

annually in Finsbury, St George's Fields and Moorfields. But towards the end of the 18th century urban encroachment forced the archers further away, with the Royal Toxophilite Society (founded 1781) eventually being driven to move from its Regent's Park home to Buckinghamshire. Several parts of London maintain an association with the activity, such as the Archery Tavern, Bayswater, and Newington Butts at the Elephant and Castle.

Astley's



Westminster Bridge Road

ORIGINALLY CALLED ROYAL GROVE, ASTLEY'S WAS London's first circus. It was opened by a former cavalry officer, Philip Astley, who received a licence for his enterprise after he used his Herculean proportions to help George III subdue a runaway horse.

When his original site burned down in 1794, he rebuilt it as Astley's Amphitheatre. Shows often featured clowns, acrobats and conjurers, and there were vast spectacles featuring, for instance, 'several hundred performers and fifty-two horses, two lions, kangaroos, pelicans, reindeer and a chamois'. Other entertainments included sword fights and exotic melodramas. The venue, though, was plagued by fires and had to be rebuilt in 1803, 1841 and 1862, when it reopened as the New Westminster Theatre.

