

Factsheet

Gun Salutes at the Tower of London

- Gun Salutes at the Tower of London have marked important State and Royal events since Tudor times and are fired ‘...in accordance with the Regulations of that fortress’. One of the earliest Gun Salutes recorded happened at the Tower and marked the arrival of Anne Boleyn at the palace on the night before her coronation as Queen to Henry VIII.
- Gun Salutes are traditionally fired as a sign of respect or welcome. A salute with an open hand shows that no weapons are concealed in the palm, the firing of a cannon as a salute indicates the friendly intent of an empty chamber.
- Until the middle of the nineteenth century the salutes took the form of small measures of black powder fired from outmoded and unserviceable cannon resting on wooden blocks on the wharf.
- The Honourable Artillery Company is the oldest armed body in Britain. They are responsible for firing the Gun Salutes from Tower Wharf, using the 105 mm light gun.
- The Honourable Artillery Company is made up of part-time volunteer soldiers many of whom work in the City.
- The Tower of London has its own unique procedures for firing salutes ‘...in accordance with the Regulations of that fortress’. State occasions are marked by a 41 Gun Salute- the traditional 21 Gun Salute, plus a further 20 because of The Tower’s status as both a royal palace and fortress - while Royal anniversaries are marked with an additional 21shots as a mark of respect for the Sovereign from the City of London (a practice begun in 1828).
- With a total of 124 shots The Tower of London holds the record for the most rounds fired in a single salute. This only occurs in those years when The Queen’s official birthday coincides with the Duke of Edinburgh’s actual birthday (10 June) - an event which last occurred in 1967. The gunshots are fired consecutively.