

Nine years ago this week, Earls Court Exhibition Centre in West London was alive with the sights and sounds of the Oldest Military Tattoo in the World as it started its "LAST RUN". The 1999 Royal Tournament was the 119<sup>th</sup> Tournament (the annual show was not performed during the First and Second World Wars), in it's final year the show played to full houses at Earls Court from 20<sup>th</sup> July – 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1999.

To mark the 9<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Last Run, a new website has been launched in an attempt to keep the tradition of the Royal Tournament alive. The aim of [RoyalTournament.org](http://RoyalTournament.org) is to provide information on the Royal Tournament and keep the traditions alive. Over time it is hoped that the website will become a virtual museum covering all aspects of the Royal Tournament.

The "Grand Military Tournament and Assault at Arms" as it was originally known was staged at the Agricultural Hall, Islington from 21<sup>st</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> June 1880. The original event took the form of a series of Mounted & Dismounted Skill-At-Arms competitions between the Regular and Auxiliary units of the Victorian Army. Military Bands were soon introduced to entertain the audience between the competitions. In 1882 the first Musical Ride was performed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Life Guards and in 1896 the Royal Artillery first performed the Musical Drive. Both the Musical Ride and Musical Drive continue to thrill audiences at events throughout the country each summer.

In 1883 under the Patronage of Queen Victoria the name was changed to The Royal Military Tournament. The first 'all-naval' display appeared in the programme of the Tournament in 1896. This comprised of cutlass drill and gun drill by forty ratings from HMS Excellent. The Navy were regular participants in the subsequent years and in 1900 following the relief of Ladysmith during the South African campaign, Sailors from HMS Powerful brought a 4.7 inch gun into the arena at the Tournament.

In 1905, in the centenary year of the Battle of Trafalgar the event was renamed the Royal Naval & Military Tournament. The following year, the Tournament was relocated to Olympia in West London and in 1907 the first Royal Navy Inter-Command Field Gun Competition was held at the Tournament. The competition was a highlight of the Tournament each year until 1999.

In 1914, the Tournament closed its doors as the clouds of the First World War gathered over Europe. When it reopened after the war it was renamed again to include the newly formed RAF, The Royal Naval, Military & Air Force Tournament was staged at Olympia in 1919 before the final name change to The Royal Tournament in 1920.

Many displays which are now commonplace on the show circuit made early appearances at the Tournament, including the world famous Royal Signals Motorcycle Display Team, The White Helmets who performed at the Tournament in 1931 and many subsequent years until 1999. The Tournament closed its doors again in 1939 and was not staged again until 1947. In 1950 the Royal Tournament relocated to larger premises at the Earls Court Exhibition Centre where it was staged annually until 1999.

With a cast of over 2,000 and combined audiences of more than 200,000 each year, the Tournament was a major national event and for many an opportunity to talk to serving members of the Armed Forces in the extensive exhibition area outside the arena. The Tournament also acted as a stage for a wide variety of overseas performers.

The website includes a gallery of programme covers dating back to 1903 and a mailing list. Visitors to the site are encouraged to show their support for the [RoyalTournament.org](http://RoyalTournament.org) project by joining the mailing list in order to receive regular updates on the development of the website.

For more information on [RoyalTournament.org](http://RoyalTournament.org), please visit the website or e-mail: [tournament@RoyalTournament.org](mailto:tournament@RoyalTournament.org)