

# Welsh Guards





**The Regimental crest is the Welsh leek, surmounted by a crown. The Regiment's cap badge is a leek.**

## The Leek

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Although the Welsh Guards are a comparatively new regiment, their badge has an old and honourable tradition.

Leeks were known to the ancient world. They were known to the Romans, and mention is made of them in some of the earliest Welsh literature. It is said that Cadwallawn's men had plucked leeks from a nearby field, as their distinguishing mark, before defeating the Saxons in a great battle in AD 633. Shakespeare mentions it in *Henry V*; on the night before Agincourt 1415, Fluellen, a Welsh officer in King Henry's Army says to the King: 'Welshmen did good service in a garden where leeks did grow... and I do believe your Majesty takes no scorn to wear the leek upon Saint Tavy's Day.' To which the king replies, "I wear it for memorable honour; for I am Welsh, you know, good countryman."

**In brief, the military tradition states that Welshmen first wore leeks during a battle hundreds of years ago as a mark of their identity.**

**Welshmen have done much 'good service' to the crown since the days of Edward 1, but it wasn't until 27th September 1915, at the Battle of Loos that the leek was once again proudly borne as the badge of the Welsh soldier.**





## The formation of the Regiment

**The Welsh Guards were formed on 26 February 1915** by order of His Majesty King George V, who was Colonel-in-Chief, with Lord Harlech as Colonel. Welshmen transferred swiftly from other Regiments; so swiftly that 1st Battalion Welsh Guards were able to mount guard at Buckingham Palace three days later!

*First ever guard mount, Buckingham Palace  
Saint David's day, 1 March 1915.*





*Welsh Guardsmen in a reserve trench,  
Guilleumont, Western Front, September 1916*

## The Great War 1914-18

After intensive training the Battalion sailed for the continent on 18 August 1915 as part of the Guards Division, and **fought its first action at Loos on 27 September 1915.**

This action involved capturing the bare hill known as Hill 70, situated behind the mining town of Loos. Having taken the hill at great cost, the Battalion remained in the area for one month before being relieved. **Only months old they had sustained almost two hundred casualties.**

The Battalion remained in Belgium and France taking part in the bloodiest conflicts of that war including Loos, and Ginchy in 1915, Flers Courcellette, Morva, Pilekem and Poelcappelle in 1916, the muddy Cambrai in 1917 and, in the final year, at Bapaume, Canal du Nord and Sambre.

**The names of all these places are Battle Honours of the Regiment and are emblazoned on The Regimental Colour and The Queen's Colour (pictured opposite).**

The Battalion returned to England on 8 March 1919, with only 13 members of the original Battalion formed four and a half years earlier.



The Regimental Colour



The Queen's Colour

## The Victoria Cross

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The Victoria Cross is the highest and most prestigious award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces.



*King George V, investing Sergeant Robert Bye with the Victoria Cross, 27 September 1917.*



Sergeant Robert Bye bravely eliminated a German machine gun blockhouse during the action at Langemarck, 31 July 1917, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

*Third Battle of Ypres, 31 July 1917. Painted by David Rowlands for the Sergeant's Mess.*



## THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Between the wars the 1st Battalion saw service in Egypt, from 1929 to 1930 and were stationed in Gibraltar in 1939; when war was declared on 3rd September they were despatched directly to France. In May 1940, the Allied Forces faced the might of the German war machine and the 1st Battalion fought a brilliant stubborn rearguard action at Arras, a town they were to liberate in 1944. The action was costly but the Battalion fought its way to the coast and evacuated with the remainder of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk.

## The Second Front

As part of the Guards Armoured Division both 1st and 2nd Battalions (the 2nd now armoured) landed at Arromanches on 18 June 1944. During the next three months, the 1st Battalion paid dearly and sustained so many casualties that they were reinforced by X Company, Scots Guards. Following the final battles of Normandy and the recapture of Arras the two Battalions took part in the fastest advance in the history of armoured warfare. On 3 September 1944, the Guards Armoured Division, with 2 WG at its head, covered almost 100 miles from Douai to Brussels, at speeds of up to sixty miles per hour. On 8 September, the 1st Battalion fought a particularly fierce but successful battle, against counter-attacking Germans, at the small Belgian town of Hechtel. While the 2nd Battalion fought right up to the final day of the war and into Germany, a much depleted 1st Battalion were relieved on 23 March 1945 and returned to England. The 1st and 2nd Battalion Battle Honours, borne on the Colours, are: "Defence of Arras", "Boulogne 1940", "Mont Pincon", "Brussels" and Hechtel".

*Photograph: Four Company, attack on Cagny, Jul 1944. Coy Commander, Major JDA Syrett is indicating a mortar target to Sergeant Vessey.*



**The Victoria Cross was awarded posthumously to Lieutenant the Honourable Christopher Furness for his gallantry during the battle for Arras in May 1940.**

Furness was 28 years old, and a Lieutenant in 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, during the Second World War, when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC. During the period 17–24 May 1940 near Arras, France, Lieutenant Furness commanded the Carrier Platoon when his battalion formed part of the garrison of the town.

On 23 May the platoon was ordered to cover the withdrawal of the transport (over 40 vehicles) to Douai. Early on 24 May the enemy were advancing along the road where the transport columns were moving and Lieutenant Furness decided to attack. He reached the enemy position under heavy fire and when the light tanks and all the carriers and their crews had become casualties he engaged the enemy in hand-to-hand combat until he was killed.

His fight against hopeless odds made the enemy withdraw temporarily and enabled the vehicles and survivors to get clear.



## The post war years

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In October 1945, the 1st Battalion sailed for Palestine where they remained until 1948; it was a difficult and tense situation and not the holiday everyone had hoped for. From 1948-50 the Battalion was based in London and in spring 1950 they moved to Wuppertal in Germany to be part of 4th Guards Brigade. This was followed by two years in Berlin and in October 1953 the Battalion was stationed in Egypt for two and a half years. After returning from Egypt the Battalion was based at Pirbright for three years and in November 1960 moved to Hubbelrath in Germany to be in 4th Guards Brigade once again. In 1964 the Battalion moved to Chelsea Barracks and celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Regiment. Aden followed in 1965 for one year and then Windsor and Pirbright before deploying to Munster in 1970. The first tour of Northern Ireland followed in 1971 before moving back to Chelsea in 1973. More tours in Ireland and Cyprus took place in the late 70s whilst the Battalion was based at Caterham and Pirbright.

## The Falkland Islands

On 3 April 1982, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards were warned of possible participation in the South Atlantic; they were the

first Household Division troops to be stood to. Between 7-9 May, all freight, rations, vehicles and drivers were loaded onto two ferries, MV Nordic and MV Baltic. The remainder of the Battalion embarked on H.M.S. Queen Elizabeth II (The QE2) on 12 May. On 27 May, the QE2 dropped anchor in Grytviken Bay South Georgia and the Battalion cross decked from The QE2 to the Canberra, and sailed to The Falklands. The Canberra arrived in San Carlos Bay on 2 June and on 7 June, the Battalion embarked on the two Landing Ships Logistic (LSLs) Sir Tristram and Sir Galahad. The latter sailed for Bluff Cove and The Prince of Wales's Company, Number 3 Company and Support Company sustained heavy casualties after the Sir Galahad was attacked by Argentine jets. Notwithstanding this setback, 1st Battalion Welsh Guards regrouped for the final push on Port Stanley where they captured Sapper Hill overlooking the town.



## Since 1982

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### Locations and Theatres

- Hohne (Germany)
- Ballykelly (Northern Ireland)
- Ternhill
- Pirbright
- London
- Aldershot
- Belize
- St Athan (Cardiff)
- Hounslow (London)
- Windsor

### Operational Tours

- Northern Ireland
- Bosnia
- Iraq (TELIC 5)
- Afghanistan (H10, H16)
- Afghanistan (TORAL 6)

## HERRICK 10

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The Battalion's tour to Afghanistan (Helmand Province) in 2009 on Op HERRICK 10 proved to be, unsurprisingly, another challenging tour as part of 19 Light Brigade. During the deployment, the Welsh Guards Battle Group was destined to experience some of the most intense fighting to date in the theatre and to lose five Welsh Guardsmen as a result, including the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel RSM Thorneloe MBE (pictured below), the first British Battalion Commander to be killed in action since the Falklands War in 1982. The story of that tour has been told in great detail in Toby Hamden's book "Dead Men Risen".



## HERRICK 16

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Op HERRICK 16 proved to be a very successful tour for the Battalion in Afghanistan but not without cost, with three Welsh Guardsmen Killed in Action and again many casualties sustained.



## TORAL 6

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During 2018 the Battalion was deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan. The Battalion's task was to generate the Kabul Protection Unit (KPU) to support the development of Afghan security institutions.

## COLOURS AND BATTLE HONOURS

His Majesty King George V approved designs for the Colours of the 1st Battalion on 2nd March 1915. His Majesty King George V approved the design for the 2nd Battalion Colours in 1940. They were returned for safe-keeping to Windsor Castle in 1947, when the Battalion went into suspended animation. No colours were presented to the 3rd Battalion during its short existence (1941-6).

**There are two colours:**

**The Royal or First (usually called The Queen's Colour)** has the following heraldic description: 'Gules (Crimson). In the centre a dragon passant, or, underneath a scroll with the motto "Cymru Am Byth". The whole colour is ensigned with the Imperial Crown'.

**The second (usually called The Regimental Colour):** 'The Union. In the centre a Company Badge ensigned with the Imperial Crown. The fifteen Company Badges are borne in rotation. The number below the Badge is the number of the Company to which the Badge belongs. The number in the dexter canton is the number of the Battalion.

The dimensions of the Queen's and Regimental Colours, are 3 feet 9 inches flying and 3 feet deep on the pike excluding the fringe, which is about 2 inches wide. The pikes are 8 feet 7.5 inches long including the Royal Crest on top. The pikes are surmounted by the Imperial Crown surmounted by a lion crowned.

The occasions on which the Colours are to be carried and lowered are detailed in Queen's Regulations, Her Majesty's Regulations for the Household Division and Standing Orders of the Household Division.

When the Colours are not on parade they are to be hung in the Officers' Mess with the Queen's Colour on the left (as observed from the front) with its pike under that of the Regimental Colour. When a Battalion parades to change quarters, the Colours are always carried cased and colour belts worn. The Colours are normally replaced every fifteen to twenty years.



*The Queen's Colour, 1st Battalion  
Welsh Guards*



*The Regimental Colour, 1st Battalion  
Welsh Guards*

## NUMBERS AS NAMES: WELSHMEN WITH THE SAME NAMES

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In Welsh regiments, it has long been the practice for soldiers with a 'common' surname, such as Davies, Evans, Jones, Hughes, Roberts, Thomas or Williams, to be referred to by the last two or three digits of their regimental numbers. This immediately identifies the individual. This system has evolved over many hundreds of years and is peculiar to Welsh regiments. No English, Scottish or Irish regiment has anything similar.

It is a practice that works extremely well at Platoon and Company level and is used as a very good bonding and team tool. It has long been the envy of other Regiments, when referring to the close relationship of Officers and Other Ranks in Guards Regiments, well known and envied for their discipline whether in the field or on parade. Certainly, this system has been practised well in the Welsh Guards since its formation. It is common practice, not casualness, for Officers to refer to Junior Ranks by their 'last two'; indeed, a Guardsman suddenly referred to as Williams/ Davies/ Jones would wonder what he had done wrong. And Jones 64 is always 'Jones sixty-four', not 'Jones six four'.

One story says it all. In Caterham, three new recruits joining Support Company from basic training were marched before the Company Sergeant Major. He pointed to the first and said, "What's your name?" to which the Guardsman replied, "Jones, Sir." Leaning sharply across his desk the Company Sergeant Major said, "Don't they teach you lot anything at the Depot these days? What's your last two?" "Twenty-four, Sir", came the reply. He quickly moved on to the second and said "And who are you?" "Davies, Sir." Turning to the Sergeant he said, "Jesus Christ, another one! What's your last two?" "Twenty-two, Sir" to which the Company Sergeant Major said, "Well, that's two North Walians." Looking at the third, he said, "And who are you?" "Radmilovic Eighty-eight, Sir!" There has only ever been one Radmilovic in the Regiment since 1915 but he was known as 'Eighty-eight' throughout his Army service.



**Mae hen wlad fy nhadau yn annwyl i mi,  
Gwlad beirdd a chantorion, enwogion o fri  
Ei gwrol ryfelwyr, gwlad garwyr tra mad,  
Tros rhyddid collasant ei gwaed.  
Gwlad! Gwlad! pleidiol wyf i'm gwlad!  
Tra mor yn fur, i'r bur hoff bau,  
O bydded i'r hen iaith barhau.**

(Welsh National Anthem)

