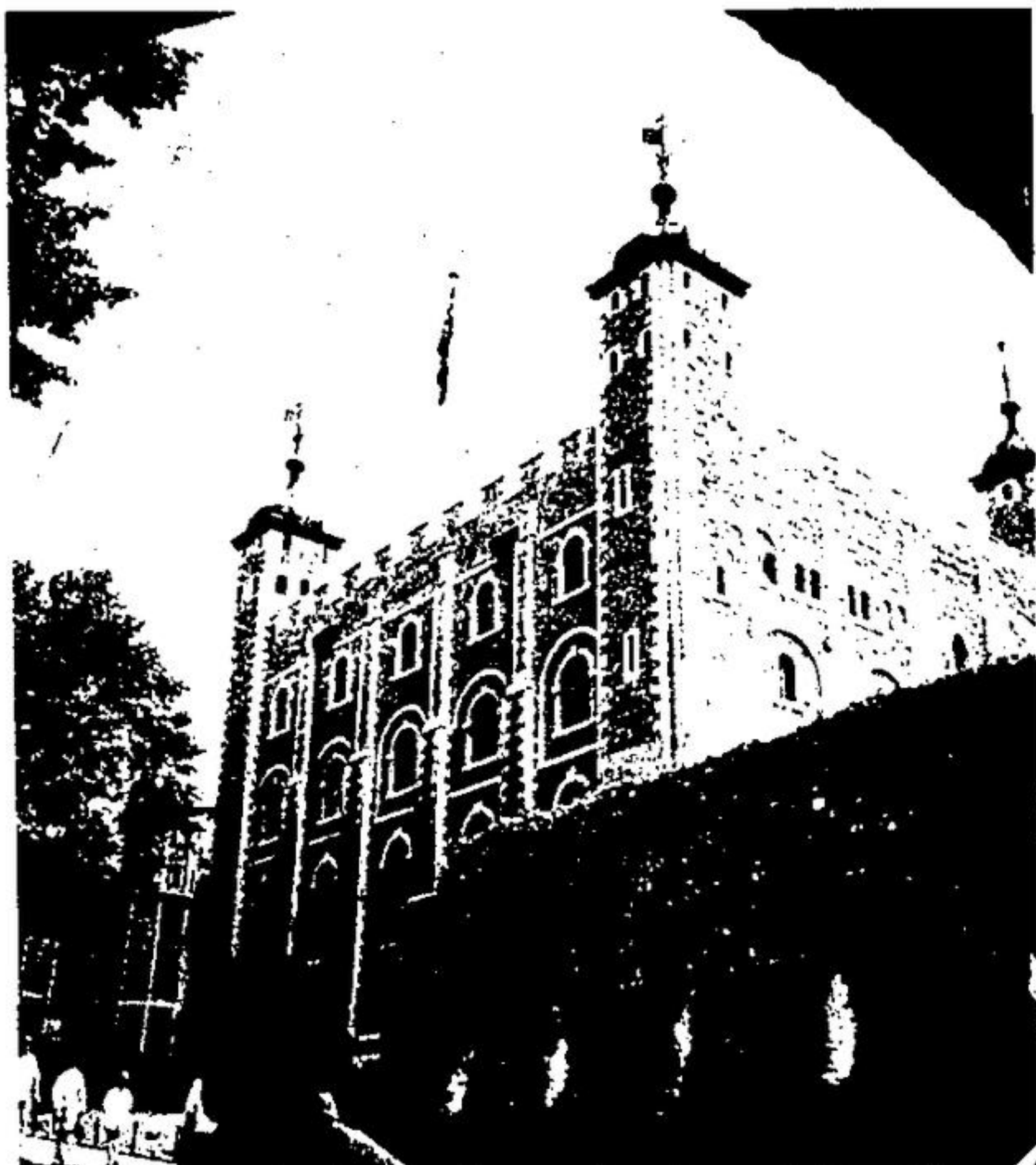


# Travel

## 900th Birthday at the tower



**SYNDICATED TRAVEL NEWS** — Last year Britain celebrated the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, and in 1978 the spotlight falls on a building where some of her ancestors — and many of their enemies — faced pain, and death. The Tower of London is 900 years old.

Although it now welcomes 2 1/2 million friendly visitors a year, the mighty Tower by the Thames can still conjure up grim pictures of imprisonment, torture and violent death.

The programme of celebrations has yet to be announced, but plans include performances, from mid-July to mid-August, of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Yeoman of the Guard" in the Moat. This spectacular, and highly appropriate show, is likely to be staged six days a week for a month.

The broad, deep Moat, which surrounds the outer wall, is now a spacious area of grass, having been drained of water back in 1843. It is planned to hold regular military band concerts in the Moat in the late afternoon on numer-

ous dates from early April to the end of September, as part of the novocentenary programme.

The Tower dates back to William the Conqueror, who replaced the original wooden structure with the mighty White Tower which is still the central feature today; that massive building, with walls 10-15 thick, was begun in 1078, and William's architect was Bishop Gundulf, who was also responsible for Rochester Cathedral, 30 miles away in Kent. (Rochester also has a Norman castle with a magnificent keep — the Tower of London's birthday is expected to create new interest in Britain's many surviving Norman buildings.)

Through its 900 years, the Tower has frequently played an important part in English history, and so it is appropriate that one of the major ways in which its birthday will be marked is by the opening, in March, of a History Gallery. Within its 18 acres, the Tower contains architecture of many periods, and the gallery will be a new building containing an interpretative centre describing the

development of the Tower through its nine centuries.

It will have a rich but gory story to tell, for although as early as 1140 the Tower had become one of the principal royal residences (James I was the last monarch to live there, in the early 17th century), it also had a great many residents who were kept there against their will. Some were royal, some were great men, some were infamous, and many of them did not leave the Tower alive.

"There is no sadder spot on the earth", wrote the 19th century historian Macaulay. "Thither have been carried through successive ages, by the rude hands of gaolers, without one mourner following, the bleeding relics of men who had been the captains of armies, the leaders of parties, the oracles of senates, and the ornaments of courts". Henry VI, the Little Prince, the Duke of Clarence, Sir Thomas More, Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard, ... all met their end within its walls.

Visitors today never cease to be fascinated by the grim tales; they see

the rooms where dark deeds were done, and plots

hatched; stand in awe as they gaze at the fabulous Crown Jewels; and admire the marvellous display of armour, founded on Henry VIII's collection (it includes some of Henry's armour, and a suit made for a man nearly seven feet tall).

In 1978, visitors will undoubtedly find the Tower a happy place, despite its past. There are to be learned conferences; and a school drama festival in the Moat in June. There will also be a series of choral evenings, which may include supper and a chance to see the ancient Ceremony of the Keys. This takes place each evening at 21.53 hours, when the Chief Warden (the Yeoman Warder) has been known as "Beefeater", so the story goes, ever since the Grand Duke of Tuscany described them, in

1669, as great eaters of beef lights a candle lantern and walks to the Bloody Tower.

He is met by an escort, and after locking some of the gates and towers, he returns to the Bloody Tower's arch to be challenged by a wren: "Halt? Who goes there?"

"The keys," replies the Chief Warden.

"Whose keys?"

"Queen Elizabeth's keys," says the Chief Warden.

He is allowed to advance, and the party form up facing the Main Guard. The Chief Warden doffs his Tudor bonnet, shouts "God preserve Queen Elizabeth", and the guard and escort reply "Amen". Then a bugler sounds the Last Post, and the keys are given into the keeping of the Resident Governor of the Tower.

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