

# Trooping the Colour: The King's Birthday Parade [C1]

In occasione della parata militare che commemora il compleanno del monarca britannico, abbiamo parlato con due dei musicisti che vi hanno partecipato. Uno spettacolo variopinto con 1.400 soldati, 200 cavalli e 400 musicisti.

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Born on 14 November 1948, King Charles III will celebrate his official birthday on 14 June with the King's Birthday [Parade](#). This tradition, also known as Trooping the Colour, [dates back to](#) the reign of King Charles II, monarch of Great Britain and Ireland from 1660 to 1685. The original idea was to help soldiers familiarise themselves with the regimental [flags](#) of their regiments. This was because [flags](#) were used as means for soldiers to see other members of their troop and [assemble](#) easily on the battlefield. In 1748, Trooping the Colour was performed to celebrate King George II's birthday. He chose to schedule the event in the month of June despite his birthday being in November. When George III, the grandson of King George II, became King in 1760, Trooping the Colour became an annual event.

## DOWN THE MALL

The parade starts at Buckingham Palace and proceeds down The Mall, a long road that runs alongside St. James's Park from Buckingham Palace. Those involved in the parade then turn right before Admiralty Arch onto Horse Guards [Parade](#), where the colour (the regimental flag) will be trooped (that is, paraded) before His Majesty the King. More than 1,200 soldiers from the Household Division will participate in the event. The Household Division comprises the elite regiments that guard the [ruling](#) monarch and royal palaces — they are also trained operational soldiers whose tasks include performing ceremonial duties. The King and other members of the royal family are escorted to Horse Guards [Parade](#) by the Household Cavalry. [Upon the King's arrival](#), a royal salute is performed. The King then reviews the various ranks of the guards and the cavalry. Five regiments of Foot

Guards take part in the ceremony. A different regiment leads the parade every year and troops its colour, or in other words, marches with their regimental flag. The Foot Guards are followed by the Household Cavalry and the King's Troop, called Royal Horse Artillery. [Roughly](#) four hundred military musicians are involved in the event.

## THE KING'S PARTY

After the parade, King Charles makes his way back to Buckingham Palace down The Mall. Once the King and his [party](#) have returned to the Palace, they watch the saluting parade as the soldiers march past the Palace [gates](#). The 41-Gun Salute is then fired from The Green Park in honour of the monarch's birthday. This is followed by an official appearance of the royal family on the balcony of Buckingham Palace before the event is rounded off with the Royal Flypast, which involves a group of Royal Air Force planes flying over Buckingham Palace.

## THE WELSH GUARDS BAND

To find out more, Speak Up spoke to two military musicians, Major Matthew Simons, the Director of Music and Officer Commanding for the Band of the Welsh Guards, and [Warrant Officer](#) Class 2 Robert Howe, the Band Sergeant Major of the Welsh Guards Band, about their involvement in Trooping the Colour. Howe has been participating in the parade since 2005, and Simons will be involved in his second Trooping the Colour this year. The Band of the Welsh Guards is one of the five Foot Guards' bands that belong to the bands of the Household Division. The other four bands of the Household Division are the Grenadier Guards, Coldstream Guards, Scots Guards and Irish Guards. The Band of the Welsh Guards is made up of around fifty musicians. Simons is responsible for the band's musical [output](#), performance, and musical selection. Howe, on the other hand, [oversees](#) programmes, personnel, and [drill and deportment](#), which refers to the practice of learning precise and often synchronised military movements in a group formation. We began by asking Simons and Howe about the cultural significance of Trooping the Colour: **Robert Howe:** Trooping the Colour is quintessentially

British. It's soldiers in [bearskins](#), marching around in red tunics, hundreds of horses.... There's hundreds and hundreds of years' worth of tradition. It is very difficult to get tickets for Trooping the Colour. It's a real British day, police everywhere, which is fantastic, all in their [smart](#) uniforms, and then you see all the horses and all the soldiers marching and about a million [flags](#). Everyone's got a flag. But it's just [soaking up](#) the atmosphere, I'd say. You can go and get an ice cream in the park and then just watch the guards go past **Matthew Simons:** What we do is often described as '[fabric](#)-of-the-nation-type' stuff. What we do is very unique. Military music doesn't really [have a strong foothold](#) in British society as such, although bands and musical ensembles and music education [thrives](#). But what we do is really unique and therefore really important in supporting the armed forces. One of our main focuses is to support what we call "state and ceremonial events", which include things like the King's Birthday [Parade](#), otherwise known as Trooping the Colour, along with other things like state visits, where other state heads and royalty will visit as guests of His Majesty the King, or indeed the government.

## MUSICIANS AND SOLDIERS

Howe and Simons talked more about how they came to be military musicians and [rose](#) to their current roles. **Robert Howe:** We all joined the Army as musicians. That is our role. You have to pass an audition, you have to be a basic standard, and then you do all the basic soldier training, and you go and do your phase-two training, which is basically where they teach you to march with instruments and do a little bit more music. **Matthew Simons:** As the Director of Music, my main [output](#), really, is [to conduct](#) the band. So I'm a conductor [first and foremost](#). So with a small stick at the front of the band, trying to keep everything together and in time. But originally, I was a trombone player. So, it is a [fast-track](#) process from being a performer to being a conductor. So we select people for that, and there's a specific course, it's the [Bandmaster](#) Course, which trains people in all of the music disciplines: oral perception, theory, history, analysis... all of those things which [underpin](#) being a conductor, really.

## PREPARATION

According to Simons and Howe, the preparation for the parade is often more effort than the day itself. **Matthew Simons:** The day itself actually comes and goes quite quickly, because there's no room to stop and go over things that might be going wrong or that we need [to brush up on](#). We'll have actually completed the parade itself in various other [orders of dress](#) in practice and [rehearsal](#) probably six or seven times prior to the actual day. So, the [ardour](#) is in the [lead-up](#) to it rather than on the day itself. It's quite [attritional](#), the two to three weeks before it. And on the weekends before, we have the Colonel's Review, which is the Colonel of the Regiment, which is, depending on which regiment of Foot Guards is trooping their colour that year, it depends which member of the Royal Family it is. And then, prior to that will be the Major General's Review, who's the senior military officer in charge of the troops on parade. And the idea is that those reviews, they give their seal of approval, so it moves to the next stage so that, on the final day, there's every assurance that it will be good enough.

## CHALLENGES

Howe and Simons point out what the most challenging aspect of being involved in Trooping the Colour is for military musicians. **Robert Howe:** I carry a drum, so it's quite heavy, it's the heaviest instrument in the band, next to the tuba. And just the fatigue of constantly doing it every day; you're on your feet a lot, and after Troop, everybody looks at their step counts, and there's, you know, "Oh, I've done 15,000 steps today, or whatever." **Matthew Simons:** The mechanics of the thing aren't difficult, and [we're well versed in](#) it, but there are so many [moving parts](#) that once you [set foot](#) from the [barracks](#) towards Horse Guards [Parade](#), and you're kind of in motion, you've really got to stay focused because the minute you [take your eye off the ball](#), something can go wrong. You've got to know where to be, at what point in time, which way you're turning, what your visual [cues](#) are, what your audible [cues](#) are... So you've got to stay sort of hyper-focused for those two to three hours whilst the parade is in motion.

## LOVE OF DETAIL

Traditionally, the members of the Royal Family would [ride on horseback](#) from Buckingham Palace to Horse Guards [Parade](#), with the late Queen Elizabeth II riding side saddle in her younger years. However, many royals now opt for carriages, as it presents fewer risks. Simons talked about how closely involved the monarchs are in the preparations for Trooping the Colour and commented on the late Queen Elizabeth's penchant for detail.

**Matthew Simons:** Queen Elizabeth was notorious for detail, and would quite happily tell people if she [spotted](#) something that wasn't quite right. So, what we find in [rehearsals](#) in the [lead-up](#) to these things, there are generally members of the Royal Household who are present, who kind of act [on behalf of](#) the King to make sure everything as it should be.

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# Glossary

- **smart** = eleganti
- **orders of dress** = uniformi
- **barracks** = caserma
- **cues** = segnali
- **assemble** = riunirsi
- **oversees** = supervisionare
- **soaking up** = assorbire
- **take your eye off the ball** = perdere la concentrazione
- **to brush up on** = ripassare
- **moving parts** = variabili
- **gates** = cancelli
- **drill and deportment** = allenamento e comportamento
- **to conduct** = dirigere
- **underpin** = costituire la base
- **spotted** = notare
- **Upon the King's arrival** = all'arrivo di
- **have a strong foothold** = affermarsi
- **rose** = salire, fare carriera
- **lead-up** = preparazione
- **set foot** = mettere il piede
- **flags** = bandiere
- **party** = gruppo
- **first and foremost** = prima di tutto
- **attritional** = stancante
- **output** = produzione
- **bearskins** = berretto militare di pelle d'orso
- **rehearsal** = prova
- **ride on horseback** = cavalcare all'amazzone
- **Parade** = sfilata
- **Warrant Officer** = ufficiale garante
- **fast-track** = percorso rapido
- **we're well versed in** = essere esperto in
- **fabric** = tessuto

- **thrives.** = prosperare
- **Bandmaster** = direttore di banda
- **ardour** = intensità
- **dates back to** = risalire a
- **Guards Parade** = piazza d'armi
- **ruling** = regnante
- **Roughly** = approssimativamente
- **on behalf of** = a nome di