

# The Downing Street Collection of British Engraved Glass

*When past honorary editor Charmian Mocatta contacted the Guild this February to say she had written an article about the Downing St Collection for the Guild Archives, it seemed an ideal opportunity to bring some of these rarely-seen pieces to a wider audience and to record the story behind their creation.*

Newer members might be interested to know that several years ago members of the Guild were responsible for engraving glassware to be used at official functions at 10 Downing Street and at Chequers. They were commissioned by the Glass Engraving Trust. The Trust, which also assisted with the purchase of tools for engraving, was set up in 2008 by past chairman and past president of the Guild, Michael Nathan.

After consultation with Downing Street to establish what would be acceptable, the Collection was to comprise twelve carafes, four water jugs and twenty six tumblers. Wine glasses and decanters would not be

suitable because of difficulties with storage and security - and the obvious likelihood of breakages. The glass was to be hand made by Dartington Crystal in Devon. The theme would be Britain's architectural heritage and with advice from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) a list of suitable subjects was compiled.

The decisions about which subject on which glass, to be engraved by whom, took some time to organise - glass engravers had other commitments. Eventually Tony Gilliam, Tracey Sheppard, Sandra Snaddon, Virginia Bliss and Hilary Virgo began work. The proposed collection of glassware became known as The Downing Street Collection. Sadly, Hilary Virgo, who had been a staunch supporter of the Guild for many years, passed away so was able to complete only a few pieces. A year before her death in 2010, she had been made a Fellow Emeritus of the Guild of Glass Engravers - a rare honour indeed!

Although not yet complete, this Collection of British Engraved Glass was first seen in public in 2012 at a National Exhibition of the Guild of Glass Engravers held at the Red House Glass Cone in Stourbridge. That year, the Guild Exhibition ran from August to October and coincided with the British Glass Biennale at

Stourbridge which began in August and ended in mid-September. Therefore, displayed in a separate cabinet within the Guild Exhibition, The Downing Street Collection was seen by and attracted interest from a large number of visitors. As Sandra Snaddon explained in the catalogue for the Guild Exhibition, the Glass Engraving Trust 'was set up to promote the work of modern British glass engravers for use at official functions at Downing Street in parallel with the collection of modern British silver there'.

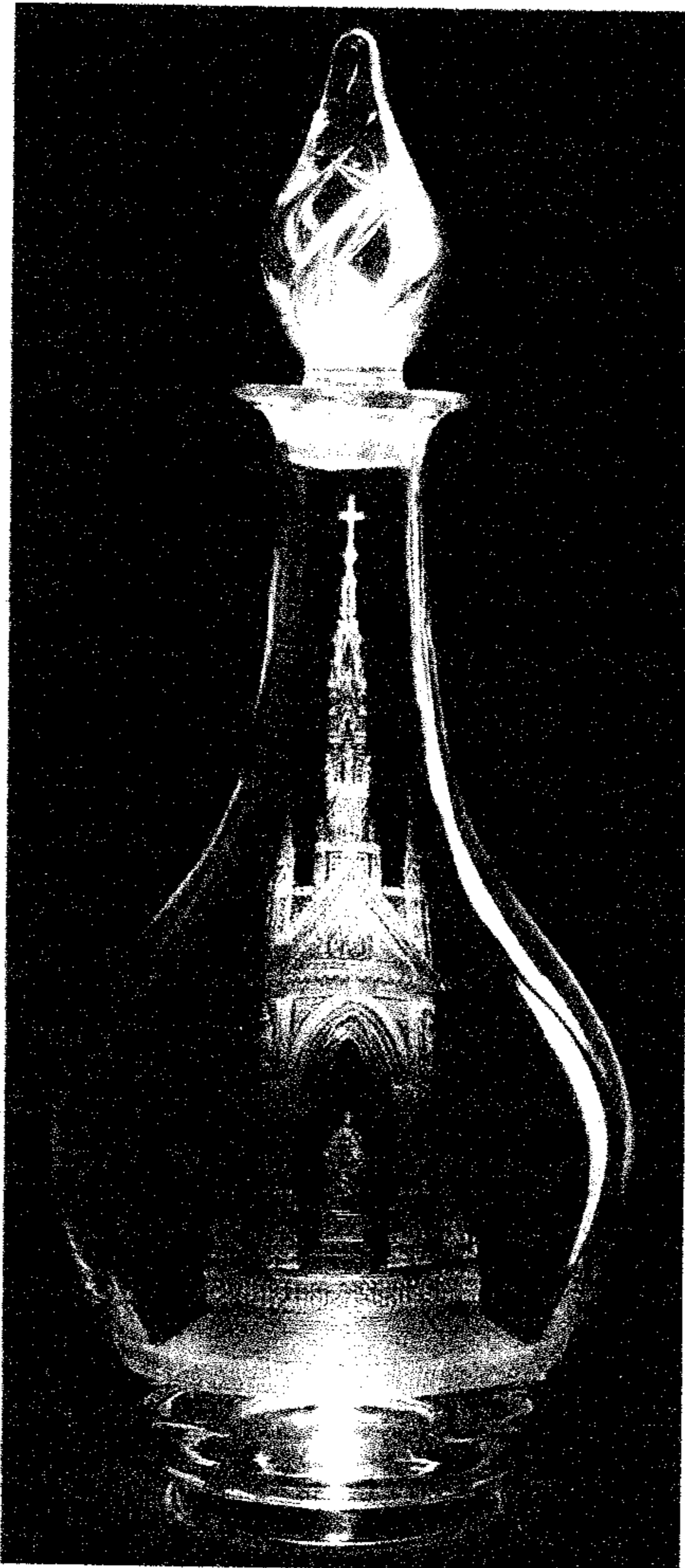
The Silver Trust had been established in 1987 as a result of a lunch party at 10 Downing Street when a guest commented that the table was set with only standard crockery, flatware and glass: there were no centre pieces. A national appeal by The Daily Telegraph newspaper had been launched for ideas for subjects and, subsequently, commissions were placed with the best modern British silversmiths. This silver tableware now forms an impressive collection and, when not in use, is exhibited round the country and abroad. Every Prime Minister has made use of it for Government and State occasions.

I first met Donald Scott when I joined the Guild and became a member of the Thames Valley branch in 1988; he was also a branch member. I remember him

giving us a talk about stamping the first Assay mark of the year on silver coasters for engraved decanters which he had commissioned from Peter Dreiser. Later, when he became chairman of the Guild, he was to initiate the Guild Spring Lecture; because the AGM was held in the autumn, he considered that an event held in the spring for members and their guests would provide additional interest. (Later, this became a bi-annual event in a year when there was no Guild Exhibition.)

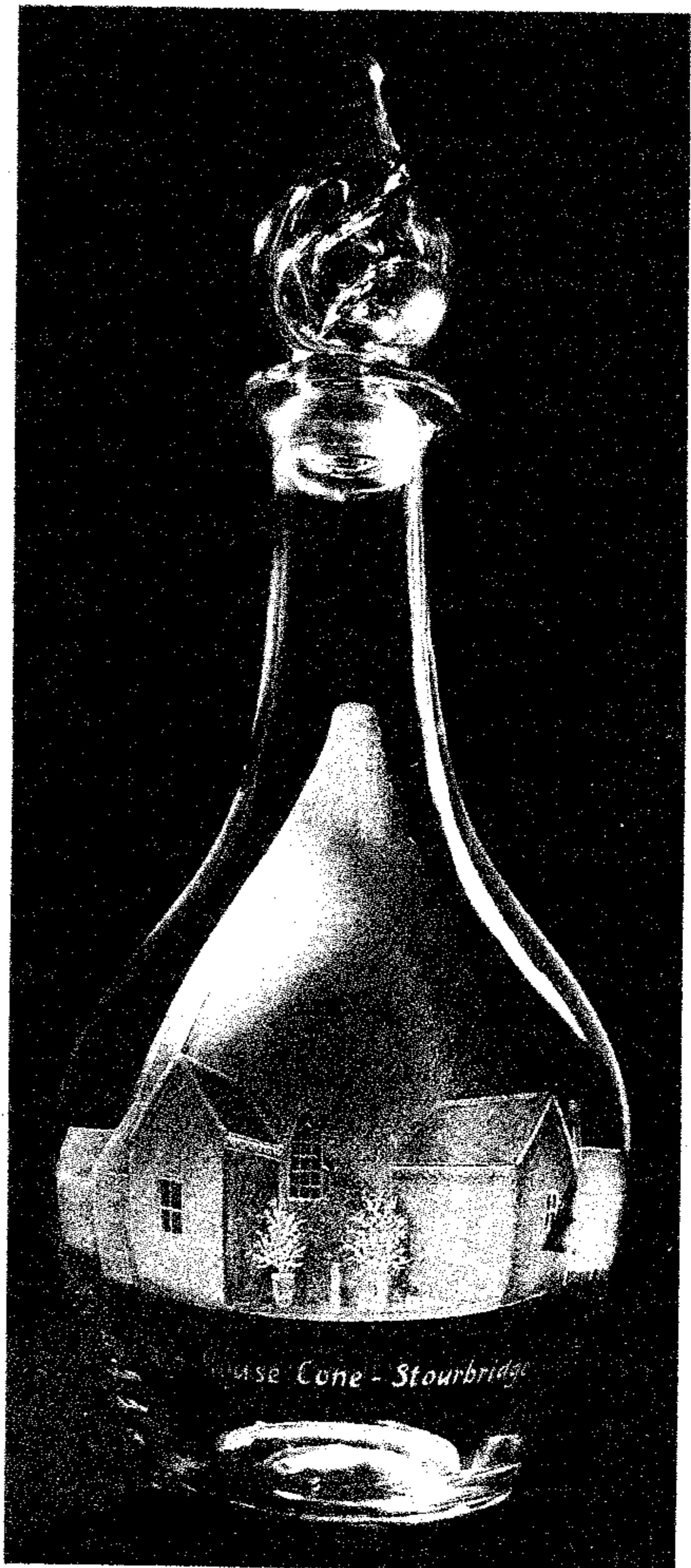
Donald was Assistant Clerk to The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths in London and, when he became honorary chairman of the Guild, he considered that the idea of special silverware as part of the table setting should be developed to include British engraved glass. He was present at the preliminary discussions in 10 Downing Street when the decision was made on the most suitable glass items to be engraved. Now retired, he comments: 'I am proud to have initiated the idea of a collection of engraved glass at Number 10, and to have taken the first steps towards that goal. All credit should be given to Michael [Nathan] for taking it on, raising the money and his persistence over the years.'

Charmian Mocatta,  
honorary editor 1989-2013



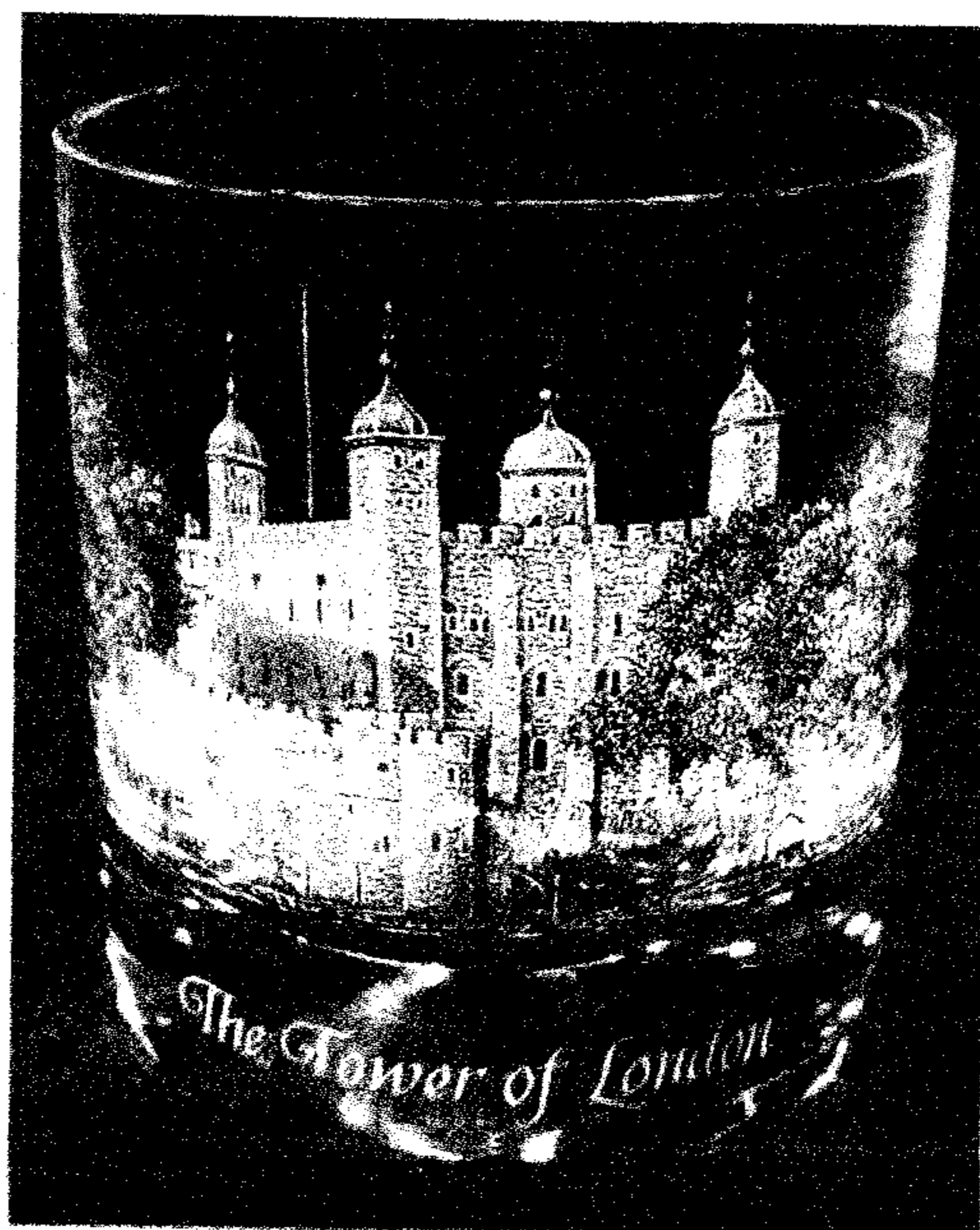
*The Albert Memorial by Sandra Snaddon*

*This memorial in Kensington Gardens was commissioned by Queen Victoria in memory of her beloved husband, Prince Albert. (d.1861) and took over ten years to complete. Designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott, the decorations round it depict 169 individual composers, architects, poets, painters, sculptors, also Victorian industrial arts & sciences and symbolic animals from Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe.*



*The Red House Cone by Sandra Snaddon*

*The Red House Cone, Wordsley, West Midlands, is a conical brick structure for making glass. It is the best preserved of only four cones remaining in the United Kingdom. It is now a visitor centre with glass-blowing demonstrations, it has temporary exhibitions, craft shops and a café. Visitors can climb a platform to view more closely the interior. It is a World Heritage Site and listed Grade II\* in 1966.*



*The Tower of London by Tony Gilliam*

*Officially entitled Her Majesty's Royal Palace and Fortress of the Tower of London, this is a castle which has played a prominent role in English history. As part of the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, the White Tower was built in 1078. From 1100 it was used as a prison but later housed numerous institutions – including a zoo. It is a World Heritage Site.*