

# **THE FIRST WORLD WAR TANK** **IN SUTTON PARK**

By Don McCollam

The first definitive paper specifying the technical and tactical requirements for a tank was written by Royal Engineer Lieutenant-Colonel Ernest Swinton on 15th June 1915. He demanded that it should climb a 5ft bank and cross a 5ft gap, that it should carry a quick firing gun plus two machine guns, be proof against armour piercing bullets, have a speed of 4mph and employ a crew of ten. These conditions were revised as progress was made by the first tank designers, William Tritton and Walter Wilson, who worked towards a recognisable objective for the first tank builders Foster's of Lincoln, who tackled the problems of construction. Throughout 1915 Winston Churchill, Ernest Swinton, Banker Albert Stern and Royal Naval Officers with government approval and funds, working as a team, overcame the problems to come up with a practical solution of making a working armoured and armed tracked vehicle to be used cross country by the British Army.

In December 1915 it was decided that a deceptive name be given to this potential special assault weapon to disguise its existence, and, as it looked like a water container, the word tank was adopted, as opposed to container or cistern, and so it remains to this day.

On the 12th January 1916 the first fighting tank ran on its own tracks and successive trials that month convinced the doubters. David Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions, instructed Albert Stern to put tanks into operation and so, on the 12th February, the first order for 100 tanks was signed by the British Army Council.

## **SUTTON TANK No 216**

The Mark V was first intended to be a completely new design of tank. When, however, in December 1917, the desired new engine and transmission became available, this design was abandoned, and the designation switched to an improved version of the Mark IV, in fact a Mark IV as it was originally intended. The Mark V had more power (150 bhp) from a new Ricardo engine. Use of Wilson's epicyclic steering gear meant that only a single driver was needed. On the roof towards the back of the tank behind the engine was a second raised cabin for a machine-gunner and the tank commander. The machine guns now fired through ball mounts rather than loopholes giving better protection and wider field of fire.

Four hundred were built, 200 each of Males and Females. Several were converted to Hermaphrodites by swapping sponsons to give a single 6 pounder gun for each. These are also sometimes known as "Mark V Composite".

The Mark V was a late participant in the First World War. It was first used in the Battle of Hamel on 4 July 1918, when 60 tanks contributed to a successful assault by Australian units on the German lines. A number saw service in the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War on the White Russian side. They participated in the British North Russia Campaign. Some saw service with the Estonian forces after Russian forces had to retreat into Estonia and be disarmed and were used until 1941. Mark Vs were also delivered to the French, Canadian and American armies.

### **PRODUCTION HISTORY (IN SERVICE 1918)**

Designer Major Wilson. Designed 1917. Manufacturer. Metropolitan Carriage. Produced 1917-June 1918. Number Built. 400.

### **SPECIFICATIONS**

Weight. Male: 29 tons Female: 28 tons. Length. 26ft 5in (8.5m) Width. Male: 13ft 6in (4.19m) Female: 10ft 6in (3.2m) Height. 8ft 8in (2.64m) Crew. 8 (commander, driver, two gears men and four gunners).

Armour. 0.55in (14mm) maximum. Primary Armament. Male: two 6pdr 6cwt QF with 207 rounds. Female: Four .303 Vickers machine guns. Secondary armament. Male: Four .303in Hotchkiss MK1 Machine gun. Female: Two .303in Hotchkiss machine guns.

Engine. 19 litres six cylinder in-line Ricardo petrol engine 150hp (110kw) Power/weight. 5.2hp/ton. Transmission. 4 forward 1 reverse, Wilson epicyclic in final drive. Fuel capacity. 100 imperial gallons (450 litres). Operational range. 45 miles (72km) about 10 hours endurance. Speed. 5 mph (8.0 km/h) maximum. Steering system. Wilson epicyclic steering.



## Letter, Newspaper Articles and Council Minutes relating to Sutton Park Tank Number 216

(Letter sent to the Sutton Coldfield News 14th March 1980  
by Albert V Turfrey 11 Church Road, Sutton Coldfield)

*Any residential visitor to Sutton Park prior to the end of 1935 may remember the Military Tank and field guns or Howitzers that were placed inside the main entrance to the park following the First World War.*

*This Tank had five guns and had been presented to the Town in 1919 by the National War Savings Committee and was placed in a prepared position near the main entrance on February 3rd, 1920, and it was hoped that the Town people would be well represented. This reminder of the 1914-1918 War remained until November 1935 when, due to its deterioration, the highest tender was for the removal and scrapping of the Tank and Guns amounting to £40. It being agreed that the proceeds of the sale be handed over to the British Legion Benevolent Fund.*

(Taken from the Sutton Coldfield News Saturday September 28th, 1935)

### **SUTTONS WAR RELIC**

*The Tank which stands just to the left of the main entrance to the Park has recently been the subject of considerable criticism among readers, chiefly by non-residents of the Borough. Complaints have been made of the Tanks unsightliness and one suggestion put forward was to the effect that such an eyesore should be removed and replaced by a garden. By no stretch of the imagination can this tank be considered to enhance the beauty of the Park. In fact, there is much to be said in support of the claim that it is an eyesore and serves only as a little playground for youngsters who from time to time find so much delight in throwing stones against its heavily plated sides. But on the other hand, the Tank even though it is unsightly relic, has some significance. A well-known local resident referring to the Sutton Park relic wrote: It may not be generally being known that, at the time the relics were brought to Sutton the local ex-soldiers made a determined attempt to throw the lot into one of the pools and were only prevented by fear of reprisals.*

(Taken from the Sutton Coldfield News on the 20th September 1963)

### **TANK IN PARK**

*Finally, there is a picture reproduced from an amateur snapshot loaned to the News by Mrs Hale of Hall Green, showing a British Tank on view in Sutton Park near the Town Gate, date unknown. It was labelled 'the weapon that made the Germans run' and was probably on view in connection with War Savings (now National Savings) or some similar effort.*

*Standing beside it is a field gun which looks like the old German "whizz-bang." The News would be grateful for any information readers can supply on this subject.*



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## *A tank on view in Sutton Park*

20.9.63





Taken from the Borough of Sutton Coldfield Council Minutes 1919-1920

REPORT OF THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

3rd MARCH 1920

CHAIRMAN THE MAYOR

*Your Committee have had a communication from the Local Savings Committee as to the formal handing over of the Tank presented to the Town through the National Savings Committee. It is suggested that the ceremony should take place on Saturday afternoon 20th March 1920 when it is hoped that the Townspeople will be well represented.*

Taken from the Borough of Sutton Coldfield Council Minutes 1919-1920

REPORT OF THE PARK AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN ALDERMAN EMERY

*The Tank and five guns were placed in position prepared near the main entrance on the 3rd February 1920 and a two-rail fence completed around them.*

Taken from the Borough of Sutton Coldfield Council Minutes 1935-1936

REPORT OF THE PARK AND ESTATES COMMITTEE

1st JANUARY 1936

CHAIRMAN ALDERMAN PEARSON

TANK AND GUNS

*The Tank and guns have now been removed from the enclosure near the Town gate and your Committee have authorised the sum of £40 the proceeds of sale to be handed to the British Legion Benevolent Fund.*

March, 2018