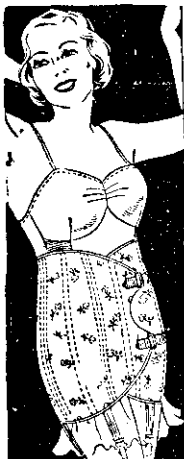


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BRITAIN'S BANDS (5)

H.M. LIFE GUARDS

FOR some reason or other, H.M. Life Guards have four nicknames, all different, all amusing. They are variously called "Cheeses," "Piccadilly Butchers," "The Tin Bellies," and "Patent Safeties."

Their story really begins with the restoration of King Charles II. to the throne of his father. Charles I. was executed in 1649, and Prince Charles, his son, had spent many—perhaps not too weary—years in exile. In 1660 he was invited home again, and made his entry into London on his birthday, May 29.

He was received with open arms, and when he rode through the decorated streets he was accompanied by the King's Troop of Life Guards—a body of Cavalier gentlemen, under the command of Lord Gerard—who had attached themselves to the King while he was in exile. At the head of the Troop rode four trumpeters and a kettle-drummer. These five musicians formed the original band of H.M. Life Guards.

Parliament, however, decided that the Army was to be disbanded, so it was not until January, 1661, after the Venner Riots, when the King re-formed "His Majesty's Own Troop of Guards," together with those of the Duke of York and the Duke of Albemarle, that the establishment of the Corps was really fixed.

Trumpeters and "Gentlemen"

Each troop included four trumpeters at £91 per annum each, one kettle-drummer at £91—to provide "The King and his Musick"—and 200 private gentlemen at £73 each. Later the pay of the trumpeters was fixed at 5/- per day and that of the "private gentlemen" at 2/6 per day. These latter were, even up to recent times, mustered under the term "Mr."

They were, however, seldom paid regularly, their money being often months in arrears. No doubt they were good musicians at the price, but from a glance at their names in the official records they do not appear to have been cradled in Albion.

On all occasions of state the trumpets and kettledrums of the Life Guards were in attendance, and when their services were in demand for dismantled purposes, London saw the extraordinary spectacle of the kettledrums carried on the back of a man, and the drummer walking behind him. These musicians of the Guards played on handsome silver trumpets, and were clothed in the royal livery of velvet coats, trimmed with silk and silver lace, embroidered with the royal cipher on the breast and back. The drums and trumpets were also gaily decked with elaborate banners.

Charles II., who was much influenced by French tastes, was so pleased by the French regimental bands of hautboys and drums that he introduced similar combinations into his Guards. The hautboys were employed only for dismantled purposes, while the kettledrums and trumpets continued to serve for mounted duties.

Men of Spirit

It is interesting to learn that in an age when Officers and Private Gentlemen settled their personal differences with the sword, the trumpeters were also men of spirit. On September 19, 1719, the "Weekly Post" reported that: "On Sunday night last, Mr. Darwin, the famous trumpeter of the 1st Troop of Guards, fought a duel at the Red Cow, behind St. Clements, in which he received three wounds, two in the breast seven inches each, and one in the belly ten inches, yet they are not supposed to be mortal." Trumpeter Darwin was obviously a tough customer.

Foreign Bandmasters

The early bandmasters were all foreigners as was the custom. The first who has any claim to attention is a Mr. Bies, who was originally a member of the Duke of Kent's Band. On the death of H.R.H. in 1820, Bies came to the 1st Life Guards, bringing with him a composition of the Duchess of Kent (Queen Victoria's mother), which was afterwards adopted as the Slow March of the regiment.

Being in constant attendance, and near the person of the sovereign upon all the great occasions of State, the Life Guards have been the recipient of many royal favours, notably, on the memorable occasion of July, 1831, when King William IV. presented a pair of silver kettledrums to the regiment at Windsor. After the ceremony the officers dined with His Majesty, the band being stationed in one of the galleries.

In 1788 the Life Guards were thoroughly re-organised. The 1st Troop became the 1st regiment of Life Guards, and the 2nd Troop became the 2nd regiment, and they lasted as such until 1922, when they were amalgamated and became "The Life Guards" (1st and 2nd). The band is now thirty-eight strong. The Life Guards, together with the Royal Horse Guards (The Blues), are first in order of precedence of all army regiments.

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