and Escort.

At 10 p. m. the bugler sounds the “Last Post” (signal to return). The Chief Warder proceeds to the Queen’s House, where the keys are given into the custody of the Resident Governor and Major.

The Ceremony of the Keys dates back 700 years and has taken place every night during that period, even during the blitz of London in the last war. On one particular night, April 16, 1941, bomb blast disrupted the ceremony, knocking out members of the Escort and Yeomen Warders. Despite this, the duty was completed.

Only a limited number of visitors are admitted to the ceremony each night. Application to see it must be made at least forty – eight hours in advance at the Constable’s office in the Tower. Visitors with the permission are admitted at 9.40 p. m. and leave at 10 p. m.

**The Lord Mayor’s show.**

The splendid civic event known as the Lord Mayor’s show is watched by many thousands of people, who throng the streets of the City of London to see this interesting procession and admire its glittering pageantry. The ceremony is the gesture of pride in the City’s history and strength as a world commercial centre. The ceremony seems still more bright and colorful because it is always held on the second Saturday in November when the city is often wrapped in mist or rain.

Its origin dates back more than six hundred years, when it began as a waterborne procession with ornate barges sailing down the river Thames. Dressed in his fur – trimmed scarlet gown, a “Cap Dignity”, and wearing the great 5 feet long gold chain of office the newly elected Lord Mayor first watches a cavalcade of decorated floats pass by his stand at his official residence, the Mansion House. Then he steps into his gilded State Coach and takes up his position of honour at the rear of the procession. Accompanied by the Pikemen in their half – armour the Lord Mayor is driven in his Gilded coach from Guildhall, past St. Paul’s Cathedral, down Fleet street to the Royal Court of Justice, where he takes his oath of office before the Lord Chief Justice. The tradition of taking oath (“declaration”) originated in 1230 during the reign of Henry III and the final declaration was made before the Barons of the Exchequer.

The Lord Mayor’s coach, weighing 4 tons and pulled by six horses was built in 1757 and was painted by the famous Florentine painter Giovanni Cipriani. A body guard of Pikemen and Musketeers march beside the coach. Many people in the procession wear traditional historic costumes. Each year a theme relating to London life or history is chosen and floats decorated with tableaux on this theme precede the Lord Mayor’s coach. The Lord Mayor who is also the City’s Chief Magistrate, is selected by the liverymen of the City Companies (guilds). One of the most distinguished of London’s Lord Mayors was Dick Whittington (1423) who held office four times. After the oath has been taken, the entire procession returns via Victoria Embankment to the original point of departure.

On the following Monday evening the Lord Mayer gives a splendid Inaugural banquet at Guildhall. This has two traditions – a first course of turtle soup and speech from the Prime minister.

This glittering occasion is attended by many of the most prominent people in the country and is usually televised. The Prime Minister delivers a major political speech and the toast of the hosts on behalf of the quests is proposed by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Half the cost of the Show and Banquet is paid by the Mayor and the other half is met by the two Sheriffs. One can imagine how high the costs are but a Lord Mayor regards such financial sacrifices as worth while because of the prestige, since in his year of office he is second in importance in the City only to the Sovereign. The official residence of the Lord Mayor in Mansion House, which was designed in Palladian style in the 18th century, but has been altered since. The Guildhall, dating from the 15th century is the place where the Lord Mayor, Alderman and the City fathers conduct the City’s affairs. Important banquets and ceremonial occasions are held there. The City has not only its own Mayor, but also its own government and its own police force. Even the sovereign (Queen) has to stop at the City’s frontiers until the Lord Mayor allows admittance.

**Remembrance Day. (Poppy Day)**

Remembrance Day is observed throughout Britain in commemoration of the million or more British soldiers and airmen who lost their lives during the two World Wars. On that day, the second Sunday in November, special services are held in the churches and wreaths are laid at war memorials throughout the country and at London’s Cenotaph, where a great number of people gather to observe the two – minute silence and to perform the annual Remembrance Day ceremony. The silence begins at the first stroke of Big Ben 11 o’clock, and is broken only by the crash of distant artillery and perhaps by the murmur of a passing jet. Members of the Royal Family or their representatives and political leaders come forward to lay wreaths at the foot of the Cenotaph. Then comes the march past the memorial of ex-servicemen and women, followed by an endless line of ordinary citizens who have come here with their personal wreaths and their sad memories.

On that day artificial poppies, a symbol of mourning, are traditionally sold in the streets everywhere, and people wear them in their buttonholes. The money collected in this way is later used to help the men who had been crippled during the war and their dependants.

In the past the day was known as Armistice Day and was marked on the 11 of November, as that was the day when armistice (agreement to stop military actions) sought by German from Allies, came into force in 1918. Armistice Day was kept since 1919 – 1938. Two minutes silence was observed throughout the British Commonwealth starting at 11 a. m. the ceremony lapsed during the second World War, but was resumed in 1945. The following year it was decided to observe a Remembrance Day for both World Wars. It was to be held annually on Remembrance Sunday (the second Sunday in November). The most magnificent ceremony is held at the Cenotaph in London, a memorial to those who died during the two world wars. On Remembrance Day the ceremony is attended by the Queen and royal family, statesmen and politicians, representatives of the armed forces and Commonwealth.

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