

TROOPING THE COLOUR

For the first time in nearly 350 years a Queen rides out to take part in an official ceremony. Escorted by her uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, Queen Elizabeth II goes to receive the tribute of her Brigade of Guards. Ahead goes the Queen Mother and the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret, for this official celebration of the Queen's birthday.

Now the Queen arrives on the Horse Guards Parade. Her Majesty's birthday is in April, but by royal custom the official birthday is placed in June to continue the tradition established by the Queen's grandfather, King George V.

After the royal salute - during which guns fire one round for each year of the sovereign's life - Her Majesty inspects the parade, which this year consists of five guards instead of the usual eight. The Queen wears a diamond badge of the Scots Guards in her tricorne hat. It's the second battalion whose colour is to be trooped. Inspection over, the Queen guides her charger Winston to the saluting base for the troop. As the sovereign, the Queen is Colonel in Chief of all the guards and today wears the Scots Guards uniform. First the massed bands march and countermarch.

Now it is time for the troop. The Regimental Sergeant Major hands the King's Colour of the second battalion, the Scots Guards to an ensign who is to carry it during the troop.

Perhaps the most elaborate ceremonial of the British army, trooping the Colour is a symbolic ceremony to impress on all members of a regiment the honour of the regiment and its duty to the sovereign and so to its country.

The troop over, Her Majesty receives the final tribute of her Guards as they march past in column of companies.

Following the five regiments of foot guards comes the Household Cavalry, a splendid sight in the magnificence of their array.

The ceremony over, the Queen leads her Guards off the parade ground. More than three hundred years ago the first Queen Elizabeth rode out on her white charger amongst her men at Tilbury to spur them on to attack and repel the greatest threat her country had known to that date. Today, under our second Elizabeth the country faces difficulties just as great, if less spectacular, and to our young Queen we bring the same resolution which saved us from the earlier threat.

Past the Victoria Memorial the Queen leads her procession as the Queen Mother, the Princess Royal, the Duchess of Gloucester and the Queen's sister watch.

Now the Queen takes the last salute that ends a day of glory and colour. In the days of the late King's illness Her Majesty acted for him. Today it has been a ceremony in her own honour, a tribute from her own bodyguard.

The ceremony is over. The Queen salutes her family and rides in to join them on the palace balcony. And then in a wild surge of enthusiasm the crowd presses forward. Now with the royal party is the Duke of Edinburgh. Never has a ruler begun a reign with so much good will. Under Queen Elizabeth II Britain looks forward to an early recovery from her present ills.