

THE MILITARY KNIGHTS OF WINDSOR

The Military Knights of Windsor proudly claim to be the oldest military establishment in the Army List. Formed in 1348 by King Edward III shortly after the Battle of Crecy, the foundation consisted of Knights who, having taken their private armies to France to fight for the King, had been taken prisoner by the French who demanded heavy ransoms in return for their release. In most cases, these unfortunate warriors were reduced to absolute poverty and were forced to beg for alms.

Known as the Alms Knights and nicknamed "Poor Knights" they formed part of the College of St George that was created to support the establishment of the Most Noble Order of the Garter. 26 "Poor Knights", mirroring the 26 Garter Knights were given accommodation in the Lower Ward of Windsor Castle in exchange for daily prayer in St George's Chapel for, and on behalf of, the Garter Knights.

In 1559, Queen Elizabeth I, acting on the Will of her father King Henry VIII, signed a statute reducing the original establishment of 26 Alms Knights to 13. New accommodation was built for them in the Lower Ward, and from then on, they were allowed to be married accompanied. The post of Governor was created and is now held by a retired officer of General rank. King William IV, in 1833, changed the designation of the Alms Knights to the more respectable title of "The Military Knights of Windsor" (MKW) and at the same time granted permission to wear the uniform of Army Officers on the Unattached List. This is still worn today and comprises a scarlet tailcoat, sword, sash, and cocked hat with plume. King Edward VII added a white cross-belt with a belt plate bearing the badge of St George inside the Star of the Order of the Garter.

The Knights are retired Army Officers with long and loyal service to the Crown. They can expect to end their lives in the Castle. Preference is given to applicants who are married. Application to become a MKW must take place before the age of 67, and the individual must be prepared to take an oath of allegiance to the College of St George and be willing to observe the Anglican faith, as followed in St George's Chapel. They must also be prepared to undertake the various duties expected of them over the year, most of which entail being on parade in Chapel every Sunday that the choir is present. The main event of the year is the Garter Ceremony when the MKW head the procession from Upper Ward to St George's Chapel, the spiritual home of the Order of the Garter. Additionally, there are four Obit (Memorial) services in the year, plus any Royal and MKW funerals and the laying up of a Garter Knight's Banner. Being on parade for State Visits to the Castle is a further duty expected of the Military Knights. In total, a Knight can expect to be on parade, in uniform, around 52 times a year.

The Knights' homes in the Lower Ward, immediately opposite the Chapel within the curtain wall of the Castle, are theirs for as long as they can carry out their duties. All have been brought up to a high standard with central heating and modern facilities, the responsibility for furnishing resting with the occupants. The MKW can escape on holiday when the choristers do - essentially during half terms and school holidays. This includes a seven-week break in the summer. The MKW can range in rank from Major - Brigadier. Current Military Knights, who come from a variety of Corps and Regiments, range in rank from Major to Colonel, though seniority within the MKW is determined by the date of installation; the most senior Knight being the longest serving.

Windsor is a fantastic town with excellent shops right on the doorstep. Security is excellent, with armed Metropolitan Police on the gate and usually a platoon of Guards on hand. The Castle also has its own medical centre, complete with doctor and nurse. Finally, it is very easy and rewarding to get involved with the Castle and Chapel communities.

A waiting list is maintained by MOD - MS Honours Branch, to whom any initial application should be made. Personnel still serving should forward their application through their chain of command to MOD - MS Honours Branch.

A board is held to establish suitability for addition to the MOD waiting list. When a vacancy occurs a second board, consisting of a day at Windsor Castle for the candidate and their spouse, establishes who is offered the post. Officers must be married and under 67 years of age on installation.

Further information may be obtained from:

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Application forms may be obtained from:

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