

Royal Ceremoies

London is a royal city and has preserved its ceremonies and traditions over hundreds of years. The most traditional ceremonies are the Trooping of the Colour and the Changing of the Guard. These are also popular attractions. I will also present some other ceremonies like Searching the Houses of Parliament, The State Opening of Parliament, Ceremony of the Keys and Swan Upping.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Outside Buckingham Palace, you can see guardsmen dressed in their bright red uniforms and bearskin hats that are 18 inches (approximately 45 centimeters) tall and are made of real bearskin. Their job is to protect the Queen. A new guard of thirty guardsmen marches to the palace and takes the place of the "old guard" every day. This ceremony is known as the Changing of the Guards and it dates back to the 1660.

The Queen's Guard changes in the forecourt of Buckingham Palace at 11.30 am. The ceremony lasts for about 45 minutes. There is no Guard Mounting in very wet weather. During the autumn and winter, Guard Mounting takes place on alternate days, but it is held daily during spring and summer.

TROOPING OF THE COLOUR

The Trooping of the Colour (Carrying of the Flag) is a military parade that marks the official birthday of Queen Elizabeth II.

Each June the Queen and other members of the Royal Family attend to the Trooping the Colour ceremony on Horse Guards Parade in London. The Queen attends the ceremony to take the salute from thousands of guardsmen who parade the Colour (their regiment's flag). The parade starts at 11 am. It lasts for about one hour.

The Queen's birthday parade is the biggest royal event of the year. In 1748 the celebration of the official birthday of the Queen was merged with the Trooping of the Colour.

THE STATE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT

This ceremony dates back to Medieval London and marks the beginning of a new session of Parliament and allows the Government to announce its programme for that session.

It usually takes place in November or soon after a General Election.

On the day of the Opening, the Queen travels from Buckingham Palace to the Houses of Parliament in the State Coach (a gold carriage).

The Queen, wearing her crown and ceremonial robes then takes her place on the throne in the House of Lords, from where she sends her messenger (Black Rod) to summon the MPs. When he arrives at the House of Commons, the door is slammed in his face, symbolizing the right of the Commons to freedom from interference. He must then knock three times to gain entry and deliver his summons.

The Queen sits on a throne in the House of Lords and reads the "Queen's Speech".

It is tradition for the monarch to open parliament in person, and The Queen has performed the ceremony in every year of her reign except for 1959 and 1963, when she was pregnant.

No King or Queen has entered the House of Commons since 1642, when Charles I stormed in with his soldiers and tried to arrest five members of Parliament who were there.

SEARCHING THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Before every State Opening of Parliament, the cellars beneath the Palace of Westminster are searched by the light of old candle-lanterns. This precaution has been undertaken every year since 1605, when the "Gunpowder Conspirators" attempted to blow up parliament on the day of the State Opening.

SWAN UPPING

Swan Upping is an annual ceremonial and practical activity in Britain in which swans on the River Thames are rounded up, caught, marked, and then released. This is a means of establishing a swan census, and also serves to check the health of swans.

Traditionally, the Monarch of the United Kingdom owns all unmarked swans on the River Thames. This dates from the 12th century, during which swans were a common food source for royalty.

CEREMONY OF THE KEYS

One of London's most timeless ceremonies, dating back 700 years is the ceremony of the keys which takes place at the Tower of London. At 21:53 each night the Chief Yeoman Warder of the Tower, dressed in Tudor uniform meets the Escort of the Key dressed in the well-known Beefeater uniform. Together they tour the various gates and lock them ceremonially. On returning to the Bloody Tower archway they are challenged by a sentry.

S: Who goes there?

CW: The Keys.

S: Whose Keys?

CW: Queen Elizabeth's Keys.

S: Pass Queen Elizabeth's Keys. All's well.

A trumpeter then sounds the Last Post before the keys are secured in the Queen's House.