

THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD.

BY GEORGE A. WADE.

THESE are few Englishmen who, were they asked which is the oldest body of soldiers now existing in the armies of the civilised world, could give a satisfactory reply. Yet the corps that may be so designated is in our own land, and is well-known, by name at all events, to most people, who may be surprised to learn that the proud distinction of being able to claim that honour belongs to the "Yeomen of the Guard."

They are men with a history, and an interesting one in every sense, these sturdy

There are to-day one hundred of these gallant fellows doing duty in some capacity in the famous corps of the Royal bodyguard known as the "Yeomen of the Guard." There was not always this number, for there has been much variation since the founding of the "regiment." At first it numbered fifty men, forty of whom are mentioned in the State records in the original warrants. This was under Henry VII. By Henry VIII.'s time it had risen to six hundred, so that it is not without reason that we speak of it as a

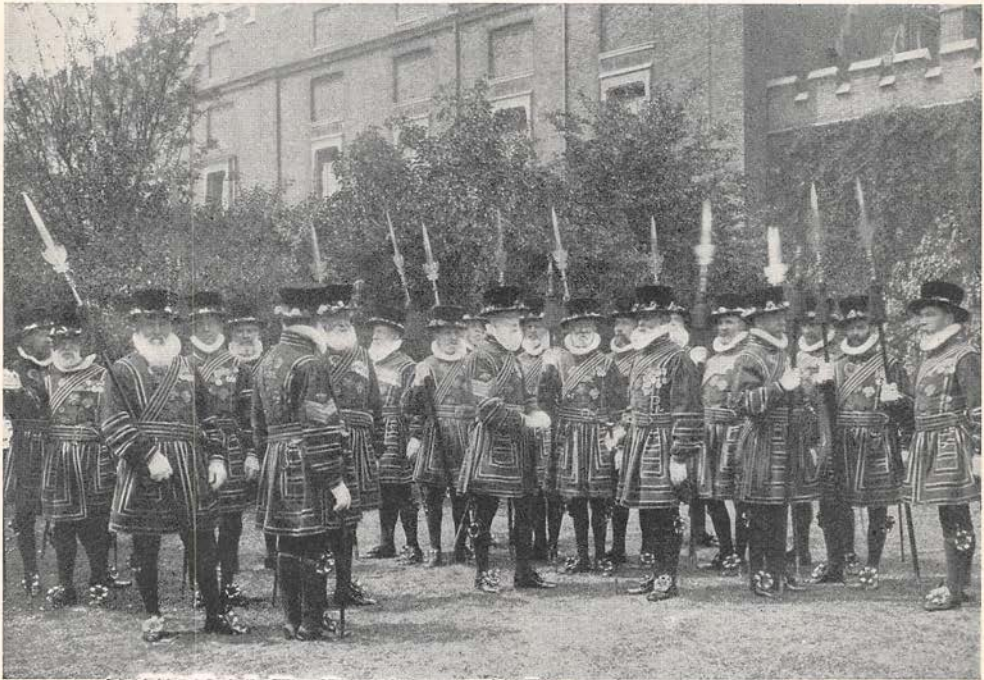


Photo by]

A GROUP OF YEOMEN OF THE GUARD, ST. JAMES'S PALACE.

[Ball, Regent Street, W.

veterans whom one sees on duty at Buckingham Palace or St. James's, whenever Royalty holds a Drawing Room or a *Levéé*, or when some State ball or concert takes place. Most of them have seen stirring times and deeds on the field of battle, about which they could tell many tales, for no retired soldiers can be admitted into the privileged ranks of the "Yeomen of the Guard" at all unless they "have held commissioned, warrant, or sergeant's rank in the Army, and have also been decorated for service in the field,"

"regiment." Edward VI. had two hundred Yeomen, whilst Mary, his sister, thought four hundred none too many. James I. reduced the number again to two hundred, and Charles II. at the Restoration made it one hundred, at which figure it has remained ever since. During the times of the Tudors it also contained some mounted men, as seen from the accompanying photograph of an engraving, but these afterwards disappeared.

There can be little doubt that the first constitution of the King's bodyguard was in



CORNELIUS VANDUN BORN AT BREDA, SOLDIER WITH KING HENRY AT TURNNEY, YEOMAN OF THE GUARD, AND USHER TO KING HENRY, KING EDWARD, QUEEN MARY, AND QUEEN ELIZABETH. OBIT 1677 ÆTATIS SUE 94.

AN EARLY YEOMAN OF THE GUARD.
From an old print.

1485, when Henry VII., fresh from his great victory at Bosworth, appointed several of his most trusted men to act permanently as his special guard, under the title and style of "The Yeomen of the King's Guard." This title was almost immediately shortened by the populace into the familiar one we know to-day, which has practically never changed. And it is curious and interesting to learn from documents now in possession of the corps that these first Yeomen were mostly Welshmen, such names as Ap Jones, Kaye, Griffiths, etc., being the most frequent. This fact is doubtless due to the circumstance that Welshmen formed the chief part of the King's retinue in his exile, and flocked so largely to his standard on his landing at Milford Haven. An interesting portrait of an early Yeoman of the Guard is here reproduced.

It has been suggested by some authorities that Canute had, five hundred years before that date, possessed a similar body of soldiers to guard his person, and that this regiment was continued by later kings, under different titles, until under Edward III. it became the "Yeomen of the Crown." But this suggestion does not prove that this regiment became ultimately the one we know at present, for in fact these separate bodyguards of the sovereigns remained in existence until the

eighteenth century. They have often been confused with the "Yeomen of the Guard," but they were not military bodies at all, and at the death of each monarch under whom they served they were disbanded, and a new guard, often of totally fresh men and with different dress and accoutrements, was formed. The history of these various bodyguards would form a volume in itself.

Nothing to-day about the Yeomen of the Guard is more striking and picturesque than their mediæval dress, which is ever such a wonder and pleasure to the country cousin who first sees it at the Tower of London. And it has altered very little, comparatively speaking, from that of the period when it was first appointed for them.

The costume is extremely interesting, with its bright scarlet tunic bearing the Tudor rose, embroidered in crimson and gold beneath the Royal Crown; the white ruffles at the neck—sure evidence of Good Queen Bess—the scarlet, close-fitting hose, and the flat-topped black velvet hat, with its wide brim. All through the centuries the Royal scarlet, the gold lace, and the velvet have remained constant in this arrangement. What alterations have taken place have been chiefly in the shape and style of the sleeves and cap. Several prints still in existence



A MOUNTED YEOMAN.
From an old print.

show that the Yeomen used to wear fuller sleeves, and that occasionally the skirts of the tunics have been either longer or shorter. Elizabeth, it is almost needless to remark, added the ruffles, now so conspicuous in the costume. The hats were, in the Stuart days, changed from the low, round hat, now so familiar, to higher headgear, adorned with plumes, and lace took the place of the ruff. But the Hanoverian dynasty did away with these innovations and restored the former cap and ruff to their old places.

The duties of the Yeomen of the Guard, as originally defined by warrant, were to protect the person of the Sovereign on State occasions and in private; to form part of the Royal train in order to increase its splendour; and to fight for and with their monarch in battle. Henry VII. was not long in bringing his favourites into useful work, for the newly-formed bodyguard took a prominent part in the procession to St. Paul's which the King organised in order to give thanks for the victory at Bosworth; and within a month it was again much in evidence at his coronation in Westminster Abbey. Henry VIII. took six hundred of the Yeomen with him to the Field of the Cloth of Gold, as his special guard; and the Yeomen were also present with William III. at the battle of the Boyne, two centuries ago.

It was Elizabeth who used to have the Yeomen waiting at table during her grandest feasts, and it is doubtless from this that the Yeomen of the Guard became looked upon as being the proper persons to perform Court duties at State functions, which are their principal services to-day.

The conditions which are requisite for a Yeoman have been already stated—*viz.*, certain rank and past services in the Regular Army, and an unblemished character for at least eighteen years previous to his application for appointment. Hence the reason why the famous hundred veterans are regarded with such pride by the whole English Army, for they are the representatives of all that is best and bravest amongst the various arms of the Service.

As to the constitution of the celebrated hundred, it is as follows. At the head of the corps is a captain, who is the sole person in the Guard who is not compelled to have seen active military service. His office is generally political, as a new captain is appointed with each change of Government. The captain must, according to all recent precedent, be a "Peer of the Realm," and the present holder of the post is Earl Waldegrave, who is



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[Ball, Regent Street, W.

A TYPICAL YEOMAN OF THE GUARD: MR. ALFRED WHITE, FORMERLY REGIMENTAL CORPORAL-MAJOR, ROYAL HORSE GUARDS; SERVICE ABROAD; MISSION TO LOBENGULA AND MATABELELAND.

extremely popular with both officers and men serving under him.

Then comes a lieutenant, who must previously have been a colonel in the Regular Army. This office is now filled by Sir Horatio Vance, who used to command the 38th Regiment. Below him comes an ensign, who must have been a colonel in former days,



ATTEMPT ON THE LIFE OF KING GEORGE III., AUGUST 2, 1786.
From an old print.

the Yeomen served as active and regular body-servants to the sovereigns of the sixteenth century.

A word or two as to the pay of the various ranks may be interesting. The privates get £50 annually, besides their pension money for former services. The "messengers" and similar ranks get £75 a year, and the lowest officer gets no less than £100.

As to their quaint and strange arms and adornments, these are also the survivals of olden times. The Yeomen used to carry during the Tudor period the weapons

then in use, and they have practically continued to keep those same arms. That is why we see them with pikes and halberts on ceremonial occasions. These are known to be purely ornamental, since they would not be the least good against the weapons

and so also must have been the "Clerk of the Cheque and Adjutant." This latter officer gets his title from the fact that in olden times he used to have to keep the "checker," the roll of Royal servants. Four other officers are termed "exons," which curious title is supposed to have been derived from the French word *exempt*—that is, free from certain duties, the word "exempt" being sounded as if it were written "exomt," and hence corrupted into "exon." Even till last century there were similar "exons" in the Household Cavalry.

Besides these there are non-commissioned officers who do duty in the Yeomen of the Guard as messengers, sergeant-majors, Yeomen bed-goers, Yeomen bed-hangers, etc. What the precise work of these would be to-day it is difficult to determine, but the names show how



MARGARET NICHOLSON ATTEMPTING TO STAB HIS MAJESTY ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 2, 1786.
From an old print.



ATTEMPT ON THE LIFE OF KING GEORGE III., OCTOBER 29, 1795
From an old print.

of modern times. A conclusive proof was given of this in the last affair of any moment in which the corps took part actively as "Soldiers of the Queen." The authorities took away the obsolete weapons and armed the men with muskets and bayonets. We shall recur to this again shortly. And as regards the badges of the Yeomen, many minor changes have taken place in the course of centuries. For at least two hundred and fifty years after the formation of the corps their emblem remained the English Crown with the red rose of Lancaster below it, and also the initials of the reigning monarch

Those cynical folks who regard the corps as being purely a decorative body for the Sovereign, a corps which never sees actual service nor is even called upon to-day really to defend the person of the monarch, are mistaken. At Bosworth the Yeomen gathered round the person of Henry; at the siege of Tournai, when all other troops had deserted the King, this corps stood firm, and it was mainly owing to their help that he was eventually successful. Four hundred of them were left in Tournai to guard it, and so pleased was Henry with their work that he gave them all an extra payment of 4*d.* a

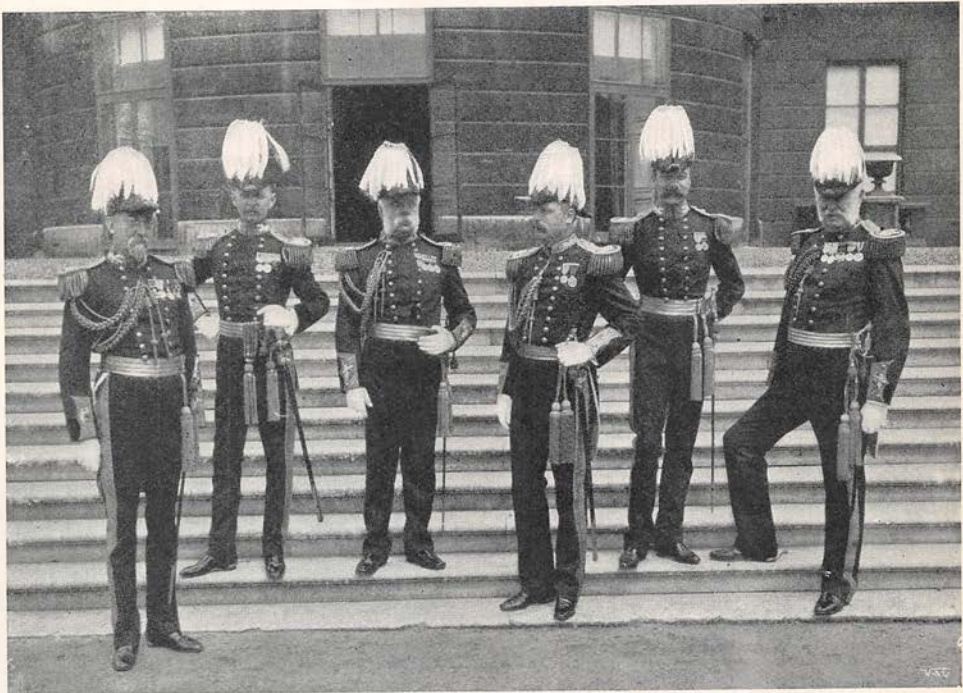


Photo by]

Captain French.
Col. Hennell, D.S.O.

Col. Sir Horatio
Vance.

Col. Lord Waldegrave
(Captain of the Corps).

Major Elliott.
Col. Ellison.

[Ball, Regent Street, W.]

CAPTAIN AND OFFICERS OF THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD, 1899.

with the Royal motto, "*Dieu et mon droit*," between them. The thistle was added when England and Scotland were united legislatively under Queen Anne in 1709, and just as naturally, when Ireland came into the Union in 1801, George III. followed the example of Queen Anne and added the shamrock. All these changes are excellently shown on the photograph, taken in the adjutant's room, of the line of pikes and emblems representing the various alterations during each reign in the insignia of the Yeomen of the Guard.

day, which was a large sum in those times. The Yeomen went with Henry VIII. to the Field of the Cloth of Gold, quite expecting to have to fight later on. It was the Yeomen who searched the Houses of Parliament when Guy Fawkes was discovered—a proceeding they have since carried out every succeeding year before Parliament assembles. They went, as stated, with William III. to the Battle of the Boyne and fought well there.

It was a Yeoman of the Guard who prevented his Majesty King George III.



KING HENRY VIII. IN THE DISGUISE OF A YEOMAN OF THE GUARD, VISITING A COBBLER.

being stabbed by the lunatic Margaret Nicholson, and so undoubtedly saved the monarch's life. And as late as 1848 it was the Yeomen of the Guard who were called out to defend St. James's Palace against an anticipated London mob during that period of revolutions when France was in a tumult and there was no telling what would happen next in England. This was the time when the Government handed out muskets and bayonets to the corps, as being likely to be more effective than the ancient halberds and pikes.

Of late years a particular interest has been attracted to the Yeomen of the Guard in the mind of the populace, owing to the wonderful success of the Gilbert and Sullivan opera of that name. But, strange to say, the opera perpetuates what is a very common mistake, for, dealing with the Warders of the Tower, it calls them by the name of the "Yeomen of the Guard," which they are not. The true "Yeomen of the Guard" recognise the antiquity of their *confrères*, the Tower Warders; they pay them tribute for excellent service in many ways; but they do not allow to them the proud title of which they themselves boast; for they point out, and with perfect truth, that the Beefeaters are quite a separate corps, though often attached to the Yeomen of the Guard; that their uniform is minus the well-known shoulder-belt; that they never did act either as the King's bodyguard or on the field of battle; that even in Edward VI.'s time they were evidently considered to be quite a distinct body, seeing that the King then appointed fifteen Tower Warders

for meritorious services to be "Yeomen Extraordinary of the Bedchamber"; and that, lastly, whilst the Tower Warders are all appointed by the Constable of the Tower, the Yeomen of the Guard are only appointed by the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army.

The review of the Yeomen of the Guard last year by the Duke of Connaught was a very striking ceremony, as will be seen from the picture here shown. No less than ninety-six of the hundred veterans appeared upon parade. Every soldier wore the medals he had won in active service, with the usual rosettes, and the lines made a gallant show. There were *doyens* of the Army there that had fought, forty-five years before, in the cold Crimea; men who had marched with Havelock and Outram over the burning plains of India in that famous Mutiny; gallant fellows who had trudged beside "Bobs" in the great march to Cabul; and soldiers who had climbed heights in face of the enemy in Burmah and China.

There stood the renowned veteran, Sergeant-Major Holmes, who is one of the two "messengers," happy and smiling as ever. There stood the officers, tried and trusty, as in bygone days when bullets rained round them on the field of battle—there



Photo by]

[Boll, Regent Street, W.

ARTHUR RULE, FORMERLY SERGT.-MAJOR 20TH FOOT, AND MAJOR IN 24TH MIDDLESEX V.R.C. (POST OFFICE), THE OLDEST YEOMAN OF THE GUARD.

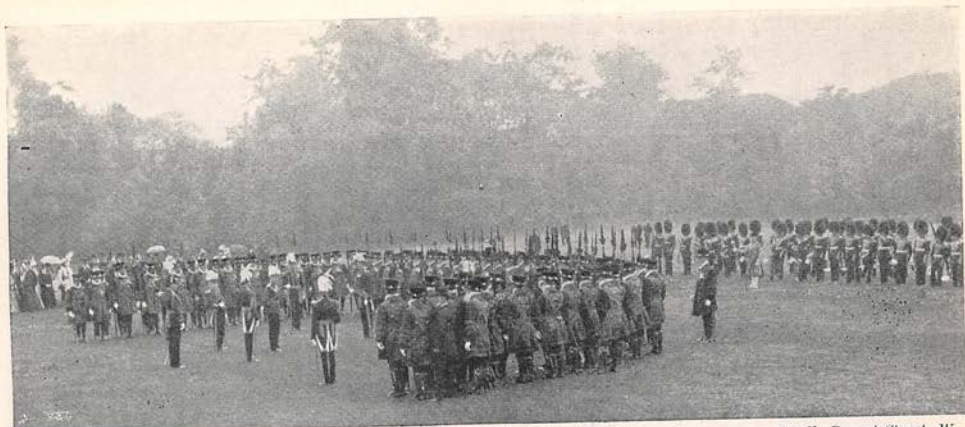


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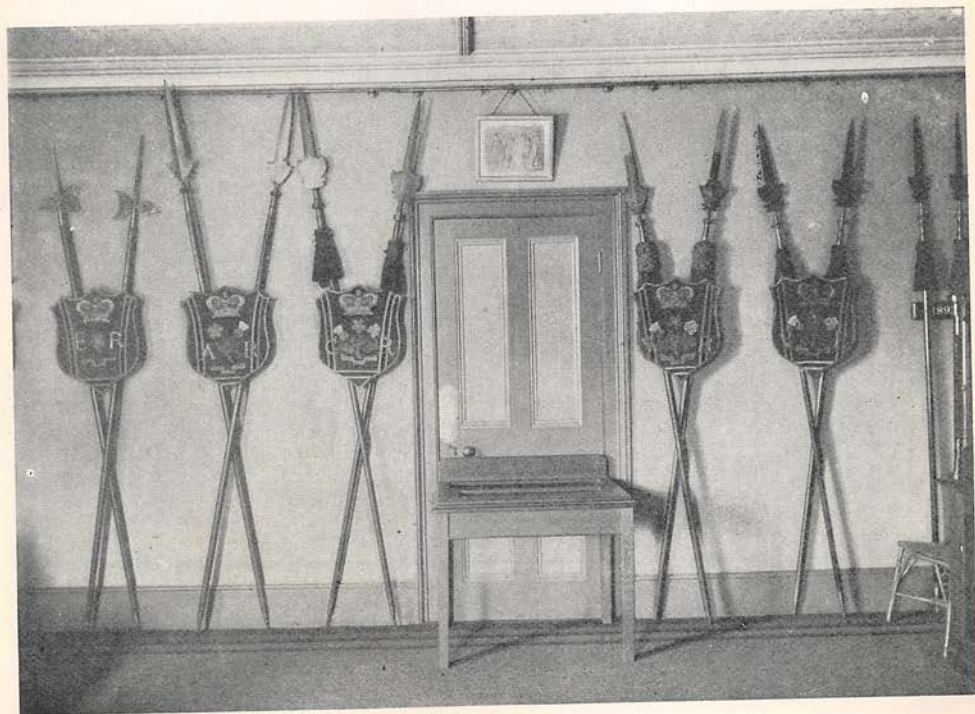
INSPECTION OF YEOMEN OF THE GUARD BY H.R.H. THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT, JUNE 20, 1899.

they stood on parade, with swallow-tailed coats and epaulettes, with gold-laced trousers, and with cocked-hats whose plumes waved in the breeze. This uniform, it may be remarked, was the one of a general officer during the time of the Peninsular war; before that the officers of the Yeomen of the Guard wore the same uniform as their men do now.

But the *doyen* of *doyens* on that parade day was gallant old Sergeant-Major Rule, whose breast was literally covered with his

medals and clasps, and who wore his unique distinction—he is the only “Yeoman” who possesses it—of the “Cross of the Legion of Honour” of France. It was the brave Rule’s thirty-fourth inspection as a member of the famous corps.

By kind permission of Earl Waldegrave, the captain, and the officers of the Yeomen of the Guard, special access has been given, for the purpose of this article, to the records of the corps, now in their possession and not before published.



THE PIKES AND INSIGNIA OF THE “YEOMEN” DURING VARIOUS REIGNS.