

Lions go on show to the public

[Clip from BBC ONE The One Show]

[Neil Oliver]

As early as the 13th century, visitors to the tower were greeted by the sound of wild beasts. They'd been given to the King of England – as Royal Armouries historian Geoff Parnell has discovered.

[Geoff Parnell]

We have records of three lions or leopards from the Holy Roman Emperor in 1235 given to Henry III. Perhaps his most spectacular gift was a few years later – he actually received an African elephant and to have these exotic beasts at the very entrance to the Tower of London must have reinforced the importance of the monarchy in England.

[Neil Oliver]

The collection grew over the centuries and the Royal Menagerie became a major tourist attraction. At the height of its popularity, there were 280 animals on show. Hyenas, camels, seals, emus – even a smoking baboon.