

# Factsheet

## **The Royal Menagerie at the Tower of London**

Begun during the reign of King John, the Royal Menagerie was one of Britain's oldest zoos. Over the ensuing centuries, the royal collection of exotic animals rapidly increased, becoming a popular tourist attraction in Elizabethan times. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, with natural history emerging as a science, the menagerie moved to Regents Park, marking the advent of modern, scientific zoos.

- Recently discovered records show the Royal Menagerie was established in the reign of King John (1199-1216). The first collection may have arrived as early as 1204 when three shiploads of wild beasts were ordered to be brought from Normandy to England after King John conceded the territory to Philip Augustus of France.
- Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II presented three leopards to Henry III in 1235. These big cats were a tribute to the Plantagenet coat of arms: three lions passant guardant, which are heraldic leopards.
- The first polar bear to grace English soil came from Norway in 1251. The King had a collar and stout chain made for the bear, which allowed it to fish for its meals in the Thames in front of the Tower.
- The gift of an elephant from Louis IX of France in 1255 caused a stir when it landed at Sandwich under the gaze of a crowd who had travelled from all parts of the country to see it. The king ordered a building measuring 12 x 6m (40 x 20 ft) to be constructed for it.
- By the end of the Middle Ages, the Menagerie at the Tower was located, as it appears to have been since at least the reign of Edward III, in the Lion Tower at the Western entrance. Originally for the amusement of the King and his associates, the Menagerie became a public attraction during the reign of Elizabeth I.
- Under James I the collection of animals was enlarged, while the facilities in and about the Lion Tower were extended and improved. As part of this, an exercise

yard was created in part of the moat around the Lion Tower now drained and damned off from the Thames by a brick wall.

- The Menagerie seems to have continued to flourish during the Interregnum, James Howel noting in the 1650's that the Tower was never "better furnished with lions that it is now, there being six in all, young and old." In July 1671 contracts were signed to erect a new two-storey residence for the Menagerie Keeper, William Gill, in the tower "where the Kings Lyons be kept".
- Strype, in his edition of Stow's London, lists the following animals at the Tower in June 1704: six lions, two leopards or tigers, three eagles, two Swedish owls 'of great bigness', two 'Cats of the Mountains' and a jackal.
- In the first true guidebook to the Tower, published in 1741, the animals listed include the lions Marco and Phillis and their son Nero, two lionesses called Jenny and Nanny, three lion cubs, a leopard called Will, a panther called Jenny, two tigers called Will and Phillis and their son Dick, a racoon, two vultures, two eagles, a porcupine, an ape and a strange bird from the East Indies called a 'warwoven'.
- During the first twenty years of the nineteenth century, the fortunes of the Menagerie declined and by 1821 its inhabitants had diminished to four lions, a panther, a leopard, a grizzly bear and a tiger. In 1830 the decision was made to close the Menagerie and in 1831 – 32 those animals belonging to the Crown were presented to the newly established Zoological Society of London and transferred to their zoo, then being enlarged in Regent's Park.
- The remaining animals were sold to an American showman and shipped across the Atlantic. After six hundred years, the Tower Menagerie was no more.