The Regiment of the Coldstream Guards was formed in 1650 by George Monck, a General in Oliver Cromwell’s “New Model Army” and can therefore claim to be one of the oldest regiments in the world. In 1661, shortly after the restoration of the monarchy, they were re-commissioned by King Charles II as household Troops and from the town of Coldstream, which lies just inside Scotland near Berwick-Upon-Tweed where it was first formed.

From the earliest days the Regiment had drummers and a “Band of Music” from 1742. This was in fact eight civilian musicians who were hired by the month by Officers of the Regiment to provide music for the Changing of the Guard at St James’ Palace. When, in 1785, the musicians were asked to perform at an aquatic excursion to Greenwich, they declined on the grounds that the performance was “incompatible with their several respectable and private engagements”. This was too much for the officers who asked the Duke of York, Colonel of the Regiment, for a regular attested band. He agreed and from Hanover in Germany sent twelve musicians under the direction of Music Major C G Eley. The instrumentation consisted of two oboes, four clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, one trumpet and a Serpent. The date of the band’s formation was May 16th 1785.

In 1815, the year of the Regiment’s distinction at Waterloo, the total strength of the band was increased to twenty-two by the addition of flutes, key bugles and trombones. In the same year the band went abroad for the first time when it was ordered to Paris for duty with the Allied Army of Occupation. As was usual in the British Army at the time, the Regiment’s early bandmasters were of German extraction. Christopher Eley (1785 – 1800) John Weyranch (1800-14), James Denman (1814-18), and Thomas Willman (1818-25). In 1835 the first truly British Bandmaster Charles Godfrey took over. This event anticipated the general replacement of foreign Bandmasters in the Army by British musicians by about thirty-five years, and it was under his Baton that the foundation
of the musical and military expertise of today was started. In 1863 his son Frederick Godfrey took charge of the band, followed in 1880 by Cadwallader Thomas who retired in 1896. By the end of the nineteenth century the band had grown to thirty-five in number. Its importance had grown too; both within the Army and the British way of life. Queen Victoria decreed that all members of Household Division Bands would be known by the title of Musician as opposed to Bandsmen for the rest of the army.

In 1869 John McKenzie Rogan took over as Director of Music and it was he who ushered the band into the twentieth century. By 1900 the size of the band had grown to fifty-one musicians and during the years before World War I the band reached new heights of excellence in concert and on record. In fact, the band was one of the first British Army bands to make an recording. The Coldstream Guards Band become the first band to visit North America when it travelled to Canada in 1903, one of the two western tours around that time. In 1907 at the invitation of the French Government, the band was the first within the Brigade of Guards to visit trance. In 1920 when Robert Evans took over as Director of Music, the band had a strength of sixty-six. One of the duties he undertook, was to take the band to Coldstream, Scotland with the Regiment for the first time since 1660 to lay up colours. Throughout the 1920's the band continued to take part in state, ceremonial and a hectic round of public engagements all overt the country, and as recording techniques improved, more fine records were produced. In 1926 the band again toured Canada, and on one occasion while in Calgary, they were transported in a fleet of Studerbaker limousines.

In 1930 James Causley Windram became the Director of Music and under him the band did many broadcasts on BBC radio. A more unusual engagement was to don uniforms of the Napoleonic period for the pre-war film “The Scarlet Pimpernel”. In 1936 the band was present at St James Palace for the proclamation of King Edward III and the following abdication, for that of King George VI. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 the familiar scarlet tunics were replaced by khaki and during the war the band did important work encouraging the morale of the troops and civilians throughout the country. It was on Sunday, June 18th 1944 that the greatest tragedy in the history of the band occurred. The band was playing in the Guards Chapel, Wellington Barracks when a German VI Flying Bomb struck it. Over 120 people were killed including the Director of Music, Major Windram, and five musicians. Despite this disaster the
band continued to function until the new director of music, Captain Douglas Arthur Pope was appointed. One of his first duties was to follow the Allied Forces to Europe after D Day.

After the war the band continued as it had done before with the usual round of state, court and ceremonial duties, plus the many varied private engagements both at home and abroad. It was in 1960 that the band went to North America for a three month coast to coast tour, this was the first of what became a regular ten yearly event. The band went again in 1970, 1981 and 1991. In 1963, now Lieutenant Colonel Pope, who had also become Senior Director of Music of the Guards Division, retired from the Army and Captain Trevor le Mare Sharpe took over as Director of Music, he went on to become Senior Director of Music in the British Army at the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall. In 1974 Captain Richard Annison Ridings took over as Director of Music and he went on to become Senior Director of Music, Guards Division. Major Roger Graham Swift served in the post between 1985 – 1990, when Major David Marshall took over until retiring late in 1999. Major Marshall was succeeded by Major Ian McElligott and now Major Graham Jones leads the way. Today the band numbers 45 musicians, who also “double” on other instruments, such as strings and keyboards.

The Band of the Coldstream Guards has now been in existence for over 200 years of continuous military service, which make it one of the oldest Military Bands in the world.