

**SOME ACCOUNT OF THE ROYAL
BODY-GUARD ENTITLED THE
ANCIENT CORPS OF THE
YEOMEN
OF THE GUARD INSTITUTED 1485**

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Some Account of the Royal Body-Guard Entitled the Ancient Corps of the Yeomen of the Guard Instituted 1485 by Thomas Smith

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OF
THE ROYAL BODY-GUARD
ENTITLED
The Ancient Corps
OF
THE YEOMEN
OF THE GUARD,
INSTITUTED
1485.
WITH A BRIEF NOTICE
OF THE
WARDERS OF THE TOWER.

BY THOMAS SMITH,
AUTHOR OF "A HAND-BOOK TO HARROW-ON-THE-HILL,"
"HAND-BOOK FOR THE USE OF VISITORS TO
CHELSEA HOSPITAL," &c.

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PREFACE.

THE Constitution of the Ancient Corps of the Yeomen of the Guard, was materially altered by an order of William IV. issued in 1835, directing that all future vacancies should be filled up by deserving non-commissioned officers who had retired from the army, and *without purchase*; instead of the class of persons of whom it had been hitherto composed, and who had purchased their places.

This regulation naturally created considerable interest throughout the service, as opening a new source of emulation and reward to a number of meritorious men, who now look forward to an appointment in this Ancient Corps as an honourable retirement, after many years of arduous activity in the regular army.

The object of publishing the present compilation, is to make its history more generally known to those whom it may concern; the various changes that have taken place from time to time, whether on the score of economy or otherwise, cannot fail to be interesting to Members of the Corps; while the narrative of historical facts connected with it, may afford amusement to the general reader.

The early History has been abridged from Pegge's *Curialia*, and from other sources, and the modern information has been obtained, by *permission*, from the Records of the Corps.

THOMAS SMITH.

NOTE.

In conformity with the Interpretation Clause in modern Acts of Parliament, the words "Band" and "Corps" used indiscriminately in various documents throughout this Work, shall be taken to mean the Company of "Her Majesty's Yeomen of the Guard."

The words "King" or "Royal Person," shall include females whether the sceptre be swayed by the highest Lady or Gentleman in the land, as the case may be.

The Dates in the List of Captains, refer to the times when they are found in office, and not to the precise date of their respective appointments.

EARLY HISTORY.

THE Corps of the Yeomen of the Guard is the oldest in England. It was instituted by King Henry VII. and consisted of 50 Archers under the command of a Captain, whose duties were to be in constant attendance upon the King for the security of his person: they were entitled Yeomen of the Guard, and did duty for the first time at the ceremony of the Coronation on the 30th of October 1485.

The King seems to have taken his model from the French, and in order to allay some dissatisfaction that had been expressed at the introduction of such a novelty into England, he ordered that the establishment should be made perpetual, "to hold succession for ever," thus combining the duty of protecting the King's person, with that of Royal parade in all State Ceremonies. Some writers assert that the King was only permitted to establish this corps upon condition that it should not increase to an army. It was to be "a State and ornament to the Crown, not a Terror to the Subject."

The term Yeomen, with reference to the rank of Members of this Corps, was defined to be "the Prime of those persons who are next below the order of Gentry," and being in the King's service, they took precedence of all the rest of the Yeomanry of the Kingdom.

They were directed to be men of strength, hardiness and activity, of good stature and robust habit. For

these qualities twelve of them were selected to carry the body of their Founder, who died in 1509, to his tomb in the Chapel at the East end of the Abbey of Westminster.

The duty of carrying the bodies of the Royal Family to the tomb by the Yeomen of the Guard, continued up to the time of the Funeral of the Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV. which took place November 18, 1817, when one of them received an injury from having slipped while supporting the coffin; since that time the coffins have been moved upon a platform raised upon wheels.

The French King Louis XI, had many years before 1485, instituted a Body Guard called the Grand Guard of the Beccs de Corbin, which was composed of one hundred gentlemen of rank and consequence, each having two archers in his suite. In 1475, that monarch altered the constitution of this body, by detaching the two hundred archers who were men of lower rank, and erecting them into a distinct Corps with the title of The Lesser Body Guard; and from the latter Henry VII. modelled his Company of Yeomen.

At the accession of Henry VIII. that sumptuous monarch, taking the French model again, instituted a superior guard composed entirely of cadets of noble families, which were called his Pensioners, and was the origin of the Band of Gentlemen Pensioners, now called the Gentlemen at Arms. He, however, not only retained the Yeomen of the Guard but considerably increased their number.

Soon after he came to the Crown we find the number of Yeomen had risen to two hundred, of whom one hundred were to have horses; and when they were subsequently employed in active military service, their number cannot be accurately ascertained. We read of their first appearance in the field in 1513 at the siege of Terouenne, where the King was attended by "Six hundred Archers of his Garde all in white Gaberdines and Coppes." They are supposed to have been at the Battle of the Spurs; and in the same year, when Tournay fell into the King's hands, four hundred

Archers of the Guard were left as part of the garrison in charge. It is related, to the immortal honour of this Corps, that all the soldiers in the Garrison, excepting themselves, mutinied, much to the annoyance of the Lord Mountjoy who commanded, and whose life would have been sacrificed but for their loyalty.

In the following year this body, styling themselves "Yeomen of the King's most Honourable Body Guard, and Constables of Tournay," sent a strong remonstrance in a Letter signed by fourteen of the Corps (supposed to be officers) on behalf of the whole, against the proposed intention of paying them half-yearly instead of quarterly.

The result of the remonstrance is unknown, but that it gave no offence is certain; for when Tournay was given up to Francis I. in 1518, according to Hall the Chronicler, "the King sent for all the Yeomen of the Garde that were come from Tournay, and after many good wordes given to them, he granted them fourpence the Day without attendance, except they were specially commanded." This was a considerable sum in those days to be paid to men whose offices thus became almost sinecures, and is equal to about five shillings per day at present.

There are two instances on record at this early period, of the attendance of the Yeomen of the Guard on occasions of State when the King was not present. One hundred of the Yeomen of the King's Guard went to Ireland with the Earl of Surrey in 1519, when he succeeded the Earl of Kildare as Deputy of Ireland; these were probably a part of those who had then lately returned from Tournay.

A body of Yeomen of the King's Guard also attended Cardinal Wolsey to France in 1521, when he was sent to mediate between Francis I. and the Emperor Charles V. notwithstanding the Cardinal had a guard of Yeomen in his own pay.

During this Reign the Yeomen of the Guard were frequently employed to arrest persons of high rank when accused of high treason; persons of inferior rank