

'What is the secret of the guards' appeal? They are undeniably elegant, stylish, colourful and highly professional. The sculpted lines of scarlet and black of the Grenadiers on the march...the skirl of the pipes of the Scots and Irish, and the rich texture of the brass of the massed Guards' bands during one of London's great military parades will send a frisson of pleasure down the most unmilitary of backs. By simply being there, the Guards evoke the glory and paths of the past in the way that a painting or a piece of architecture sometimes does.'

The Guards by John de St. Jorre, Crown Publishers, N.Y., 1981

For centuries, the Guards Division (until 1968 'the Brigade of Guards') has fascinated the public. Here is a potpourri of facts and customs you may not know about this most famous of military forces.

Why scarlet?

'The uniform each Regiment wears is, by its very colour, royal. As far back as the reign of Canute, it is known that the 'House Carles', who



A caricature of a Coldstream Guards officer by Simon Dyer

The Guards

James H. Hillestad, member no. 6, gives an insight into some of the lesser-known facts and customs of the Guards Division

Britains historical series of "Redcoats" released as of this writing.



were his bodyguard, were clothed in scarlet. When the Normans brought to the Royal coat of arms a shield in which the ground of the top left quarter was also scarlet, the fashion was set. Not until the reign of Charles II were blue facings, and in some cases, blue tunics, associated with the Royal Household.'

The King's Guard, Henry Legge-Bourke, Macdonald & Co., Ltd., London, 1952

There is history in the names

The history of the Guards dates from the time of Charles II and the restoration of the monarchy. In exile in France in 1656, he raised the King's Royal Regiment of Guards.

This regiment distinguished itself at Waterloo in 1815, where it defeated the Grenadiers of the French Imperial Guard. As a result of that action, the Prince Regent ordered that the regiment be known as the 1st or Grenadier Regiment of Foot Guards.

The Coldstream Guards take their name from the village of Coldstream on the border of Scotland. Raised in 1650 on the orders of Oliver Cromwell, they took their place in the 'New Model Army' under Colonel George Monck. Their motto ('Second to none') emphasizes that the Coldstream Regiment is older than any other regiment of Foot Guards, even if it was not until 1660 that they entered Royal service.



Fifes and Drums of the Grenadier Guards (41175)

The Scots Guards trace their lineage to 1642 (Argyll's Regiment). In 1686, they were brought into the English Army's establishment. Queen Victoria designated them the 'Scots Guards' in 1877, and they took precedence with the Foot Guards as the Third Regiment.

The Irish Guards were raised in 1900 at the suggestion of Queen Victoria to commemorate the gallantry of Irish regiments in the Boer War.

Side drums of the five Guards Regiments



The 'youngest' of the five Guards regiments is the Welsh Guards, formed in 1915 by order of King George V. They went into action later that year at the battle of Loos.

More than pageantry

The five regiments of Guards, though popularly known for their ceremonial duties, are first and foremost operational troops. They

BELOW Dress tunic and baldric (shoulder belt) of an Irish Guards Drum Major. Note the shamrocks and the grouping of the buttons.

have seen service from Tangiers in 1680 to the Gulf War. In fact, you can often catch a glimpse of them training outside Wellington Barracks in camouflage and bearskin.

They are also charged with guarding the Sovereign and the Royal Palaces. A special force, called Coats Mission, was formed in 1940 from the Coldstream Guards to protect the Royal Family in the event of invasion. Another special group was assigned to safeguard Winston



Churchill at his country home, Chequers.

Until November 1959, the sentry boxes and the sentries' beats were outside the railings at Buckingham Palace. A dramatic increase in tourism had brought with it ill-mannered behaviour that severely tested the stamina of the men on guard. The boxes were moved into the courtyard – much to the relief of the Guardsmen.

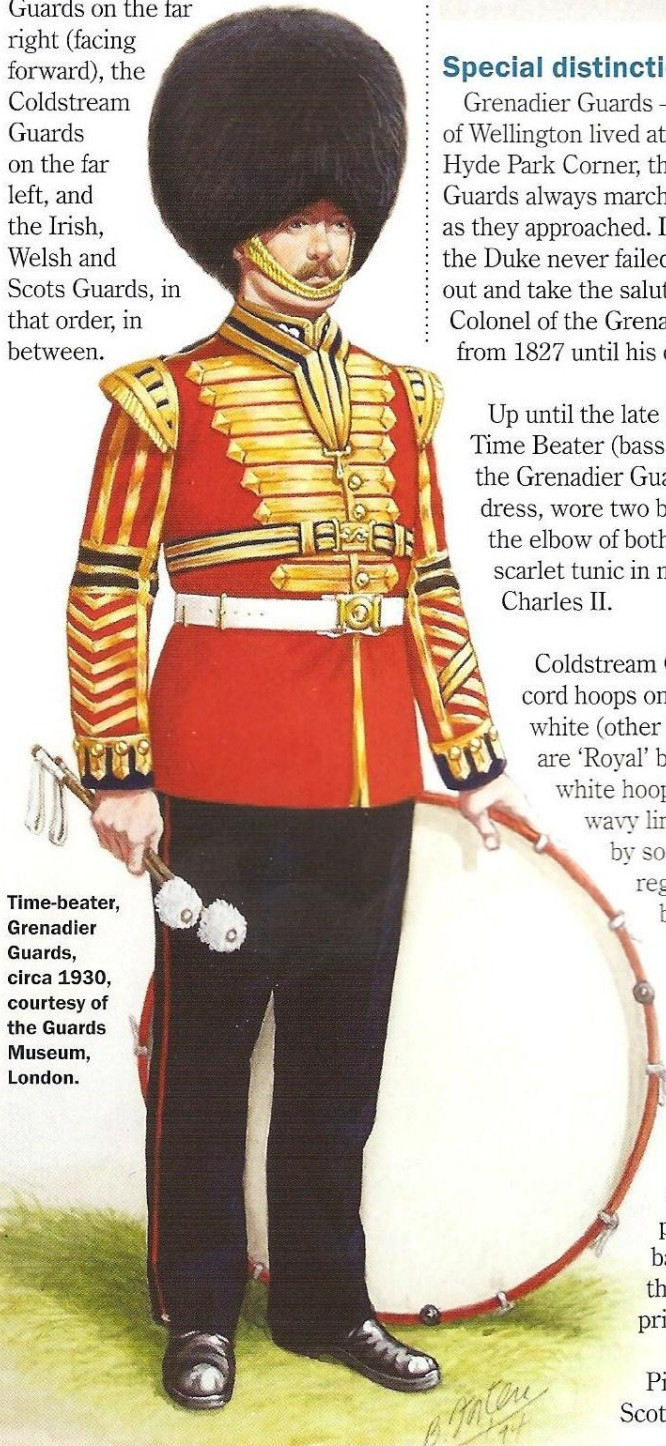
Telling them apart

From a distance the five Guards regiments look alike. But close-up there are noticeable differences. The chart below helps sort them out.

| Regiment | Plume | Buttons | Collar Badge | Shoulder Badge |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|---------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Grenadier Guards | White, worn on left | Single | Grenade | Royal Cypher |
| Coldstream Guards | Red, worn on right | Paired | Garter Star | Rose |
| Scots Guards | None | Threes | Star of the Order of the Thistle | Thistle |
| Irish Guards | Blue, worn on right | Fours | Shamrock | Star of the Order of St. Patrick |
| Welsh Guards | White-Green-White, worn on left | Fives | Leek | Leek |

Note: Officers' and sergeants' plumes are of cut feathers, and those of guardsmen are horse hair. The title 'Guardsmen' was authorized by King George V in 1918, to privates in the regiments of Foot Guards.

When on parade together, the five regiments of Guards observe a seventeenth century order of precedence, the flanks being considered the place of honor when in line. This placement is based on seniority, with the Grenadier Guards on the far right (facing forward), the Coldstream Guards on the far left, and the Irish, Welsh and Scots Guards, in that order, in between.



Time-beater, Grenadier Guards, circa 1930, courtesy of the Guards Museum, London.



State Colour of the Scots Guards #5991

Special distinctions

Grenadier Guards – When the Duke of Wellington lived at Apsley House, Hyde Park Corner, the Grenadier Guards always marched 'to attention' as they approached. It is said that the Duke never failed to come out and take the salute. He was Colonel of the Grenadier Guards from 1827 until his death in 1852.

Up until the late 1940s, the Time Beater (bass drummer) of the Grenadier Guards, when in full dress, wore two black bands near the elbow of both sleeves of his scarlet tunic in memory of King Charles II.

Coldstream Guards – The cord hoops on their drums are white (other Guard regiments are 'Royal' blue). The white hoop with its blue wavy line is attributed by some to the regiment's having been a unit of Cromwell's Parliamentary army.

Both the Scots Guards and Irish Guards have a contingent of pipers in their bands, reflecting their nationalistic pride and spirit.

Pipers in the Scots Guards wear a



ABOVE Colour Sergeant arm badges. **Bottom row, left to right: Grenadier, Scots, and Coldstream Guards. Top row: Irish and Welsh Guards.**

feathered bonnet, dark blue doublet, and a kilt of Royal Stuart tartan. Pipers in the Irish Guards wear a green caubeen fashioned with a St. Patrick's blue hackle. Blue was chosen, rather than green, so as not to be confused with the Royal Irish Fusiliers, who wore a green plume on their bearskin. A dark green tunic with cloak is worn with a saffron colored kilt.

The Irish Guards are the only Guards regiment to have a mascot – an Irish Wolfhound. The first, Brian Boru was named for the famous King of Ireland, and was enlisted into the regiment as #1463 in 1900. Mascots are granted the same status and pay of Guardsmen. The current mascot is called Fearghal.

Welsh Guards – For a number of years, on the anniversary of the Liberation of Brussels, September 3, 1944, the famous Mannekin Pis statue in Brussels was dressed in the uniform of the Welsh Guards. That



ABOVE Irish Guards Colour Party (00317). Note the arrangement of the Colours.

uniform now resides in the Guards Museum on Birdcage Walk in London.

The Colours

The historical significance of the colours dates to the Eagles of the Roman Legions and to knight's banners in the days of chivalry. They were used as rallying points in battle. A 1905 article in the *Globe* magazine aptly put it: "The flag is not simply a piece of silk, but a symbol which connects us with the past, which reminds us of our duties in the present, and has a connection with our aspirations for the future."

Each battalion of Foot Guards have a Queen's (or King's) Colour and a Regimental Colour, which is a Union flag – unlike the rest of the Army, where the Union flag is the Queen's (or King's) Colour. The Queen's Colour of a Guards battalion is red.

All the regiments of the Guards Division, also unlike the rest of the Army, have their battle honours embroidered on both the Queen's (or King's) and the Regimental Colour.

The Grenadier, Coldstream and Scots guards also have special State Colours. These are used only for



Irish Guards Wolfhound (00317)



Colour Bearer, Grenadier Guards by Britains made for the Buckingham Palace gift shop.

Royal occasions when the Sovereign is personally present. The State Colours are larger than the battalion colours – five feet ten inches by four feet ten inches with a pike of ten feet five inches, compared to just three feet nine inches by three feet seven and a half inches.

A closing footnote

Onlookers peering through the railings of Buckingham Palace often wonder how the two sentries know when to step out of their boxes and begin their measured, perfectly synchronized patrol. It is done with a series of taps of the rifle butt on the ground, with the right-hand sentry as you face them – always the senior man of the pair – giving the cue.

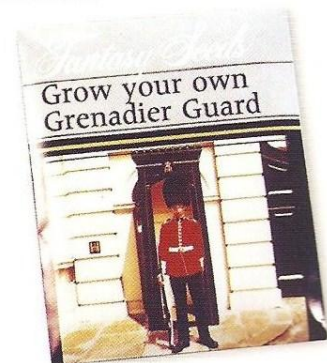
One tap of the rifle on the ground

means a patrol, two are for an ordinary salute, three for a 'present arms,' and a couple of double taps warn that a patrol is coming to inspect the sentries or relieve them. Next time you visit London, you will be able to amaze your companions by predicting the Guardsmen's next move! 📌

SUGGESTED READING

- The King's Guards by Henry Legge-Bourke
- The Queen's Guards by Henry Legge-Bourke
- The Story of the Guards by Julian Paget
- The Foot Guards Regiment 1880 – 1914 by A.H. Bowling
- The Guards by John de St. Jorre

Special thanks to Andrew Wallis, Curator, The Guards Museum; Adrian Snood, Band Archivist, Grenadier Guards; and Alix Baker, military artist extraordinaire!



A souvenir packet of flower seeds to promote national pride.

William Britain based many of the firm's model figures on colour plates made by the celebrated military artist Richard Simkin (1850-1926).

Jim Hillestad operates under the name "The Toy Soldier." His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of Northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227 or visit his website at www.the-toy-soldier.com