

## Queen Alexandra State Coach

This coach is named after Queen Alexandra, King Edward the Seventh's wife, who used it for much of her life.

It's a closed carriage with a lower body of polished red-brown, the upper body and roof in black, and red and gold wheels. There are three windows either side as well as an arched window at the front. If the central door is open it reveals an interior of dark blue brocade. At the bottom of the doorway is a blue leather step which can be folded down to allow occupants to step up into the carriage.

Two cylindrical lamps at the front of the carriage are decorated with delicate golden swags and topped with a crown. The central windows above the side doors are gently arched, their shape outlined in gold. Above this, the roof forms a shallow dome. It's simply decorated, with a large red and gold painted crown in the centre and four little ones on gold cushions at the corners.

These crowns hint at the unique role this coach now performs, which is to carry the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London, via Buckingham Palace, to Westminster for the 'State Opening' of Parliament. More precisely the carriage contains what's called the 'regalia' - the items which symbolise the monarch's authority, including the Sword of State and the Imperial State Crown. As it is processed through the streets, the crown is displayed inside the coach on a raised crimson cushion, and spot-lit from above.

At the front of the coach, to the left, completely obscuring any view through the front window, is what's known as the 'box'. As high as the carriage roof, it's covered with a "hammer cloth" of scarlet fabric ornamented with heavy gold brocade and gold tassels. This is where the coachman sits, his "livery" or uniform, also of scarlet and gold. The livery changes depending on the occasion, the State Livery being the most magnificent, with a heavy scarlet and gold frock coat, scarlet

plush knee-breeches, pink silk stockings, gold buckled shoes and a tricorne hat decorated with ostrich feathers.

A platform to the rear of the coach is where two Royal Watermen stand during the procession. Also known as 'Bargemen' they are there to symbolise the earlier tradition of rowing the regalia along the River Thames to Parliament.