

# **PATRICK COLLINS, THE ROYAL PROMENADE GARDENS, THE CRYSTAL PALACE AMUSEMENT PARK AND THE SUTTON MINIATURE RAILWAY.**

## **PART 1- PATRICK COLLINS AND THE ROYAL PROMENADE GARDENS.**

Our story begins with the birth of Patrick Collins on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1859.

He was born in a small house at Boughton Heath, on the outskirts of Chester, and he was christened in St. Werburgh's Catholic Church in the centre of the city.



**Fig. 1. St. Werburgh's Catholic Church, Chester, where Pat Collins was christened.**

His parents were John and Norah Collins (née McDermot). His father, an Amusement Caterer, came from Ballinasloe in Southern Ireland, which was situated between Galway and Athlone.

John and his brother were horse dealers and every year they came over to England, via Liverpool or Holyhead, to attend horse fairs and began their trading in Altrincham, Macclesfield, Congleton, Leek and Derby, during the months of April and May.

John eventually decided to settle in England and made his first home at Northwich. He purchased land at Brook Street, which later was used as a fairground.

Patrick Collins had four siblings namely; Johanna (1848-1907), Margaret (1853-1929), John (1857-1929) and Michael who sadly died in his youth, after being severely kicked by a horse. Regrettably, one of the unfortunate hazards that was commonplace for people who spent their lives in contact with horses on a daily basis.

Reports of Pat's early life often suggest that he had started from nothing, an impression he himself did nothing to contradict, yet, whilst his background was relatively humble and certainly not affluent in the sense of the word today, he did have a strong background firmly based in the world of travelling, trading and showmanship. He could not therefore be classed as one of the urban or rural souls forming part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century poor.

Patrick was educated at St. Werburgh's Catholic School, but he only stayed there until the age of ten. After that, the demands of the family business took precedence over the claims of school attendance

and he began travelling the fairs of Cheshire, Lancashire, Shropshire and North Staffordshire with his father and elder brother John.

His father, at the time, owned two fairground rides, a 'one boat yacht' and a small (called a juvenile in the trade) hand-turned roundabout.

The 'one boat yacht' was big enough to accommodate twenty people and had to be hauled from fair to fair by two horses. When the ride was erected, wherever the travelling fair was at the time, it was swung by Pat and John, alternately pulling on ropes.

This would have been extremely hard work and it was during this period that the boys learnt how to fight and to defend their 'pitch' in the rough world of the fairground.

In 1875, when he was just sixteen, Pat persuaded his father to sell him the juvenile hand-turned roundabout.

Five years later, on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1880, he married Flora MacDonald Ross in St. Peter's Church, Church Street, Liverpool.



**Fig. 2. St. Peter's Church, Church Street, Liverpool, where Pat Collins married Flora MacDonald Ross.**

The Marriage Certificate indicated that Pat was 22 years of age at the time and he described himself as a General Dealer. His wife was born in Wrexham, the daughter of a Watchmaker.

The 1880's would have been a difficult period for Pat. To be a successful showman, it was necessary to be able to physically defend one's right to a 'pitch'. It was also important to be able to deal with gangs who invaded the fair demanding free amusement and 'protection money'.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the arrival of fairs and wakes were associated with a considerable increase in the consumption of alcohol, often leading to violence and the subsequent threat of lawlessness.

With this in mind, as Local Government developed, many 'respectable folk' hoped that fairs and wakes would be outlawed. Pat would therefore have found himself engaged in battle on at least three fronts, namely:

- (a) Fighting the gangs.
- (b) Fighting the growing powers of Local Government.
- (c) Trying to reform the showman's image by presenting the idea that fairs and wakes could be considered safe entertainment, worthy for all the family to enjoy.

During Pat's first decade in Walsall, having moved there in 1882, he described himself as a 'Swing-boat Proprietor of Chester'.

He leased land at Shaws Leasow, which he eventually purchased and it became his *yard*, which he named the 'Gondola Works'.

Pat Collins was both thrifty and shrewd and his business accordingly began to expand and, by the beginning of the 1890's, he owned a number of riding machines and sideshows. With the help of other 'tenants' to assist, he was quite capable of presenting quite large fairs.

He was a founder member of the 'Van Dweller's and Showmen's Protection Society', which was formed in 1889. This eventually became the 'Showmen's Guild', which Pat was president of for quite a number of years.

As the business grew and flourished, so did his family. Pat and Flora having one son, Patrick Ross Collins, who was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 1886, in Chester.

Pat began to appear all over the place and he thus acquired quite a national reputation as a showman, while at the same time consolidating his position in the Black Country and South Staffordshire. He was now able to call himself 'Sole Lessee' of fairs at Bloxwich, Darlaston, Oldbury, Wednesbury, West Bromwich and Smethwick.

He was also Lessee of the famous Birmingham Onion Fair, which was held at the Pleck in Aston, as it had been since the mid-1870's.

During the first 30 years of his life, Pat Collins had not only established himself as a showman to be reckoned with in the Black Country, he had become Lessee of a number of fair sites, owner of other venues and proprietor of a number of riding machines.

In 1899, a Notice was placed in the *Walsall Observer* which announced the Prospectus of P Collins Limited, a company being formed to;

**'Acquire, carry on, extend and improve the established business of Pat Collins, Public Amusement Caterer, Traction Engine and Travelling Roundabout Proprietor'.**

It is not clear what motives he had for creating this company, but it may have been simply a way of raising money by selling everything to shareholders in order to use the money to pay for further expansion. Perhaps it was just a necessary step in regulating the affairs of his sprawling business.

Pat Collins agreed to stay on as Managing Director for at least three years.

Pat began the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a man of substance. He lived at 'Chester House', Algernon Street, Walsall, almost next door to his 'Gondola Works'. He was 40 years old and, even at this relatively young age, he contemplated retirement. Within a few days, however, he was back again in the fairground.

Pat himself is quoted as saying;

**"I can't stand still, if they tied me down, I should go mad".**

Pat's household had a reputation for 'adopting' the orphans of showground friends and relations, the best-known being Clara and William Mullett. John Collins, or 'Walsall John', as he was later known, was another.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1906, Pat Collins obtained the lease on the *Crystal Palace* ground in Sutton Park and thus began his association with 'amusement catering' on a permanent site.

Local Historian, Roger Lea, wrote articles in the Sutton Coldfield News on the history of the Royal Promenade Gardens and also the *Crystal Palace*, in which he stated;

**"Visitors to Sutton in 1900 would flock to the *Crystal Palace*. It had a zoo in its grounds, where they could see monkeys, lions, camels and kangaroos.**

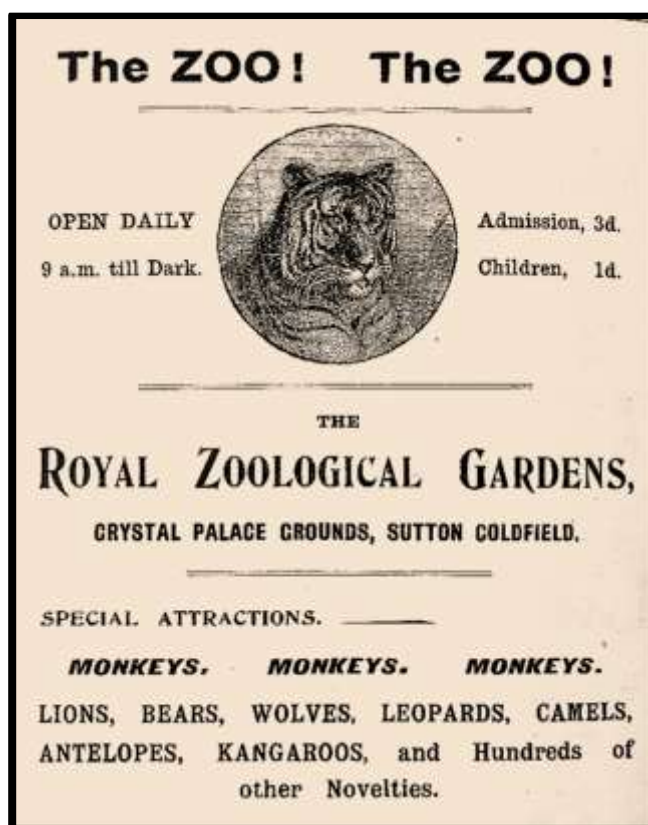


Fig 3. An advertisement for the Zoo, which opened around 1900.

**FILE NOTE:** The Zoo was opened by Mr Frederick Kings, a local man, with a lifelong interest in animals. Unfortunately, it closed in 1906, due to the ever-increasing cost of animal food.

26 years previously a more ambitious plan had been put forward.

In July 1853, the Mayor of Birmingham, James Baldwin, wrote to the Warden and Society of Sutton Coldfield with a comprehensive plan to provide;

**"A place of recreation for the inhabitants of the Borough (of Birmingham)."**

The original *Crystal Palace* had been built in Hyde Park to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. This had caught the public's imagination and so the proposal was to build another, smaller version, of the *Crystal Palace* in Sutton Park, connected by a branch line to the Midland Railway at Saltley.

The plan met with great enthusiasm, with further proposals for rail links from several Black Country towns. In the meantime, the original *Crystal Palace* was being moved from Hyde Park and re-built at Sydenham. However, in the September, a fatal accident killed five construction workers and this cooled enthusiasm for the Sutton scheme, which was dropped entirely when the Warden and Society refused to allow Birmingham to build on Sutton Park.

Despite this setback, the Park continued to attract large numbers of visitors to Sutton Park and its wide-open spaces and the thought occurred to Mr Job Cole, a Nurseryman from Aston Lane Nurseries, Birchfields, that many of these visitors would enjoy wandering around more formal pleasure grounds, as well as the Park.

He duly laid out his grounds on a 10-acre site between Clifton Road and the Park, close to where the Sutton Coldfield Youth Centre is today and at a time when neither Manor Road nor that part of Clifton Road existed, so the first visitors accessed the gardens via Sutton Park.

Features of the gardens included a fernery, sheltered by rhododendrons and azaleas, two separate acres of rhododendrons, a rose garden, a bowling green, cricket, archery and croquet grounds and an extensive sheet of water.

**FILE NOTE:** According to past local historian, Denis Hurley, the E-Brook rises in Sutton Park and flows out of the park near Town Gate. Possibly, as long ago as 2,000 years, a causeway was built across the valley, on the line of the present Clifton Road, creating a pool fed by both the E-Brook and Longmoor Brook. This pool was named 'Cross Pool' and was used as a fishery in the Middle Ages, until it was drained. In 1868, Job Cole, when laying-out the Royal Promenade Gardens, created a new pool there, as an ornamental feature, close to what is now the local Youth Centre.

Mike Hodder also refers to 'Cross Pool' in his Archaeological Survey dated 7<sup>th</sup> May 1977.

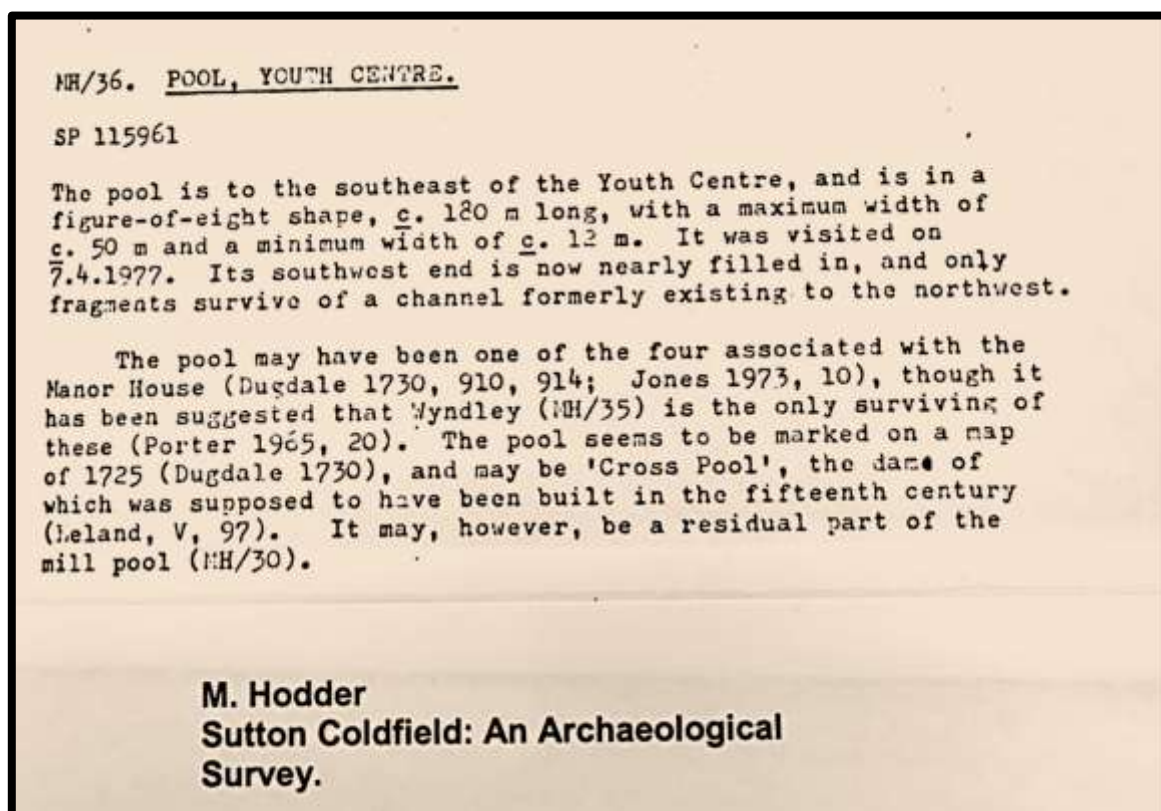


Fig. 4. Pool, Youth Centre – Sutton Coldfield: An Archaeological Survey, 1977.

**A spacious conservatory was erected for floral displays and ancillary buildings for the enjoyment of creature comforts. These must have included the 'Manor Inn' where, according to the 1871 Census Return, two servants were in residence.**

**The land had previously been meadows belonging to the Manor House Farm and Job Cole had acquired it on a 100-year lease from the Somerville Estate. The 1871 Rate Book listed it as a 'House, Promenade Gardens, twelve acres, rateable value of £116. 13s. 4d.' It also showed that Cole had the neighbouring nine-acre meadow.**

**According to the 1868 edition of Peers' *History and Guide to Sutton Park* the venture was described, as follows;**

**'Just opened, a very important attraction to the visitors of Sutton is the establishment of the Royal Promenade Gardens by Mr Job Cole.'**

**FILE NOTE:** Miss Sarah Holbeche, in her diary, specifically mentioned the event and gave the date as being the 25<sup>th</sup> July.

**Initially, the gardens were a great success and Cole prospered and moved from Perry Barr to Sutton Coldfield into a new house near Manor Hill, with his second wife.**

**This paved the way for the *Crystal Palace* eventually being built in 1879. It was capable of sheltering upwards of 1,500 people and included a conservatory for floral displays, with a large glass dome. It also had refreshment rooms and even an hotel with stabling for 50 horses in large cellars beneath."**

At this point in time, it would seem to be the ideal opportunity to delve a little into the history of Job Cole.

He was born in 1819 to Thomas and Mary Cole in Wellow, a small village about five miles from Bath, Somerset. His father ran a successful nursery business and, by 1851, he was employing eight people to assist him.

Job spent his early days gaining a thorough grounding in the art of tending and nurturing plants and vegetables from his father. There came a time, however, when he made the decision to progress to the next stage of his career.

In 1840, when he was twenty-one years of age, he obtained a position at the Botanical Gardens in Edgbaston, Birmingham, where he further honed his skills in a horticultural environment, earning 13 shillings a week in the process.

Job was one of seven children and all his siblings eventually went on to become involved, in one way or another, in gardening. Some worked for large private houses, others were involved in the running of commercial nurseries and some married into the profession. It could be safely said therefore that horticulture ran in Job's blood!

In 1843, Job won a special prize at the Birmingham Horticultural Society's Annual Show, for a collection of 20 named British plants.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1848, at the age of 29, he married Frances Elizabeth Cameron at St. Phillip's, Birmingham. She was the daughter of David Cameron, the Curator of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

At some point in time, it is known that Job left the Botanical Gardens as, by 1849, he was working for a Mr Wilmore at Birchfield House, Perry Barr. A few years later, the 1851 Census Return showed that



the family were living in Aston Road and Job was doing quite well, as he employed a domestic servant, together with a young labourer from Ireland.

During their marriage, Job and Frances had three children, two sons and a daughter, named David (1849), Charles Hind (1850) and Fanny (1853). Sadly, his wife died in April 1853, after they had been together for only five years. She was just 30 years of age at the time. It is probable that Frances died in childbirth, as the mortality rate in Victorian Britain at the time was high and peaked in 1874 with the greatest number of deaths ever recorded.

Less than a year after the death of his first wife, he met and married his second wife, Emily Marton, in January 1854. Emily was born in Bath, Somerset, very close to where Job Cole had been brought up and it is possible they had known each other during that period.

Emily must have been a remarkable woman, as she was 35 years of age at the time of her marriage and a spinster, yet she was still willing to take on the burden of three young children who were not her own. On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1857 they had a son, whom they named Edward Wharton Cole.

During the 1850's, Job once more improved his position by taking over Aston Lane Nurseries. At the same time, he was offering his services as a landscape gardener and exhibiting in different places such as Aston Hall.

The 1861 Census Return provided the following information on the family;

Job Cole	Head	Married	42	Nurseryman	Wellow, Somerset
Emily Cole	Wife	Married	42	-	Bath, Somerset
David Cole	Son	-	11	-	Birmingham, Warwickshire
Charles Hind Cole	Son	-	10	-	Birmingham, Warwickshire
Fanny Cole	Daughter	-	8	-	Handsworth, Staffordshire
Edward Cole	Son	-	3	-	Handsworth, Staffordshire
John Hindley	Servant	Single	19	Apprentice	Stoke Newington, Middlesex
Rebecca Lambert	Servant	Single	19	Domestic Servant	Tipton, Staffordshire
Richard Smith	Servant	Married	40	Foreman Nurseryman	Sedgley, Staffordshire
Sarah Smith	Servant	Married	40	Foreman's Wife	Martley, Worcestershire

Regrettably, his second wife also died unexpectedly, when she was only 50, in February 1869.

This did not deter him and, hoping for third time lucky, he married again at the age of 54, in September 1874. His new spouse was Jane Lowe, a spinster, aged 52 years of age. Her place of abode was described as Aston Manor, but she originally came from Adelaide, South Australia, the eldest daughter of James Lowe. They were married at St. Peter & St. Paul's Church, Aston.

As mentioned previously, since the advent of the railway line to Sutton in 1862, more and more day-trippers were availing themselves of the convenience of travelling to enjoy the benefits of the park. Job Cole, being an intelligent man and a good businessman, saw the opportunity to tap into this rich revenue stream.

He eventually came up with the idea of laying out extensive gardens, together with refreshments for the general public to enjoy, as part of their visit. This plan came to fruition in 1868.

In June 1870, the Birmingham Daily Post included an article on Job Cole, which stated;

### **The Royal Pavilion Gardens**

**“These were established by Mr Cole, well known in the district for his successful landscape gardening.**

**Two years ago, the site of the present flourishing horticultural grounds, was almost a barren tract. Mr Cole, however, by determination, enterprise and, it must be said, a vast amount of hard work, has succeeded in transforming the desert into a paradise, wherein trees, shrubs and flowers are in the process of rapid development.”**

The same year, Cole obtained a license to sell spirits. Upon initial application, a letter signed by nearly all the householders living in the area described him as a ‘very respectable man’.



**Fig. 5. The pools, laid out by Job Cole in the Royal Promenade Gardens, *Crystal Palace*, circa 1900.**

In 1877, Cole entered into discussions with investors, who wanted to lease an area of land within the gardens to build an hotel and entertainments complex.

The investors in the new venture anticipated, in similar fashion to what Job Cole had done earlier, that there would be excellent profits to be gained from the large number of visitors travelling by train to Sutton Park and the Town from Birmingham and the Black Country. An added bonus was the opening of Sutton Park Station by the London and North Western and Midland Railway Company in the same year.

Job Cole’s Garden scheme had obviously been a success, but it was on a lower scale and far less ambitious than the *Crystal Palace* plans that were to follow it. By 1881, Cole had moved address once more and was living in the fine surroundings of the Manor Hill area. It should be noted at this juncture that Job had been ably assisted by his sons in the enterprise.



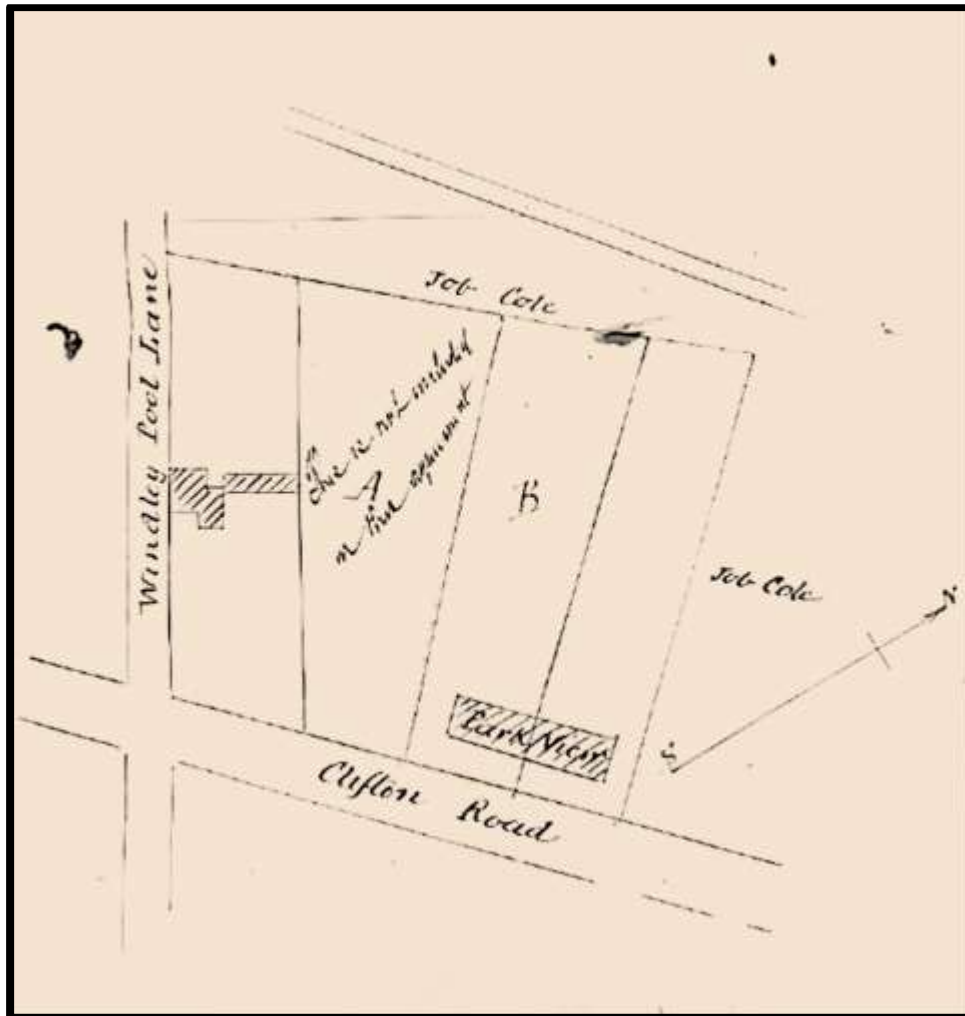


Fig. 6. Plan of Job Cole's house and land, which was named 'Park View'.



Fig. 7. A view of the *Crystal Palace* complex from Sutton Park, circa 1880. This photograph was used as a postcard and on it were the following remarks; "How do you like this view. Not quite like Sydenham is it? But very nice." Vincent.



Fig. 8. The large glass dome, which formed part of the *Crystal Palace*, 1931.

The Birmingham Daily Post, dated Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1877, included an article, which stated;

**SUTTON COLDFIELD CRYSTAL PALACE AQUARIUM AND SKATING RINK COMPANY**

“A meeting of gentlemen, interested in the formation of this company, was held yesterday afternoon, at the offices of Messrs. Hawkes & Weekes, Solicitors, Temple Street, Birmingham.

Mr Hawkes explained that the object of this company was to raise capital to erect in Cole’s Royal Promenade Gardens, Sutton Coldfield, which adjoins the Park, a building similar in character to the Crystal Palace at Sydenham and the main attractions of which would be an aquarium, winter garden and skating rink, together with a hall in which to hold balls, concerts and other entertainments and to establish a central place of attraction at which refreshment could be obtained for the great number of excursionists who annually visit Sutton Coldfield.

Plans of the building had been prepared by Messrs. Davies & Middleton, Architects, Temple Street, Birmingham, who had obtained estimates from contractors. Mr Hawkes further stated that it was proposed to first erect the building upon a site in the Royal Promenade Gardens, a lease of which had been obtained from Mr Cole and, providing the undertaking proved successful, the directors would call up further capital to enable the company to purchase the whole of the Promenade Gardens, which covered an area of about 25 acres. With this view, an agreement had been obtained from Mr Cole, whereby he undertook to sell the gardens on moderate and deferred terms of payment and to take out a portion of the purchase money in shares.

Mr H J Hainge, Accountant, of 82 New Street, Birmingham, produced a certificate from Messrs. Carter & Carter, Accountants, of Waterloo Street, Birmingham, certifying that they had examined Mr Cole’s books and that 110,000 persons last year entered the gardens, 77,500 of whom took special excursion tickets for the gardens by London and North-Western Railway. Mr Hainge also produced figures showing an estimated income, based upon Messrs. Carter’s report, sufficient to pay a dividend of at least 25 per cent.

**Messrs. Davies & Middleton produced complete working plans of the undertaking, which were approved, and a resolution was passed that the following gentlemen should be formed into a provisional directorate, for the purpose of launching the company, viz: Mr Samuel Thornton, Mr Henry Hawkes, Captain Walker, Mr John Avins, Mr James Bartleet, Councillor Wilde, Mr W H Sambidge, Mr John McClelland and Mr O C Hawkes.**

**Messrs. Hawkes & Weekes were appointed Solicitors, Messrs. Carter & Carter, Auditors, Messrs. Davies & Middleton, Architects and Mr J Hainge, Secretary.**

**Shares amounting to one-half of the capital were subscribed for in the room.”**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1877, the first general meeting of the company was held at the Midland Hotel, with Mr Henry Hawkes, J.P., in the chair.

Mr Hawkes stated that the company had been registered on the 2<sup>nd</sup> inst. and the capital of which was £25,000, limited by shares.

He reiterated that the company was established to provide a place of entertainment and refreshment adjoining Sutton Park, to supply the wants of the numerous visitors and, according to the original prospectus, the company had the option of building a Palace in Mr Coles’ Garden and working it in conjunction with that gentleman.

It was the opinion of the directors, however, that it would be better to buy Mr Cole out and acquire the whole garden. In addition, it would be preferable to buy some adjoining land, in order to build an entrance to the gardens near the Park Lodge.

Mr Hawkes also remarked that, since the issuing of the prospectus, the title of the company had been slightly altered by the striking out of the words ‘Aquarium and Skating Rink’, but that the directors did not intend to abandon either of these two enterprises in the long term.

From the report read by the secretary, Mr Hainge, it appeared that more than half of the necessary capital had already been subscribed and that the directors were of the opinion that £1 per share upon allotment, instead of the £2 per share fixed by the prospectus, would be sufficient as so large an amount of capital had already been taken up and the directors could leave part of the purchase money upon mortgage.

**FILE NOTE:** Assuming £13,000 had been subscribed, this amount today would approximately be the equivalent of £1.275M, which indicates that this was a major investment.

Several of the shareholders present expressed the position of matters to be very satisfactory, considering that the undertaking had not yet been advertised formally before the general public.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1878, the Birmingham Daily Post, gave an up-to-date account of what was happening at the *Crystal Palace*. They stated that;

**“This Company, having acquired Mr. Cole’s Royal Promenade Gardens, are now re-building the hotel, constructing a Winter Garden, Skating Rink, an Aquarium and re-arranging and laying out Gardens.**

**It is expected that of the whole of the work will be completed by the middle of May, in time for the commencement of the excursion and holiday season.**

**The hotel, which is of brick with Bath stone dressings, has a frontage to the park of about 140 feet and contains suites of sleeping and sitting apartments, dining rooms, extensive cellars and cooking accommodation, spacious bar, promenade and smoking and billiard rooms.**

It will be fitted up with every convenience and will afford ample accommodation for visitors and parties. The existing conservatory has been lengthened by about 30 feet and utilised as a Winter Garden, which will also be available for dining a large number of persons, as well as for concerts, dancing and other purposes, the space for an orchestra being arranged so as to be of use either for the Winter Garden or the Skating Rink.

The latter adjoins the Winter Garden and has a covered area of 120 feet by 45 feet and, in conjunction with the terrace promenade on either side, gives a grand hall for use on special occasions of 128 feet by 60 feet.

At the end of the rink are the skate room, ticket office, orchestra space and ample lavatory accommodation. There are main entrances on either side of the rink for the public and through these access is obtained for the Winter Garden, Hotel and Terrace Promenade, without in any way interfering with the skating.

At the end of the building furthest from the park is a dome of iron and glass, of which the Winter Garden and Skating Rink are also chiefly constructed and underneath this dome is the Aquarium, which will be fitted up with all the best known appliances for the exhibition and preservation of the fish.

The directors intend to work the undertaking in connection with the railway companies, by the issue of special excursion tickets and when the Midland Railway is open from Water Orton to Walsall, there will, no doubt, be a large increase in visitors to the gardens. The bulk of the company's capital has already been subscribed."

**FILE NOTE:** With regards to the very last statement, the newspaper had been badly informed!

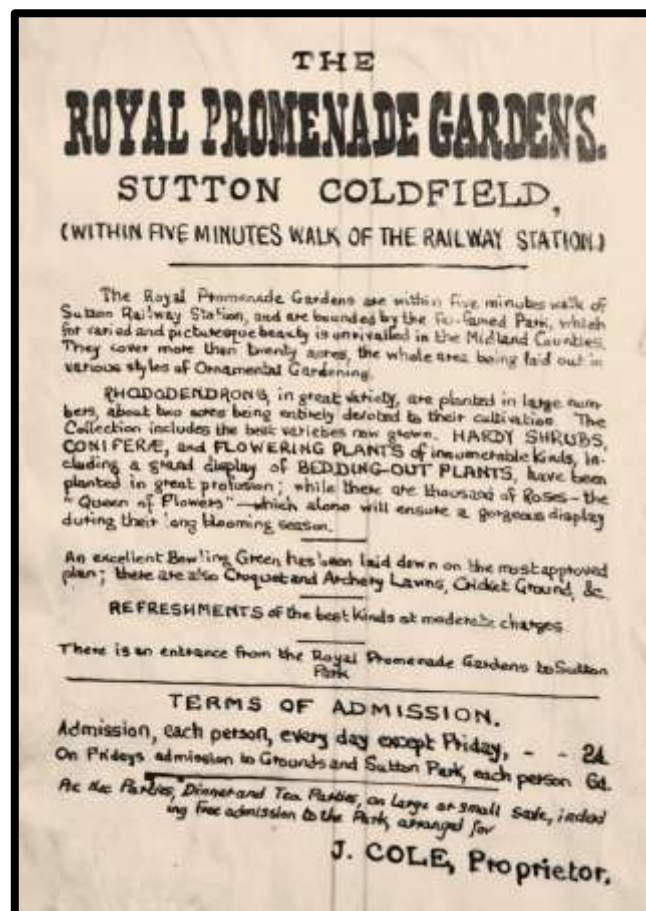


Fig. 9. An advertisement for the Royal Promenade Gardens, placed by Job Cole.



On the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1878 an advertisement appeared in the Birmingham Daily Post, informing the general public that the *Crystal Palace Promenade Gardens* would be opening once more on Whit Monday the 20<sup>th</sup> May. There was no mention of the *Crystal Palace* itself, as it was still in the course of erection.

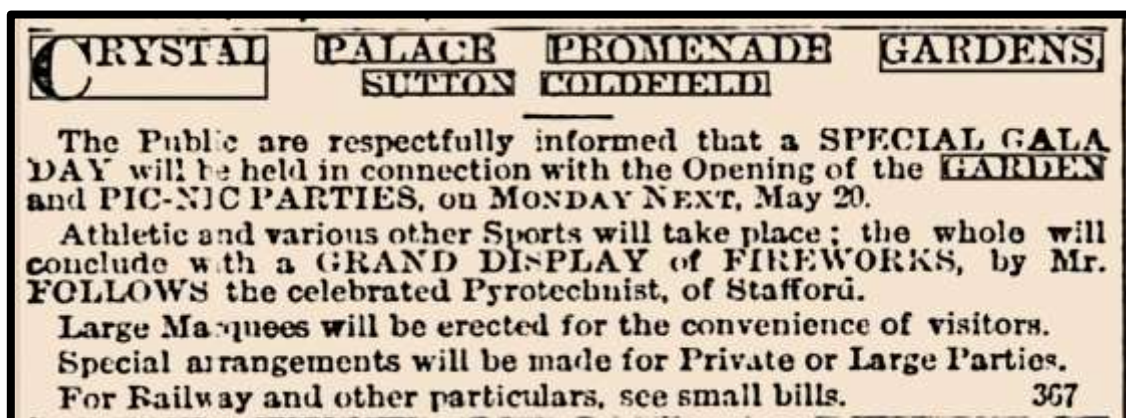


Fig. 10. Advertisement for the *Crystal Palace Promenade Gardens*, which appeared in the Birmingham Daily Post, dated 16<sup>th</sup> May 1878.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> August the following year, the first annual meeting of the Sutton Coldfield Crystal Palace Aquarium and Skating Rink Company took place, in front of a good attendance of shareholders.

The directors, in their report, stated that they had adopted the plans of Mr W H Ward, Architect, for the erection of the hotel and other buildings and had accepted the tender of Messrs. Horsley Brothers of Birmingham, for carrying out the works for a figure of £6,666.

Although the hotel and pavilion were fast approaching completion, it was running behind schedule. Messrs. Horsley Brothers attributed the great delay that had occurred in the finalising of their contract to the inclement weather in the spring. The directors had also made considerable additions and improvements to the original design.

The directors stated they had no reason to doubt that, when the works were complete and the additional railway facilities were in operation, the business would realise the anticipations of the promoters.

The Chairman, in moving the adoption of the report, expressed the confidence of the Board in the future prospects of the company. He said that, had it not been for the delay of the builders in the completion of their contract, the receipts would have been greatly in excess of those stated in the accounts.

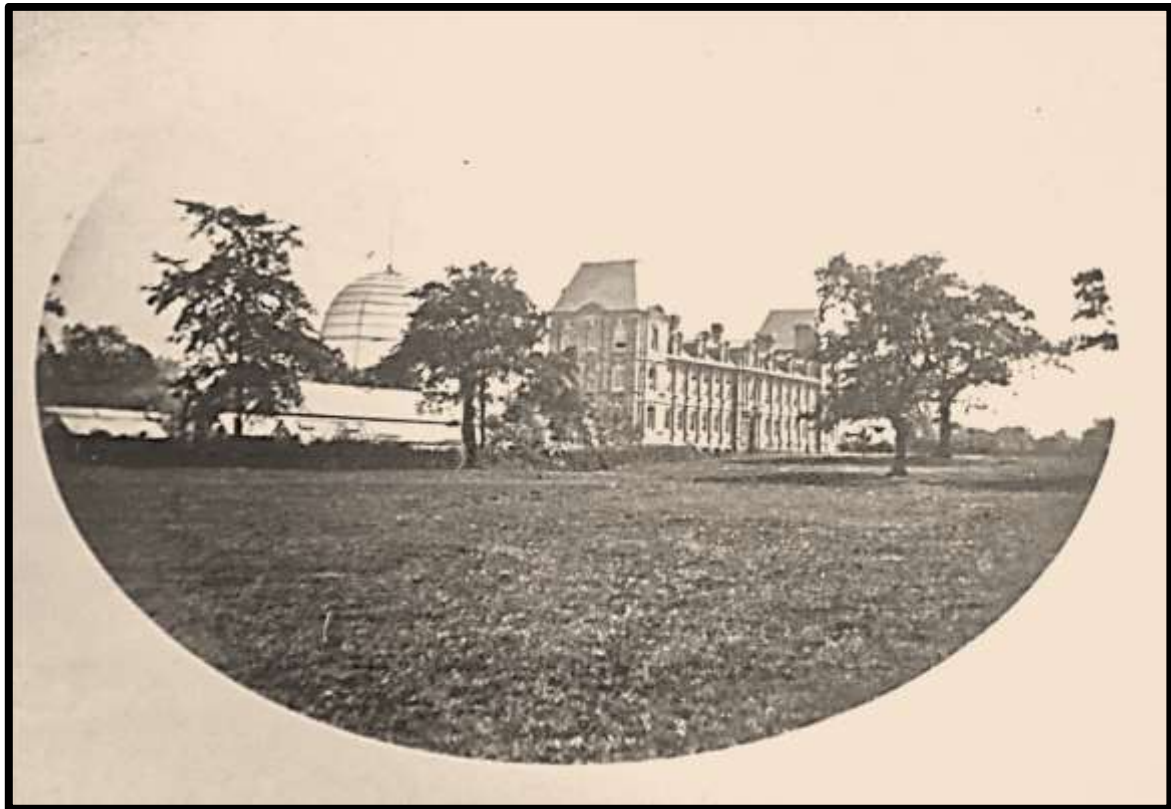
He also pointed out that, as the whole of the capital had not been subscribed, the directors had been unable to include in the present contract the Aquarium, Museum and Skating Rink. For his own part, he did not consider the Aquarium and Skating Rink absolutely necessary.

Mr Hawkes said it was desirable that the Museum and Lecture Rooms should be made a prominent feature of the scheme and referred to the suburban literary institutions now rising on all sides of the town, as a means of providing for the culture of the people.

The report was adopted and the retiring directors were re-elected.



**Fig. 11. A distant view of the *Crystal Palace*, taken from the Sanatorium, previously the Royal Hotel, circa 1890's.**



**Fig. 12. Another view of the *Crystal Palace*, taken from Sutton Park, circa 1890's.**

In 1880, the *Crystal Palace* was chosen to become the Headquarters for the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Sutton Coldfield Volunteer Rifle Corps and, on the 15<sup>th</sup> December, approximately 40 new recruits gathered there to be sworn in and to receive their first drill instruction, given by drill sergeants from the Regimental Headquarters.

The purpose of the Rifle Volunteers was to provide part-time soldiers, who could later be called upon to support the regular army in the defence of the country against invasion.



The parade ground was situated in front of the *Crystal Palace* and, on wet days, they retired inside to receive lectures on various subjects relating to armaments, tactics etc.

Thomas Vincent Holbeche, a prominent Sutton Coldfield figure, himself enlisted the same year. He was soon given the rank of First Lieutenant and was later promoted to Captain.

In May 1885, an article appeared in the Warwickshire Herald describing one of their annual parades;

**“The Sutton Coldfield Volunteers, F Company 1<sup>st</sup> Volunteer Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, attended for Divine Service at the Parish Church on Sunday last. The company paraded at the Crystal Palace at half-past ten in the morning and on falling in comprised Captain Howell, Lieutenant Holbeche, Lieutenant Tisdall, Lieutenant Bedford, Sergeant-instructor Taylor, 6 sergeants, 3 buglers and 110 rank and file, making a total of 124 men. There were 7 absent through sickness and 12 from other causes, making up the full strength of the company to 143.**

**Headed by the band of the regiment, the company marched out of the Palace grounds, up the Clifton Road, along Anchorage Road, Lichfield Road, High Street and Coleshill Street, to the church. The return march was down Mill Street, along the Parade, Manor Road and Clifton Road to the Palace, where the men dispersed.**

**During the offertory, the band played the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus inside the church porch.**

**The sermon was preached by the Rector, the Reverend W K Riland Bedford.”**

The 1881 Census Return provided details of the occupants of the *Crystal Palace* at the time, which were, as follows;

Frederick Taylor	Head	Married	25	Hotel Manager	Middlesex, London
Harriet Taylor	Wife	Married	28	Hotel Manageress	King’s Heath, Worcestershire
Harriet Gough	Servant	Single	17	Barmaid	Wolverley, Worcestershire
Jane Morgan	Servant	Widow	66	Cook	Bilston, Staffrdshire
Matthew Payne	Servant	Single	21	Cellarman	Stourbridge, Worcetershire

Roger Lea, also provided information on the *Crystal Palace*;

**“In 1881, the owners were described as being the Crystal Palace Company, with 26 acres of land and a rateable value of £350. The company also rented Wyndley Pool from the Somerville Estate.**

***The Crystal Palace and Gardens* were managed, at this time, by a Mr O E McGregor, who was also the proprietor of the Molyneux House and Pleasure Grounds in Wolverhampton.**

**He offered cheap excursions during the summer months via the London & North Western and Midland Railway Company. The overall charge for the journey by rail and admission to the Crystal Palace, Gardens and Park was one shilling.**

***A Guide to Sutton Park* by Eliezer Edwards, published in 1880, described the *Crystal Palace and Grounds* in glowing terms over several pages, during which he highlighted a ‘Splendid bicycle track, half a mile in circuit.’**

**This had been laid out a few years previously, on a nine-acre meadow, when cycling had become a popular pastime with men about town.**

**One snag the cyclists encountered, however, was that, when riding the penny-farthing bicycle, popular during the 1870’s and 1880’s, upon hitting a pothole the rider was likely to be pitched over the handlebars, so a smooth, purpose-built cycle track proved to be very desirable indeed.”**

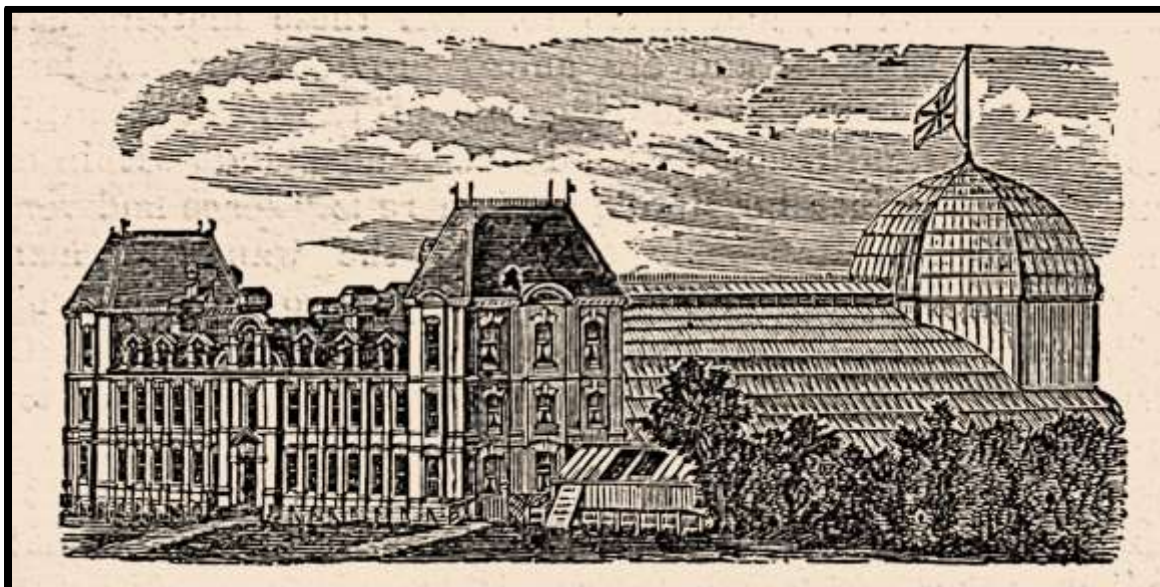


Fig. 13. An advertisement for the *Crystal Palace* in 1880, when the Proprietor was a Mr O E McGregor.

Referring back to Roger Lea's comments, regarding the description of the *Crystal Palace* in the 1880 *A Guide to Sutton Park*, the author of the guide, Eliezer Edwards, certainly waxed lyrical on the subject and had spoken glowingly of the benefits that could be found in the gardens and also the adjoining hotel. He stated that;

**"The Crystal Palace at Sutton and the beautiful grounds by which it is surrounded, are a fitting supplement to the natural beauties of the locality. They are situated within a few minutes' walk of each of the three Sutton railway stations and are but a short distance from the town itself. They adjoin the park, into which there is a private entrance from the grounds.**

The gardens are about 30 acres in extent and are laid out with much taste. The alternations of greensward and flowerbeds, of over-hanging bowers and groups of pleasant evergreens, of winding walks by the margins of crystal streams and placid pools and of open spaces for dancing and other recreative games, render it one of the most delightful spots in the Midland Counties. The native charms of the place have so utilised, and art has so improved nature, that, as a whole, there are few places so well adapted as these gardens for recreative purposes and for the thorough enjoyment of a day in the country.

In addition to their sylvan and rustic beauty, the gardens have the great advantage of having been admirably adapted to their intended purposes. People when they go into the country to enjoy themselves, want something to eat and to drink, as well as to look at and listen to. All these matters have been thought of here and are amply provided for.

A large and picturesque hotel, overlooking one of the most beautiful parts of Sutton Park, adjoins the Crystal Palace and stands within the grounds. Under its hospitable roof there is space and verge enough for simultaneously satisfying the wants of many hundreds of visitors, promptly, quickly, economically and comfortably. From the simple sandwich, or bun, to the *recherché* dinner of half-a-dozen courses, the wishes of all can be met and no matter whether a dinner party consisting of a dozen or of a thousand persons, the comfort of each guest is secured and their requirements satisfactorily and sufficiently supplied.

Ample provision has also been made for the amusement and recreation of the visitors. There are boats for sailing or rowing, canoes for paddling, and punts for patient fishermen upon Wyndley Pool, which adjoins the gardens and is leased by the Crystal Palace Company. A gateway from the gardens opens upon the dam of the pool. There is a splendid bicycle track, nearly half-a-mile in circuit and the centre of this circle has been levelled and is one of the best cricketing grounds in the district. There are swings for children, dancing ground for more ambitious people, shady avenues

for ‘spooning’ purposes and arbours for those whose spooning days, like mine, are over, and to sit quietly and enjoy the grateful incense of a good cigar.

Twice a week, in the summer season, a military band is in attendance and enlivens the visitors with delicious music. Then there is a wicket gate opening from the gardens into Sutton’s grand old park, where visitors can stroll through leafy glades and magnificent old woods, till they are tired. When, on coming back to the gardens, the ‘comforts’ without which there is little permanent enjoyment, are available at a moment’s notice.

Usually, as a day’s out draws to a close, there are ‘disagreeables’ about getting home again. Some exuberant souls want to stop a bit longer, but mothers who have brought their children and old folk whose breath is shaky, don’t like the night air and want to go home. These gardens are so situated that these little matters are easily and satisfactorily arranged. With a trifling distance, at intervals of half-an-hour or so, trains start for Birmingham and elsewhere, so that for those who wish to get home early have no difficulty, while those whose appetite for enjoyment is so keen that they will insist upon staying to see the fireworks, may remain until the gardens close and yet find the train ready to take them home in time to secure a good night’s rest.

Sometimes a day’s holiday in the country is spoiled by unpropitious weather. That makes little difference at the Crystal Palace. It is true that you cannot wander in the park, or stroll among the flowers and shrubs, but the beautiful and roomy glass pavilion is at your service, where you can dance, or romp, or gambol, or enjoy yourselves in your own way, regardless of gloomy clouds and drenching rain outside. There are also cozy nooks in an underground grotto, where quiet and elderly people can sit and smoke and chat, wondering why places like this were not available when they were young.

This is a marvellous age of improvement and these gardens are an outcome of the times. There are no brutalising dog-fights, bull-baitings, cock-fighting or pugilism here. The whole surroundings are humanising, healthful and pleasant and are so satisfactory in all their arrangements that, when night comes on and visitors are obliged to go, their thoughts range into the region of the future and, in most cases, long before their trains reach New Street, the weary excursionists are planning when to come again.



Fig. 14. The gardens of the *Crystal Palace*, circa 1880's.

The writer could certainly tell a fine tale and would almost certainly have been able to ‘sell coals to Newcastle’ should the opportunity have arisen. In addition to all the delights highlighted, however, he omitted to mention that in the glasshouse was a vinery which contained orange trees laden with fruit!

Unfortunately, words alone do not balance the books.

In July 1881, before the Master of the Rolls, a creditor's petition was presented for the winding up of the Sutton Park Crystal Palace Company. The petitioning creditor claimed £303 balance of an account for goods supplied to the company. Although the Master of the Rolls ordered the petition to stand over for a week, it spelled the beginning of the end for the company.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1882, a newspaper article in the Tamworth Herald revealed more sombre news relating to the *Crystal Palace*.

The article was headed - 'The Liquidation of the Sutton Coldfield Crystal Palace Company' and it went on to say;

**"At the Sutton Coldfield Police Court on Tuesday, before the Warden (Mr H Duncalfe) and the Reverend Montagu Webster, Mr Bibby, on behalf of the overseers of the parish, summoned Mr Job Cole for rates, amounting to £14.0s.9d., made upon land in his occupation, known as the *Crystal Palace Gardens*, Sutton Park.**

**Mr Sadler appeared for Mr Cole.**

**A summons was also taken out against Mr Harold Carter of Birmingham, for £15.0s.0d., for rates levied upon the *Crystal Palace* buildings.**

**The Crystal Palace Company went into liquidation some time ago and Mr Carter was appointed liquidator, preparatory to winding up the affairs of the company.**

**Mr Bibby said that Mr Cole was in possession of the gardens, but denied that he was liable for the rates. Several applications had been made for payment, but to no purpose. He now applied for a distress warrant, which would bring matters to a climax.**

**Mr Cole was then examined. He said a demand had been made upon him for the rates upon the Palace Gardens. None of the demand notes were addressed to him personally. He had never admitted to Mr Bibby that he owed them. The only arrangement made with reference to the gardens was that, when they were handed over to the mortgagee, he was put in possession. He admitted going to Mr Bibby's office and asking for the rates to be divided.**

**The Bench, after some considerable discussion, decided that Mr Cole was liable for the rates upon the gardens and Mr Carter, the liquidator, for those upon the buildings and made orders accordingly."**

The exact sequence of events leading up to the liquidation of the Sutton Coldfield Crystal Palace Company is unknown, but there are a number of possibilities that could have occurred, which may have attributed to its downfall.

1. At the time of the first General Meeting, it was decided not to proceed with the Aquarium and Skating Rink elements of the plan, which gave an early indication that, perhaps, the amount of funds available was not as much as was generally stated.
2. The directors also said they intended to take out a mortgage on the amount not taken up by investors, should it be deemed necessary. This obviously took place but, unless favourable terms were negotiated from the outset, a mortgage can become very onerous in a relatively short span of time and thus become a 'millstone around the neck'.
3. At the next meeting, a year later, it was seen that the building work had been substantially delayed. This would have seriously impacted upon the anticipated revenue flows, because they did not commence at the expected time.



4. The required working capital had been calculated to be £15,000, comprising 5,000 shares @ £3 each. In the event, only 2,903 shares were actually issued totalling £8,909, which was considerably short of the amount envisaged.
5. Finally, the *Crystal Palace* scenario seemed eerily similar to the one that occurred less than twenty years earlier involving the Royal Hotel scheme. The year 1862, signalled the arrival of the railway into Sutton, which was backed by a consortium of businessmen. Those same businessmen, who promoted the railway, also speculated upon the fact that Sutton would subsequently become a popular resort, due to the large influx of visitors to the town, using the new form of quick and safe transport now available to them. They were also of the opinion that the visitors would then require superior accommodation to satisfy their needs and that it should be provided close to the terminus of the railway in Sutton.

The Sutton Royal Hotel was set up and the luxurious hotel opened in May 1865, which was two years later than had been hoped for. Miss Sarah Holbeche, writing in her diary, was critical of the hotel project, believing it to be far too costly and badly planned.

Unfortunately, as it was in the case of the *Crystal Palace*, the anticipated demand did not materialise. The expected profits did not happen and the company was very soon in financial difficulties and was officially liquidated in 1866.

It filed for Bankruptcy in the High Court of Justice, Chancery Division, London and was dissolved with effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1866. It was agreed that the company would pay ten shillings in the pound to its creditors, owing to it being in debt to the tune of £13,000. The hotel was put up for sale by auction and, on the 28<sup>th</sup> March, a bid of £4,000 was accepted for a business that previously had been valued at £21,000, resulting in a lot of speculators having their fingers burned!



**Fig. 15. Artist's impression of the Royal Hotel, with a locomotive on the turntable below, prior to its return journey to Birmingham, circa 1865. The painting was probably commissioned to celebrate the opening of the hotel the same year.**

The Royal remained as a hotel for many years after that, but it never really flourished and finally it was sold in the 1890's to become a Sanatorium.

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Returning once more to the Royal Crystal Palace, Job Cole died on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1893 at the age of 74, thus ending his long association with Sutton. Probate was granted to his widow the following year, his personal effects being £240.5s.0d. (equivalent to £25,900 today).

After the failure of the Sutton Coldfield Crystal Palace Company, the complex had numerous subsequent owners. The first being Mr Samuel Penrhyn Aston, who was in occupation for most of the 1880's. He had previously been the Headmaster of St. Thomas's School in Holloway Head, Birmingham. He then became a Postmaster in Small Heath, prior to his move to Sutton. Samuel Aston remained at the *Crystal Palace* until 1888.

He was succeeded by a Mr Charles Earle. He was a newcomer to Sutton Coldfield and he rented 'Umberslade', a house in nearby Clifton Road.



Fig. 16. An advertisement for the *Royal Crystal Palace* placed by Charles Earle, circa 1890.

The 1891 Census Return indicated that Earle was living at the Crystal Palace with his wife Jane and his wife's widowed daughter, Sarah Newlands.

Charles Earle	Head	Married	59	On Own Means	Birmingham, Warwickshire
Jane Earle	Wife	Married	72	-	Nechells, Warwickshire
Sarah Newlands	Daughter	Widow	43	-	Witton, Warwickshire

During the next few years, Earle became a somewhat notorious figure in Sutton. He was involved in a number of altercations, which ended in court proceedings. In September 1888, he was fined when he confronted a visitor to the *Crystal Palace Gardens* who had not paid the entrance fee. It was said that;

**“He had thrashed the man and hurt him very much.”**

The same year, he was summoned for not paying his rates. Those who lived close to the *Crystal Palace* came to regard him as a great nuisance and there were complaints that Earle did nothing to stop drunken and disorderly behaviour. It was claimed that visitors to the attraction were extremely noisy when they left at night. For his part, Earle declared that he was being harassed by a number of his neighbours and the police.



Charles Earle, it would seem, like many of his customers, was partial to a 'wee dram' or two which, in a publican, was not a habit to be encouraged.

The police said that Earle had promised to end the drunken behaviour. But it had since become a thousand times worse.

Matters came to a head in September 1891 and an article in the Birmingham & Aston Chronicle provided details;

## **THE CRYSTAL PALACE LICENSE**

### **THE LANDLORD COMMITTED TO THE ASSIZES**

**"The adjourned licensing sessions for the Borough of Sutton Coldfield were held on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September when Mr R H Sadler made application on behalf of Mr Charles Earle, the proprietor of the Crystal Palace, for the renewal of his license, before the sitting magistrates, which included the Mayor (Alderman A H Evans).**

**Mr Sadler based his application on the great accommodation which the Palace was to thousands who visited Sutton Park in the summer and pointed out that it was absolutely the only place where large parties could be catered for. He admitted that his client's conduct during the past few months had not been all that could be desired, but assured the Bench that Mr Earle would, in future, conduct the place with propriety and order.**

**Mr Earle had been a licensed victualler for thirty-eight years and, until coming to Sutton Coldfield, had borne an unblemished character.**

**Superintendent Walker opposed the renewal of the license on the ground of the manner in which the place had been conducted since the last licensing sessions and put in a memorial opposing the license. He also proved two convictions and fines of £5 and costs.**

**In his opinion Mr Earle was not a fit and proper person to hold the license and he therefore asked the Bench to withhold the granting of it until a fit and proper occupier of the premises could be found.**

**The Bench assented to the suggestion and adjourned the application till the 10th October.**

**Earle was now charged on remand with attempting to cause grievous bodily harm to P.C. Mansell by shooting at him on the night of Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> inst. Mr R H Sadler defended.**

**The evidence showed that a butcher named Harry Brown of Reddicap Hill was coming down Mill Street along with P.C. Mansell and P.C. Rogers when they met the defendant. Mansell wished him 'Good night'. The defendant immediately turned round and presented a gun at Mansell saying "Stand back or I will let go." Mansell said, "Don't be a silly fool, Mr Earle," but as the defendant repeated the threat, he seized the gun, which went off in the scuffle. Mr Earle**

**was then taken to the police station. The gun, on being examined, was found to contain an empty cartridge in the left barrel and a loaded one in the right.**

**Mr Sadler contended that the gun went off by accident and that if mischief had been intended, Mr Earle, as a sportsman, would have pulled the right barrel and not the left.**

**The prisoner was committed for trial at the assizes, bail being granted for £200 with two sureties of £100 each.**

**Two other charges of firing a gun in the street and damaging the cell in which he was confined since the remand, were withdrawn, the defendant agreeing to pay for all the damage he had done."**

Earle obviously suffered from a serious drinking problem, which made him lose control when under the influence.

Not surprisingly, the application for a drinks license went against him.

Another one of Earle's less attractive traits was the fact that he was a wife-beater, especially when drunk. On one occasion his wife, whilst he was away, removed all the furniture from their house. Upon his return and finding out what she had done, he struck his wife, knocking her down, which resulted in her cutting her head as she fell.

Mrs Earle applied for a separation, which she duly obtained and, in addition, she was granted an allowance from her husband.

In early 1893, another incident occurred at the *Crystal Palace* which found its way into the newspapers. An article in the Birmingham Post dated the 6<sup>th</sup> January stated;

#### **SALE AT THE 'CRYSTAL PALACE', SUTTON COLDFIELD**

##### **A 'BARGAIN' IN ACADEMY PICTURES**

**"Another chapter in the history of the unfortunate '*Crystal Palace*' at Sutton Coldfield was concluded on Thursday, when practically all of the contents of the building were sold by auction, at what an enterprising shopkeeper would delight to call 'an alarming sacrifice'.**

**The fact that 23 pictures worth, at a moderate estimate of £500-£600, were sold for £34, that a switchback railway fetched only £20, less than the value of the timber for firewood purposes and that a marquee, the sale price of which was £450, was 'knocked down' for £19, will probably make many speculative people regret that they were not amongst the score or so bidders, who took any practical part in Thursdays sale.**

**For the rest of the 200-300 people who composed the company, they were evidently there out of mere curiosity aroused, no doubt, by the article published by the '*Post*' on the 24<sup>th</sup> ult. exposing the circumstances under which a number of artists had lent their pictures to what was called an 'Oriental Art & Industrial Exhibition' at the '*Crystal Palace*', Sutton Coldfield.**

**A brief summary of that article, which created a great deal of interest, will not be out of place here. Mr Hayward, of the Manor House, Sutton Coldfield, as the owner of the freehold of the '*Crystal Palace*' and grounds, let the property to a Mr Earle on a 99-years' lease and it is understood that a Mr Roberts, commonly known as 'the Captain', became a sub-lessee on a 14-years' lease. Just before his lesseeship, however, the license formerly attached to the '*Crystal Palace*' was refused. This was, of course, a great blow to the undertaking and 'the Captain' had to look around for other sources of attraction.**

**Then it was that he and his friends conceived the idea of an 'Oriental Art & Industrial Exhibition'. Circulars were issued, with a list of patrons calculated to quieten the most suspicious and, in the end, about a score of pictures of considerable value were lent. The artists included, the following names;**

**Messrs. E R Taylor (Headmaster of the Birmingham Municipal School of Art)  
G C Harte  
A J Nowell  
H Holland  
H L Norris  
W Gale  
F Hamilton Jackson  
A W Bayes  
E Chappelle**

J Coulson  
W Luker  
J H Henshall  
M R Corbett  
C P Downing, etc.

Without mincing words, the exhibition was a complete failure and locally, in consequence of the frequent visits of the Sheriff's officers to the building, it became known as the 'Bailiff's Mansion', not the '*Crystal Palace*'.

'The 'Captain' resided, with other friends, on the premises and the wonder was that the venture had, so to speak, kept its head above water. However, in October, certain of the artists became suspicious and ultimately Mr E R Taylor paid a personal visit to the '*Crystal Palace*' to secure his picture. He then found it in the possession of the bailiffs, put in by the landlord, who had ordered a 'Sale by Auction' to settle a rent debt of about £100.

**FILE NOTE:** The equivalent in purchasing power today of approximately £10,800.

Notwithstanding the very unpretentious character of the announcement of the sale, which was fixed for the 23<sup>rd</sup> December, the news of the proceedings reached the ears of the ground landlord and he stopped the sale by producing a Warrant for a sum of £250, which was due for rent.

It was well known that he had the legal power to sell everything in the place till his claim was satisfied, therefore the artists and their friends were left in a state of considerable anxiety as to what course would be pursued. The information came in the form of another obscure advertisement announcing the sale by another auctioneer, on the instructions of Mr Hayward, for the 5<sup>th</sup> January 1894.

Mr E R Taylor and one or two gentlemen representing other artists, thought it well to be present and accordingly they attended the sale on Thursday at an early hour. The catalogue, issued to the company, announced 280 lots and included 23 works in the so-called 'picture gallery', which was a dismal, ill-lighted entrance-hall. The lots were simply described as;

A large oil painting, ditto, ditto, four pictures, ditto and so on.

There being no details as to the names of the artists, nor any limit as to the value of the paintings. The contents of this 'picture gallery' were low down in the catalogue, so those who had paid a special visit concerning them had to wait for hours in the intensely cold building, while over two hundred lots of miscellaneous goods were disposed of, such as furniture, fittings, pewter mugs, crockery, garden seats and even parrots and monkeys!

Some of these articles were sold under humorous conditions. The monkeys, for instance, had to be caught before they could be purchased and considerable fun resulted. In the end they fetched about a crown a piece and were taken home in a bag by a Walsall dealer.

A very large marquee, lent out on hire by Messrs. Piggot of London, sold for £19 to a representative of that firm, so they effectively had to pay to get back their own goods and a switchback railway, as previously stated, only realised £20.

As time approached for the sale of the pictures, a great deal of interest was manifested in the whispered consultations between the friends of the artists on the one hand and Mr Hayward and Mr Roberts on the other. At one time, the rumour went round that the pictures, at least the two most important ones, were to be carried off by force and there were plenty of sympathisers ready to lend a helping hand.

Mr Hayward seemed anxious that they should be sold, as the artists present were fairly sure of buying them in at a nominal figure. On the other hand, Mr Roberts urged him again and again not to sell them and Mr Earle's agent, who was also present, said if they were sold, they should be seized on behalf of the clients.

These differences of opinion seemed likely to end in a ‘scene’ but, fortunately, that was averted by the instructions that had been given to the auctioneer. When all the lots had been sold, the auctioneer led the way into the entrance hall and, without any delay, asked for a bid for;

‘This lot of twenty-three oil paintings and watercolours.’

With a start of £10, the bidding went rapidly up to £34, when the lot was knocked down to Mr E R Taylor, whose intention it was to see that they fell into the hands of their respective owners.

During the afternoon, Mr Roberts told our representative that the ground landlord had pledged himself to return the pictures, so that possibly Mr Hayward may see his way, with the co-operation, which will no doubt be readily given by Mr Taylor, to come to an arrangement by which each artist will have his work or works restored to him free of any cost whatsoever.

The sale nearly realised the amount for which the distraint was issued. What is to follow nobody knows, though much interest is locally felt concerning the future of the *Royal Crystal Palace*, Sutton Coldfield.”



Fig. 17. A view of the *Crystal Palace* Hotel, from Sutton Park, 1904.

In 1906, an accident occurred which did nothing to add to the diminishing reputation of the *Crystal Palace*. Douglas V Jones in his book *'The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield – A Commemorative History'* stated;

“The *Crystal Palace* was a Mecca for thousands of visitors every year and, in 1906, it featured in an item of news in the national press, when the ‘Daily Mail’ proclaimed”;

#### PANIC AT A CHILDREN’S TREAT

“A panic occurred yesterday (14<sup>th</sup> August), during the feeding of a large gathering of Birmingham’s poor children at Sutton Park, a large common a few miles out of the city. The children, who numbered 5,000, were provided with tea in the *Crystal Palace* and ate in batches of 1,000 at a time. As one section was leaving the hall, the floor collapsed and thirty or forty children fell into the cellar. A good deal of alarm was caused, but the rush of children was checked by the attendants and no one was seriously injured.”

**FILE NOTE:** After the accident, the *Crystal Palace* was condemned by the Council. Repairs were eventually put in hand and in July 1908 the Borough Surveyor for Sutton Coldfield passed the building as safe for occupation once more.

The children were from deprived areas of Birmingham and the Black Country and the outings were generally organised by the 'Royal Robins', an organisation which was founded by Mr J G Pentland in 1893. Other local charities soon followed his example, such as the Birmingham Cinderella Club.



**Fig. 18.** A huge party of deprived children from Smethwick arriving at Sutton Park in a long column, via the Town Gate entrance. It is headed by a brass band to enliven the proceedings.

After breathing in the fresh air and marvelling at the trees and green open spaces, which most would not have had the opportunity of ever seeing before, they would have enjoyed a picnic sitting on the grass.

The children were often bare footed and sometimes they may have been lucky enough to be given a pair of boots. It is rumoured, however, that their parents sold them later when they arrived home, to eke out the family's meagre household budgets.



**Fig. 19.** A group of 'Royal Robins' children taken in 1898. They look so cheerful, but they had nothing but the very barest of necessities. Compare these with the children of today.



These days were so well loved and popular that, 45 years after they were initiated, they were still going strong. An article in the Birmingham Gazette, dated the 11<sup>th</sup> August 1938, highlighted the event;

**“Yesterday was a red-letter day for 3,000 children from the poorer parts of Birmingham. Three special trains were chartered to take the children from New Street to Sutton Town Station, from where they were walked to Blackroot Pool.**

**All types of games were indulged in after lunch and, at intervals, a Concert Party and a Punch & Judy show provided amusement.**

**The Birmingham Robins’ outing was not the only one to Sutton for, a few hours after their arrival, four more trains from Birmingham and Wolverhampton brought a further 2,000 children and parents as the guests of Messrs. M Bywater & Co., the pork butchers of Small Heath. The occasion was the annual outing given to customers and their children.**

**The venue was the Crystal Palace Fairground, where a happy afternoon was spent.”**

The town’s traders often helped with contributions. Mr Gibbins, for instance, supplied apples and oranges from his greengrocer’s shop situated in Mill Street.

Precise events after 1906 are unclear, but the lease on the grounds seems to have changed hands again. The zoo operated by a Mr Kings also closed with financial troubles and it would appear this may have been a time when leases were re-negotiated and things sorted out as to who was going to do what on the site.

Although better times did come again, it never really recovered its original popularity. It gradually began to suffer from neglect and lack of maintenance.

In 1907, a miniature railway began running next to the *Crystal Palace* grounds and this was purchased by Pat Collins in 1912. He continued to operate it until the First World War began, when the *Crystal Palace* and Sutton Park were taken over for military purposes.

A typical outing to Sutton Park and the funfair was described in an article which appeared in the Walsall Observer on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1912;

**“On Tuesday the Walsall Wood Church Band of Hope had their annual outing, the place chosen this year being Sutton Park. Five brakes and wagonettes, in charge of Mr Sheargold were loaded to the full by the children and their parents and friends.**



Fig. 20. A horse-drawn brake, circa 1890.





Fig. 21. A horse-drawn wagonette.

The Vicar, the Reverend W W Boulton accompanied the party, which made its way along the main road over Shire Oak Hill into Lichfield. The cathedral was visited and the vicar kindly pointed out to the interested visitors the most important relics and regimental colours and tombs of past bishops of the cathedral, also that most beautiful piece of sculpture, the ‘Sleeping Children’.

The Museum was visited and the home of Dr. Johnson and his statue in the Market Square came in for much attention.

The horses being refreshed, the party wended their way to Sutton Park, where the switchback, miniature railway, boating and rowing was indulged in by the merry children, while the elder people enjoyed to the full the beauties of the magnificent park.

Tea was provided at the White House and after full justice had been done to the good things, the party mustered for home, which was reached after a very pleasant ride about 8.30 p.m.

**FILE NOTE:** The White House in Sutton Park was also known as the White Cottage and Hollyhurst Cottage, at various times.

The most admirable arrangements were made by Mr & Mrs A Hall and Mr & Mrs John Cresswell. The children and friends of the Band of Hope had great cause to rejoice at such a pleasurable day’s enjoyment.”



Fig. 22. Advertisement for the White House, Hollyhurst, Sutton Park, circa 1901.



**Fig. 23. The White House Tea Rooms, Hollyhurst, Sutton Park, circa 1901.**

With regards to the amusements in the grounds of the *Crystal Palace*, it would appear that Pat Collins ‘retired’ his older rides to the park, after they ceased travelling around the country.

After the end of the First World War, Collins seemed to have been quite keen to re-establish the site and by June 1919 he was able to announce its re-opening. His advertisements list the rides to be found there namely;

**A Switchback, the Joy Wheel, the Helter-Skelter, Gondolas, Bicycles, Swing boats and Sideshows.**

Because the amusements were being offered on a fixed site, it could reasonably be assumed that the attractions were permanent but, of course, they were always changing and were taken in and out of the park, when they were required for travelling.

For a time, the site was managed by Mr R H Delaney, who had been associated with Pat Collins for many years.



**Fig. 24. Mr Richard Henry Delaney,  
Manager of Pat Collins’ Amusement Park.**

Mr Delaney ran the park until his death at the end of 1934. He had given 48 years' service to Pat Collins, assisted by his wife, Minnie, for 30 of those years.

The period from 1912-1914 was described as the most prosperous in fairground history, a kind of golden age for all concerned. The emerging scenic railways, the organs, the fantastic show fronts and the sheer variety of the entertainments on offer, all added up to a spectacular fairground scene.

The last two years before the First World War, saw Pat Collins trying to add to his network of fairs.

It was clear that, by 1914, Pat had some of the best showground equipment in the business and he had established a reputation, both for himself and for his fairs, that made his 'King of Showmen' title difficult to dispute.

The end of World War I, in 1918, was the start of another period of change in the life of Pat Collins. He moved his base from Shaw Street, Walsall to Bloxwich. He also consolidated his interests in permanently sited amusements such as theatres and skating rinks and he took his first formal steps into local civic life.

Collins had become fascinated with cinematography, after including a bioscope in many of his fairs.

The heyday of the travelling bioscope shows, an early type of silent cinematograph, was between the late 1890's and the First World War.

The bioscope itself was a portable viewing device, which was hand cranked by the operator.

Although the bioscope was very basic, the show fronts became extremely elaborate, with ornate carvings and often featured a large fairground organ. The main auditorium was situated behind the show front.

The films shown in the bioscope were very primitive to begin with and the earliest ones were made by the showmen themselves. Later on, however, the films were commercially produced.



**Fig. 25. A bioscope at Nottingham Goose Fair in 1908, showing the ornate carved and gilded proscenium. The bioscope at this time was at the height of its popularity.**



Pat Collins subsequently began to acquire cinemas, eventually owning thirteen of them. Of these, three were local cinemas, namely;

The 'Alhambra' at Dudley Port.

The 'Grosvenor' at Bloxwich.

The 'Olympia' at Darlaston.

He purchased the 'Electric Palace' cinema in 1918 and ran it until he closed it on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1921. He then arranged for it to be demolished and replaced it with a new 1,000-seater cinema, which he named the 'Grosvenor'.

The 'Grosvenor' was opened on the 11<sup>th</sup> December 1922 by Lady Grosvenor of Chester, who was a friend of Collins.



Fig. 26. Poster advertising the opening of the 'Grosvenor' cinema in 1922.

In 1931, Collins sold the cinema to Oscar Deutch & Associates which, in 1935, became part of the Odeon chain of cinemas. It closed as a cinema on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1959 and eventually, in 2014, the building was taken over by the J D Wetherspoon Group. It opened in early 2015, after a complete refurbishment and named the 'Bloxwich Showman', in honour of Pat Collins.



**Fig. 27. The 'Grosvenor' cinema, Bloxwich, shortly after its sale to Oscar Deutsch & Associates in 1931.**

On the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1918, Pat Collins was co-opted onto Walsall Council, as Councillor for the Birchills Ward, which he represented until 1930.

Throughout the war, *Crystal Palace Amusements* in Sutton Park had been closed but, when the war ended, preparations were started to re-open as soon as possible and this occurred in June 1919.

The re-establishment of the fairground as a popular place for leisure activities had begun and continued for many more years.

In 1922, Pat Collins' name was put forward to be the Liberal Party candidate for Walsall and, much to everyone's surprise, he triumphed over the Conservative candidate, having polled 14,674 votes to 14,349, a majority of just 325!

Little did Pat realise that, in the short space of just two years, he would have to fight two more General Elections. He retained his seat in 1923, again beating the Conservative candidate. However, at this period of time, the Liberals were unable to provide a stable Government and another General Election was called in 1924. When all the votes were counted, Pat Collins lost by 15,168 votes to 12,734 to the Conservative, W Preston.

Pat Collins' brief sojourn into politics and Parliament did nothing to change his philosophy and he once declared;

**"I am a showman first and a politician second. I am a worker and a fighter, rather than an orator. There is only one object in my life and that is to see fair play."**

During the remainder of the 1920's, Pat re-directed his energy to his business and the Guild of Showmen. At the beginning of 1930, the Guild took the opportunity to express their appreciation of Pat's long-term period as President, just prior to his retirement from the post.

By now Pat was in his seventies and had just become an Alderman. He was, however, still committed to his various fairs and keen to find new rides and attractions. Many of his managers, staff and tenants had been with him for most of their lives and he had outlived many of them.

His son and his children and his 'adopted' son, John Collins, now known as 'Walsall John', were all part of the business. Sadly, however, Flora, after a long and active life, passed away on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 1933 and was buried in her home town of Wrexham.



**Fig. 28 Pat & Flora Collins sitting outside their trailer, which they used when they were travelling around the country, circa early 1930's.**

Although he made no public statement about his wife's death, as he had when his brother died in 1929, friends did remark that Pat lost some of his 'flair' and his grip on the reins of his business was not quite as tight as before.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1935, however, an unexpected turn of events took place when Pat Collins quietly married Clara Mullett at St. Patrick's Church, Walsall. He was 75 years of age at this point of time and she was 54.

Clara had been orphaned at the tender age of 11 and Pat had taken responsibility for the Mullett children. She had therefore grown up in the heart of the Collins' family and eventually became Pat's Secretary and Treasurer.

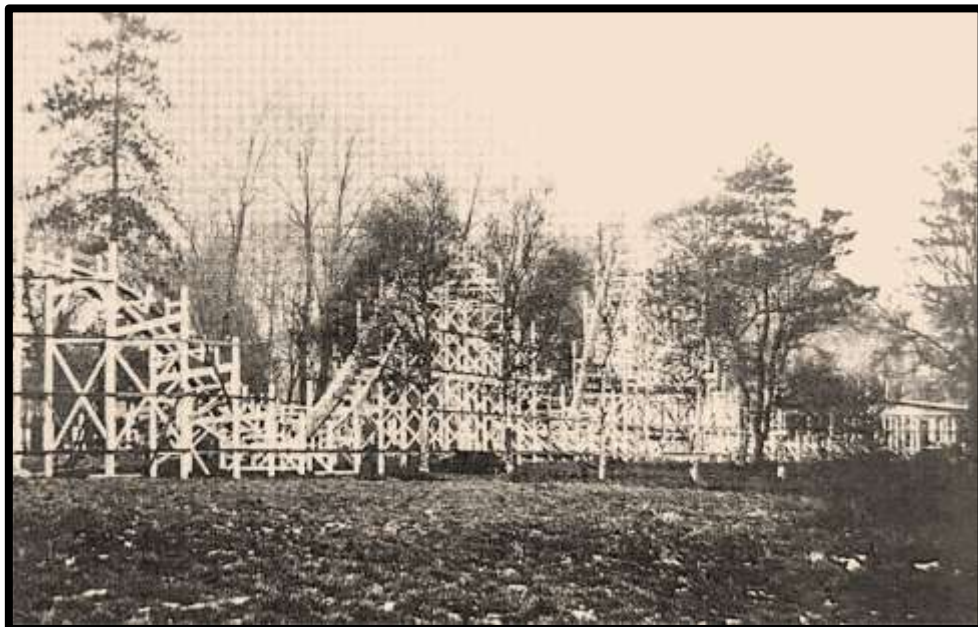




**Fig. 29. Pat & Clara Collins on their wedding day on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1935.**

Following the death of Mr Delaney the management of the *Crystal Palace* fell to Pat's friend and fellow politician, Danny Cartwright.

Once again there was talk of great re-development and renewed interest in the site. There were discussions about reviving the miniature railway and 'Walsall John' found a new opportunity to develop the Big Dipper concept. An older gravity ride at the *Crystal Palace* was taken down and early in 1937 construction began on a new Big Dipper, which was completed later the same year.



**Fig. 30. The newly built Big Dipper, or Scenic Railway as it was sometimes called, 1937.**

By the summer of 1938, it became known that Pat Collins' name was going to be put forward to become the next mayor of Walsall, at a time when he was approaching his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

It was not the first time the offer had been made, as it appears he had been approached a couple of years or so earlier, in the mid-1930's. However, at the time, he had been experiencing a bout of ill health and therefore had to decline the invitation.

In an article in the *Walsall Observer*, when asked if he would be able to combine his business interests with his duties as Mayor, he replied;

**“I shall remain in control during my Mayoralty, but I have some very able lieutenants among members of my family and during the coming twelve months it will be more convenient than it was a few years ago to leave things a little more in their hands, so I think we will manage alright!”**

Before becoming Mayor, Pat entertained his colleagues from the Council to an ox-roast at the Walsall September Fair, which was being held on the Corporation Street ground. He then invited them to take a fairground ride, whilst he stood at the controls himself. He took great delight in ‘letting it rip’!

Pat Collins formally became Mayor of Walsall on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938. Following the official ceremony, Pat and Clara welcomed over six hundred guests to the Mayor’s Reception, held at Walsall Town Hall.



**Fig. 31. Pat & Clara Collins, at the time they were elected the Mayor and Mayoress of Walsall, 1938.**

In November 1939, at the conclusion of a very busy term in office, Pat Collins received a fitting honour, in recognition of his long contribution to local civic life, firstly, as a Councillor, then as an Alderman and finally as Mayor, when he was granted the Freedom of the Borough.

Pat responded to the honour bestowed upon him with great emotion. He gave a sensitively prepared speech, covering his career in Walsall from the 1880's to the Second World War and concluded;

**“As a young showman, sixty years ago, just after my marriage, I came to Walsall and pitched my caravan in Shaw’s Leasowe. From that day to this, I have never regretted doing so.”**

The end of Pat’s year as Mayor, coincided with the advent of the Second World War, which posed numerous problems in the running of his business empire.

There was the fear of air raids and new lighting restrictions gradually came into effect culminating in, what was called, the 'blackout'. In addition, several of Pat's employees began to depart on military service and it was thought that conscription was not far away. On top of that, many more were being drafted to work in munitions factories.

Pat Collins had installed a large air-raid shelter in the vegetable garden at his home, *Lime Tree House* and many people remembered nights spent in the shelter when the air-raid siren sounded. Pat's temper was sometimes short, but his greatest concern was always for the safety of his great-grandchildren.



**Fig. 32. *Lime Tree House*, Bloxwich, circa 1930's.**

At the end of 1940, Pat's health began to decline and his wife Clara nursed him through his long illness. Pat Collins died on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> December 1943, at his home at *Lime Tree House*, at the age of 84. His last words to Clara and John were;

**“Keep the flag flying.”**

Pat's funeral took place on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> December and, after the service at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Bloxwich, he was buried in Bloxwich Cemetery.



**Fig. 33. Mass being held at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Bloxwich for Alderman Patrick Collins, 1943.**



At the Council Meeting, held that same afternoon, more tributes were paid to Pat and many speeches covered familiar ground. Perhaps the most poignant tribute came from Alderman Ingram, who had known Pat for sixty years;

**“We were filled with admiration and affection for Pat Collins. We admired him for the way in which he handled a business that was difficult to manage and also the spirit in which he received the rebuffs, as well as the rewards of the showman’s life and we esteemed him for his other excellent qualities.**

**He possessed some power that appealed to us all. What was the secret of it? I have come to the conclusion that it was because he had a golden heart”.**

After his death, the Bloxwich Carnival Committee decided to set up a fund to enable them to pay for a suitable monument to be built, as a lasting tribute to his many achievements, especially in his adopted town of Bloxwich.

Unfortunately, due to the Second World War and its aftermath, it took until 1955 for this to come to fruition.

The memorial took the form of a clock, with a traditional face, which was mounted on tall ornate columns. The columns themselves are decorated with intricate designs and motifs that reflect the fairground heritage of Pat Collins.

The clock was initially erected in the King George V Playing Fields, Bloxwich and was unveiled by the Mayor of Walsall on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1955. In 1991, however, the memorial was moved to Bloxwich Park and Promenade Gardens.



**Fig. 34. The Pat Collins Memorial Clock, Bloxwich Park and Promenade Gardens, Walsall, 2013.**

## **PART 2. THE CRYSTAL PALACE AMUSEMENT PARK**

Just as railways played a part in the creation of seaside resorts, urban transport played a part in developing places on the outskirts of large conurbations that could be used by the inhabitants in search of fresh air.

Trams and local train services provided the gateway to open countryside and Pat Collins, among other showmen, realised that 'all the fun of the fare' could be enjoyed just as much, if not more, in nice surroundings.

In the West Midlands, this led to the popularity of places such as the Lickey Hills, Clent Hills, Kinver Edge and Sutton Park.

Showmen who provided entertainment at fixed venues could lead a more settled existence and were therefore regarded as 'amusement caterers' rather than 'travellers.' This sometimes led to conflict between the Showmen's Guild and the Amusement Caterers' Association. Nowadays, the same gulf exists between the travelling fair and the world of theme parks.

Nothing, however, is ever quite 'permanent', even in amusement parks and the same families operated in both worlds and travelled or set anchor, as time and season dictated. Pat Collins' empire eventually embraced both worlds.

Sometimes a showman's progress towards acquiring an amusement park was a gradual process, first appearing on the site as a tenant and then making a bid for the lease. Having obtained the lease, the space on the site could be let to others and so, not all the attractions in a park, had to be solely provided by the proprietor himself.

The *Crystal Palace Amusement Park* was one of Pat Collins' best-known ventures into the world of amusement catering on a permanent site, although it was probably his second such venture, as he had opened a site in New Brighton on the Wirral Peninsular in the 1890's.

It is thought that Pat Collins acquired the lease on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1906, but it was not clear whether this applied to the whole site or just the part on which he provided some amusements. It may be that Pat Collins became the leaseholder and he sub-let the amusements to the Russell family. It is known that the Russell's remained as tenants on the *Crystal Palace* site until 1961, just before it closed down for good.

A miniature railway ran close to the *Crystal Palace* grounds and when the Miniature Railways of Great Britain Limited, the owners, went into liquidation in 1912, Pat Collins purchased LOT 1., which consisted of a complete 15in. gauge miniature railway comprising a 15in. gauge 'Atlantic' type locomotive, bogie passenger cars, engine shed and about a quarter of a mile of track.

Pat continued to operate it, up to the outbreak of the First World War.

Once more, it is unclear what else, if anything, Pat Collins provided at the *Crystal Palace* in the years leading up to the First World War. He may have left it entirely to the Russell family to organise, but if later policies of his company are taken into account, it seemed probable that Pat 'retired' his older rides to the park, as they ceased travelling around the country at his fairs.



After the First World War ended, Pat Collins seemed quite keen to re-establish the amusement park and, by June 1919, he was able to announce its re-opening. His advertisements at the time listed many rides such as;

**‘A Switchback, the Joy-Wheel, the Helter-Skelter, Gondolas, Bicycles, Swing-boats and Sideshows etc.’**

Although the amusements offered to the general public were on a fixed site, it was logical to assume that they were permanent but, of course, this was not the case. The various rides were changed and taken in and out of the park when they were required for the travelling fairs.

R H Delaney, who had been associated with Pat Collins for many years, managed the site at this particular time. When he was interviewed for a magazine article in July 1920, he stated;

**“We have well drained the place, made new roadways and approaches, put in electric cables and are putting down the rails for a miniature railway. We shall have two Lilliputian trains, which will tour around the pleasure park. The station will be in keeping with the line and for picnics and pleasure it should provide endless enjoyment.**

**When the railway is complete, we shall then erect a gigantic figure of eight and water caves on the lake, on which will run two or three motor boats.”**

The miniature railway was slowly revived and, it is thought, re-opened in the late summer of 1922. However, by 1924, it appeared to have been abandoned again.

The fortunes of all the equipment at the *Crystal Palace* seemed to face such vicissitudes and, at some stage, the amusement park began to acquire the reputation of being a ‘dumping ground’. By the 1950’s, this had become institutionalised and part of the grounds became a graveyard for equipment that had come to the end of its travelling life.

Obviously, as rides became difficult to travel about or less profitable, it made sense to ‘retire’ them to an amusement park for a further lease of life.

The grandson of Pat Collins recalled in an interview in 1990;

**“I spent a couple of years at Sutton Coldfield. They used to say, ‘If it’s had it – put it at Sutton’.**

**When I was first there, we had a Tunnel of Love, an old Dodgem Track that had seen better days and a set of Dragons that was my father’s.”**

The period he was speaking about would have been the latter half of the 1920’s.

Mr Delaney, who was mentioned in Part 1 of this research, ran the park until his death at the end of 1934.

Pat appointed a fellow Walsall Councillor, Danny Cartwright, to the vacant post at the *Crystal Palace*, in the spring of 1935. Cartwright had, by then, already served seven years there running the children’s boating pool.



**Fig. 35. The Boating Pool at the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park*, Summer 1934.**



**Fig. 36 Another view of the Boating Pool at *Crystal Palace Amusement Park*, showing how popular the venue was to the general public, Summer 1934.**

An article in the *World's Fair* magazine by their correspondent, published on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 1935, commented;

**“Great developments are to take place at the *Crystal Palace*, all that is needed is the permission of the magisterial bench at Sutton Coldfield.**

Mr Cartwright gave me permission to report the plans, which included an hotel, a zoo, a full licence, an extension of the amusements and a publicity scheme, which would bring so many people to Sutton Coldfield, that the town would enjoy a prosperity it had never known.

I can remember that one of the great attractions at *Crystal Palace* was the miniature railway, which ran through the wood and I was glad to hear that this may be re-started in the near future.

I sincerely trust that permission will be granted for Pat Collins to go ahead, for I cannot see how this venture could possibly fail. With Mr Cartwright in command, success is assured."

It is not known whether permission was given for any of these grandiose schemes, but it is doubtful if the people of Sutton would have wanted to be submerged under hordes of fairground visitors!

Eventually, Pat Collins' 'adopted' son, John Collins, took a greater interest in the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park* and devoted some of his time to it.

In early 1937, he had built a new 'Big Dipper' or Scenic Railway as it was sometimes called, in time for the new season. He also acquired more miniature railway equipment from Great Yarmouth and this was transferred to Sutton during the winter of 1937/38.

A new station was built for the 'Pat Collins Express' and the line used part of the cycle track, which was initially laid out in the days of the Royal Promenade Gardens. The line opened again in 1938, as the '*Crystal Palace Railway*' and a model engineer named Dudley Priestley was employed to drive the train, which he did for about ten years.



Fig. 37. Advertisement for the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park*, 1936.



William ‘Billy’ Bagnall, a showman in his own right, with his own equipment, gradually became associated with the *Crystal Palace*, in the late 1930’s. He took his coconut stall there originally and virtually looked after the fair during the Second World War. He officially became manager in 1948. One of his first tasks was the driving of the miniature train, when Dudley Priestley was absent for reasons of illness, holidays, etc.

He became one of the most distinguished fair folk and an ex-president of the Showmen’s Guild. When he left Sutton, he moved to the amusement park at Chasewater, which he owned.



Fig. 38. William Bagnall, Manager of the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park* in 1948.

During the early years of the Second World War, ‘Walsall John’ purchased a property in Sutton known as the ‘Four Winds’ in Halloughton Road, Four Oaks.

Following Pat Collin’s death in 1943, John Collins was therefore well placed to keep an eye on the amusement park, although it did not seem that there was much money available after the war to re-invest in the site. He did, however, apply to Sutton Borough Council for a new toilet block to be built, which was approved on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 1943.

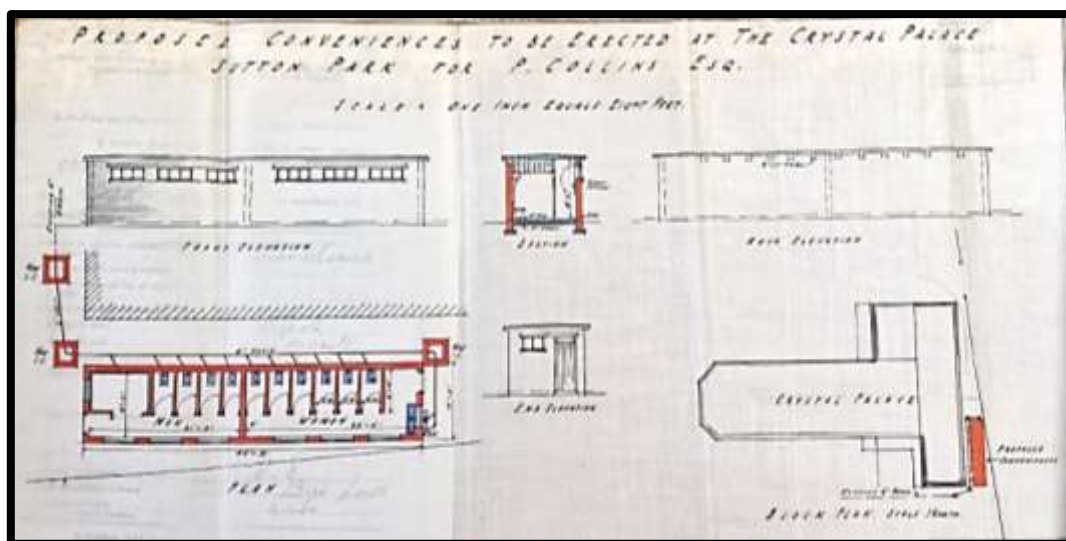


Fig. 39. Plans for a new toilet block at the *Crystal Palace*, 1943.

Clara, Pat Collins' widow and John also decided that a ballroom would be a great attraction within the *Crystal Palace*. Refurbishing the whole building was out of the question, as it had been unloved since the accident with the children visiting Sutton Park, way back in 1906.

With great ingenuity, however, John Collins purchased a 'Big Top' marquee and it was erected within the great hall itself, by using the poles that came with the marquee and the canvas was supported by means of the girders which spanned the room. A portable maple dance floor was hired and installed and the Dance Hall was opened to a great fanfare in 1945.

After years of austerity caused by the war, people could not wait to 'let their hair down' and the concept was a tremendous success.

Admission cost for the Dances were two shillings on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings. This increased to three shillings on Saturday evenings. Dances began at 7.30 p.m. and ended at 10.30 p.m. Teddy Thomas and his Orchestra provided the music.

A Mr G Wilson writing in the Sutton News dated the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2002, remembered the Orange Grove Dance Hall, as it was then called. Mr Wilson used to work for the Pat Collins Amusement Fair, as a dodgem mechanic, before it was turned into a dance hall. Prior to that the building was used as a workshop and storage area.

He said some of the top bands in the country used to play there.

Unfortunately, in the mid-fifties, a violent thunderstorm damaged the roof of the dance hall and water poured into the building, causing serious flooding. The Jack Parnell Band was due to appear that evening, but the show had to be cancelled.

It later transpired that the cost to repair the damage was too high to consider, thus making any future plans unworkable. The Orange Grove Dance Hall therefore sadly closed down and it reverted back to being a storage area.

Meanwhile, there was still a tendency at the amusement park for rides to come and go, while others came to 'retire' and fade away. Ghost trains came and went, sometimes staying at the park during the summer, before being transferred to travelling fairs in the autumn.

In 1946, John Collins decided it was time for the 'Coronation Thriller' gravity dipper ride, built in 1937, to be replaced. He duly arranged to purchase the scenic railway from Southport Pleasure Beach. The structure covered roughly an acre of ground, with half a mile of track. It had a maximum height of sixty feet and contained 350 tons of timber and machinery. It took up to four 'trains' at a time, each carrying 30 passengers. The structure was transported in 125 railway trucks and 50 men were employed in erecting it.

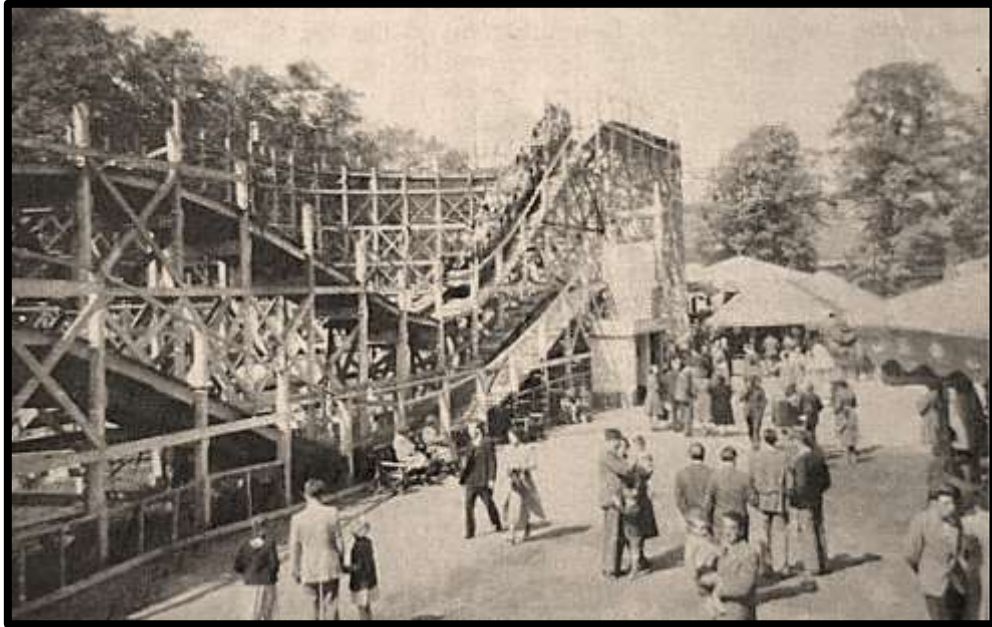


**Fig. 40. A new big dipper, or scenic railway, in the process of being erected, 1946.**



John Collins was still telling the *Sutton News* that it was his intention to greatly expand and improve the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park* and, in 1948, a new speedway was built in the centre of the Big Dipper and petrol driven cars were raced around it.

In the spring of 1950, John Collins stated that new 'dips' had been added to the Big Dipper, to make it even more exciting. In addition, there were new speedboats on the lake. Towards the end of the season, however, the Big Dipper was dismantled and taken to Battersea Park.



**Fig. 41.** The Big Dipper at the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park*, August 1950. Not long after this photograph was taken, the ride was dismantled and taken to Battersea Park, London.



**Fig. 42.** The 'Jack and Jill Glide' at the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park* in 1952. The concrete stumps of the Big Dipper, which had been dismantled earlier, can still be seen on the right hand side.

Shortly after this, John Collins appeared to lose interest in the amusement park and Billy Bagnall was left to administer the park's gradual demise over the next decade, although there were periods of intense activity around and during Bank Holiday weekends.

By the end of the 1950's, despite the variety of rides and amusements still to be found there, it became more and more obvious that the amusement park was on 'its last legs'. Visitors to the park during this time remember seeing all manner of fairground equipment resting in the 'graveyard'. In one place a tree seemed to have grown through the remains of an organ and the cellars beneath the dance floor of the *Crystal Palace* contained all sorts of relics.

The lease on the *Crystal Palace* fell due in 1962 and, as Sutton Council had alternative plans for the land, they would not grant a renewal. The season itself was a very wet one and, to add to the gloom, Clara Collins died in the September.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> October, the last train ran on the Sutton Park Miniature Railway and was promptly dismantled and all the equipment moved into storage.

A Mr Norman Beck, who described himself as an old Suttonian, said he had pre-war memories of riding on the miniature railway out to Wyndley Pool and back from the *Crystal Palace*, around about 1920, when the fare was 2d. He also rode the Big Dipper and played 'shove-halfpenny' on lots of different stalls.

Post-war, after being demobbed from the RAF, he and other young men, used to wend their way to the *Crystal Palace Dance* on Saturday nights, 'looking for girls', that is until he got married! He also recalled going to John Collins' fabulous house in Four Oaks, where he met Freddie Mills, a well-known boxer at the time, who was booked to give an exhibition fight at the *Crystal Palace*.

Freddie Mills stayed with the Collins family for the whole week and they became good friends.

He also remembered that John Collins would occasionally visit the Royal British Legion in Rectory Road. He would just walk in and it would be 'drinks all round'!

Collins made vast amounts of money from the amusement business during his career and subsequently lived at exclusive addresses in Park Lane, London and Virginia Water in Surrey.

Upon its final closure in 1962, the fun fare's manager William 'Billy' Bagnall, described the closure as;

**"A sad occasion. I shall miss all my many associations with it."**



**Fig.43. The *Crystal Palace* in May 1962, just prior to the start of demolition.**

An article in the Sutton Coldfield News dated the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1962 also described the closure, under the heading of ‘**Sutton’s Crystal Palace is crystal no longer**’. It went on to say;

“For the past week many of the older residents of Sutton Coldfield have passed through the Town Gate of Sutton Park to look for the last time on a building which has been regarded as an old friend, the *Crystal Palace*.

Its demolition no doubt revived many old memories of its colourful history, of the old days when it was a fashionable dance hall and of the parties, exhibitions and shows which took place there.

On Friday morning, the great dome, formerly a conservatory at the end of the Orange Grove, which could accommodate 1,500 people, lay stripped of its covering.



Fig. 44. A worm’s eye view of the interior of Sutton Coldfield’s old *Crystal Palace*, now in the course of demolition, with the glass panes removed, 1962.

The *Crystal Palace* was crystal no longer and the soft breeze, which rustled through the trees, carried the sharp perfume of wood smoke from the smouldering timbers.

In its hey-day, the *Crystal Palace* was a landmark and almost a fairy-godmother to the Royal Town. It was the Siamese twin to Sutton Park’s success, for it established the park’s popularity among people living many miles away from Sutton Coldfield.

There is a considerable difference of opinion in the town about the demolition of the *Crystal Palace* and the closure of the fun-fair. While some welcome it as a move for a better future for the town, others declare that, without the site as an added incentive, Sutton Park could suffer a loss in attraction for outsiders.

For years, it has been the natural target for school outings and Sunday School treats. Teachers, who visited the park as young people, quoted the attractions afforded at Sutton Park with the assuredness of travel guides.

One such teacher received a shock on Friday afternoon, when a Bidford-on-Avon school arrived on coaches carrying more than 80 children, together with adults, to find it closed. He sadly shook his head, as the young children formed up to return to their coaches. They had had their tea at Wyndley Café and had fed the ducks, but their roundabout money went home with them!”





**Fig. 45. The *Crystal Palace* site in 1964, two years after it had officially closed.**

Even after the Crystal Palace was demolished, fairs and bonfire nights, organised by the Round Table of Sutton Coldfield, continued to be held on the site. These events were always well attended and, in October 1966, 5,000 visitors were present at a gathering, when £700 was raised for charity.

Wyndley Leisure Centre and other associated projects were opened on the site, in stages, during the early part of the 1970's.

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### **PART 3. SUTTON MINIATURE RAILWAY**

During the early part of 1903, Henry Greenly, a well-known miniature railway engineer, was approached by George Flooks and Fred Smithies of the London Society of Model Engineers regarding a proposal to build a 10¼" gauge model steam locomotive.

In due course, the locomotive, weighing in at 6 cwts., was completed and given the name '*Nipper*'. Meanwhile, Flooks and Smithies were laying down a straight track, measuring 200 yards in length, at Bricket Wood, near St.Albans.

In addition to the track, they also built a train comprising six four-wheeled coaches, five of which were of identical design and construction and consisted of a flat base on which were mounted two rustic garden-type seats, facing inwards. Each coach seated two persons. The sixth coach was of a more substantial appearance, with boxed-in sides.

The line was opened to the public in the spring of 1904, under the name of Flooks and Smithies Miniature Railway. The fare was fixed at 2d. for adults and 1d. for children and the journey took between 50 and 60 seconds from one end of the line to the other, running at an average speed of 12mph.



**Fig. 46. The '*Nipper*' at Bricket Wood, with George Flooks driving, 1904.**

Greenly also had a long association with the firm of Bassett-Lowke Limited of Northampton, where he was initially a designer of small gauge model locomotives. Before too long, however, both Greenly and W J Bassett-Lowke became fascinated with the idea of developing scaled down passenger carrying railways.

They may have been influenced, in particular, by seeing the miniature railway at Blakesley Hall, near Towcester. In 1903, Mr Charles Bartholomew, a wealthy Civil Engineer and a friend of Bassett-Lowke, had laid down a complete 15" gauge line there, to connect his home with the nearby station of the East and West Junction Railway. So, in 1904, a new company, The Miniature Railways of Great Britain Limited (MRGB) was formed at Northampton, with Bassett-Lowke as Chairman and Greenly as Engineer.

The remit of the company was described, as follows;

*‘For the purpose of manufacturing miniature locomotives and railways and working them at exhibitions, public parks and pleasure grounds on the lines of that already done by the Americans and also for equipping gentlemen’s estates and parks with complete railways.’*

The newly formed company, not long afterwards, acquired the 10¼” gauge railway, including ‘Nipper’ and all associated equipment, from Flooks and Smithies at Bricket Wood and transferred them to a new site adjacent to Abington Park, Northampton.



**Fig. 47. The ‘Nipper’ at Abington Park, Northampton, travelling across the viaduct, with Fred Smithies driving, Easter 1905.**

The acquisition of ‘Nipper’ gave Bassett-Lowke the chance to ‘test the water’ for the new venture and the new line was opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1905, which happened to be a bitterly cold Easter Saturday. The track was laid on undulating ground and included a 50ft long wooden viaduct, supported by timber piling.

Despite the weather, there was immense interest from the general public and great crowds of people gathered to watch the spectacle. An account, included in the ‘*Model Engineer*’ at the time, mentioned that;

**“Fully loaded trains operated every three minutes for a 10-hour period!”**

The partnership of Flooks and Smithies subsequently broke up, with Smithies deciding to follow new opportunities elsewhere before being employed by Bassett-Lowke to drive miniature engines on railways at Blackpool, Rhyl and other destinations.

Bassett-Lowke was greatly impressed with the potential offered by this new attraction and it was not surprising therefore that he quickly cast around for a more suitable location for the little railway. It is not known how or why his search led him to Sutton Coldfield, but he may have come across one of the advertisements extolling the virtues of the *Crystal Palace*.

The *Crystal Palace*, however, was an extremely good choice, with vast crowds of visitors coming into the park from Birmingham and the Black Country, which virtually guaranteed good business opportunities during the Spring and Summer months.

The grounds of the *Crystal Palace* had just become a Funfair operated by the famous showman, Pat Collins, who had obtained the lease on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1906.

In the Spring of 1907, therefore, the little railway moved once again, this time to the Midlands. A line was laid just outside the boundary of Sutton Park, from a point just beside the fairground and running back towards the entrance gate to the Park near to Wyndley Pool.

As it had done when it opened at Abington Park, the miniature railway created quite a stir and the Agent, who negotiated the lease, could recall, many years later, the fascination of the event, with frequent visits being made by members of the Somerville family, the then owners of the land.

Lord Somerville, who had actually died in 1864, owned extensive land between Jockey Road and Sutton Park, consisting mainly of farmhouses and farmland and this was known as the Somerville Estate. Most of the land was developed for residential use in the 1930's by Lord Somerville's grandsons.

In 1937, Sutton Corporation built a new road, which took on the name of Monmouth Drive. Under the terms of the agreement with the Somerville Estate and other owners, the land north of Monmouth Drive was to revert to Sutton Park or be used for other recreational purposes. The final decision was that, after 400 years, Powell's Pool and the fields to the north, would once more come under the umbrella of the Park.

The Sutton Miniature Railway finally opened for business to the public in June 1907. The new venture must have proved an instant success because, before the year was out, plans were being made for a major expansion with totally different rolling stock.



**Fig. 48. 'Nipper' at the *Crystal Palace* in 1907, shortly after the new line opened.**

The first of Greenly's new 15" gauge locomotives for MRGB Limited had been built in 1905 and had since been running successfully on Blackpool's South Shore. Bassett-Lowke was an astute businessman and the revenue generated by trainloads of 12 passengers at Sutton must have compared very unfavourably with Blackpool, where they were able to haul trains of 36 passengers in just three coaches. Furthermore, the additional stability offered by a 15" gauge railway was an important factor in an enterprise where mother and father were as much inclined to take a ride as were their children.

With workshop capacity available at Northampton, together with proven designs for equipment to the larger gauge, the decision was taken to re-gauge the railway at Sutton and this work was carried out



during the winter of 1907/08. At the same time, the line was lengthened to a total of some 410 yards and run-round loops installed at either end.

The line was basically level throughout with the only major engineering feature being a 50-foot long bridge built across the stream at the Wyndley Pool end of the line.

To provide traction for the new railway, a new locomotive was constructed early in 1908, bearing the name '*Mighty Atom*'. The engine was smartly finished in Midland Red livery and bore the letters MRGB on the sides of the tender. With the engine came the rolling stock consisting of three 12-seater bogie open coaches to Henry Greenly's design, built specially for the line. Each coach weighed 11 cwts. and was constructed with oak frames and seats of pitch pine.

One wonders why there was not more provision for passengers, bearing in mind the success they had achieved at Blackpool?

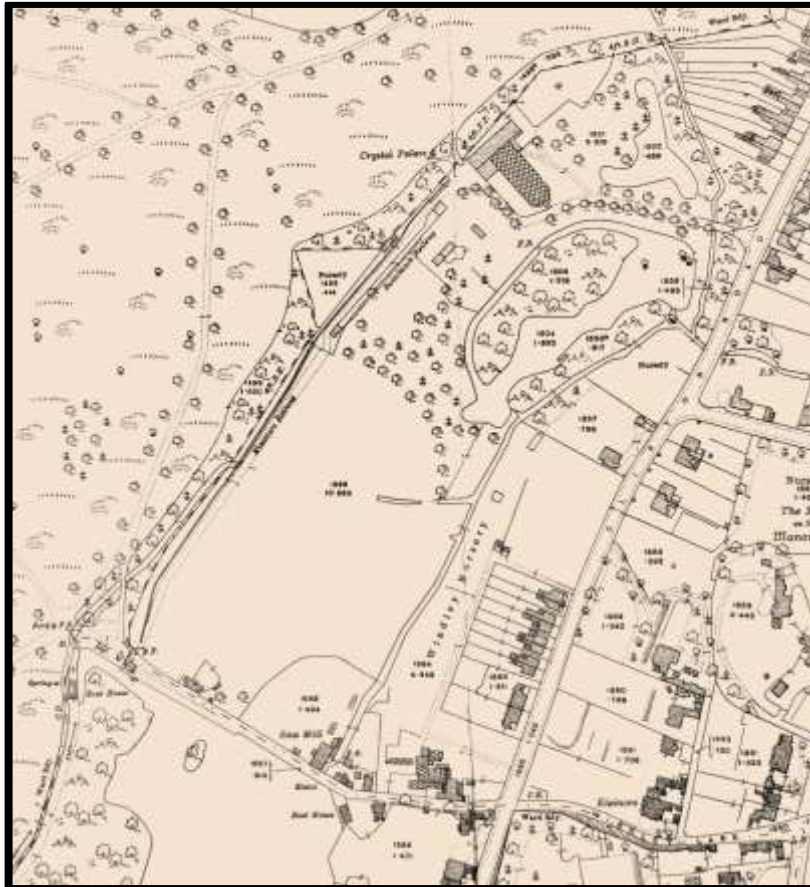
The provision of run-round loops at either end of the line overcame the need for the engine to push its coaches back on the return journey, as had been the practice with '*Nipper*'. All points were spring loaded and, in addition, the driver could release the locomotive couplings without leaving the footplate, by means of a lever in the cab. As a result, the locomotive could run round its train very quickly and easily. So much for the present-day notion that Driver-Only-Operation is a modern concept!



**Fig. 49. The '*Mighty Atom*' on the new 15" gauge railway at the *Crystal Palace*, which opened in 1908. The locomotive is shown crossing the viaduct over the stream towards the Wyndley end of the track.**

Whilst on the subject of '*Nipper*', although only a few years old, the locomotive disappeared from the stage for some time, but happily it was found to still be in existence and had been privately preserved in the North of England.





**Fig. 50. Ordnance Survey Map of 1886, showing the site of the *Crystal Palace*, the Royal Promenade Gardens and the line of the Miniature Railways of Great Britain Ltd. (MRGB) track.**

As soon as the trackwork was completed and the new locomotive and rolling stock delivered, the usual crowds gathered to witness the initial test runs, which were conducted using boys from Bishop Vesey's Grammar School as ballast! Once everything had been given a clean bill of health, the new railway was opened to the public at Easter 1908.



**Fig. 51. The '*Mighty Atom*' surrounded by the boys of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, together with their Schoolmaster.**

The main station, together with an engine shed, was located close to the *Crystal Palace*. It was, however, also possible to join or alight at the other end of the line. The single fare from one end of the line to the other was 1d. Specially printed bell-punch tickets were provided, similar to those used on tramways of the period and these were issued by the guard.



Fig. 52 Example of the ticket issued to visitors.

The railway continued to operate right up to the outbreak of the first world war in 1914, notwithstanding an announcement in the model railway press at the beginning of 1912, which read;

**The Miniature Railways of Great Britain Limited (in liquidation)**

**For Sale by Private Treaty**

- (i) Complete 15in. gauge Miniature Railway at Sutton Coldfield, consisting of 15in. gauge 'Atlantic' type locomotive, bogie passenger cars, engine shed and about a quarter of a mile of track.
- (ii) Complete 15in. gauge Miniature Railway at Halifax, consisting of 15in. gauge 'Atlantic' type locomotive, bogie passenger cars, station, tunnel and circular track.
- (iii) Two 'Atlantic' type locomotives (by Bassett-Lowke Limited), eight covered bogie passenger cars (by Milnes Voss and Company) and about 1,300 yards of 15in. gauge rails etc.

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LOT 1. is self-explanatory. LOT 2. referred to equipment previously at Blackpool, which was later moved to Halifax Zoo in 1910. LOT 3. would seem to refer to equipment used by the company for their continental exhibition lines.

Beyond this date, the history of the enterprise became shrouded in mystery for a number of years. Britain was then at war and all such irrelevances as miniature railways were laid to one side. The *Crystal Palace* fairground was also closed down for the duration. The equipment was probably stored away in the Engine Shed and allowed to gather dust!

Douglas V Jones, in his book, mentioned;

**"The headquarters of the Warwickshire Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Birmingham City Battalion was at the *Crystal Palace* and that of the 2<sup>nd</sup> was in the huts near Powell's Pool.**

**Later in the war, after the departure of the City Battalions, the hutments in the Park and at the *Crystal Palace*, were used to accommodate New Zealand troops and convalescing soldiers, discharged from military hospitals."**

With the end of the war in November 1918, Pat Collins soon turned his attention to bringing the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park* back to life. Advertisements appeared in the local press and, on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 1919, it duly opened its doors once more for business.

However, a miniature railway was not mentioned amongst its various attractions until May 1921, when a Collins advertisement in the *Sutton News* briefly stated that;

**“A miniature railway shortly to be installed.”**

Nothing further was heard on the subject until another advertisement appeared in July 1922, which read;

**“Extra attractions for the Bank Holiday – the miniature railway will be running.”**

An indication of what sort of railway this was, can be found in an article written for ‘*The World’s Fair*’ on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1920, where the writer tells of a visit to the *Crystal Palace* and detailing an interview with its then manager Mr R H Delaney who, after describing the new works being carried out on the site following the First World War, goes on to say;

**“We are now in the midst of putting down the rails for the miniature railways. We shall have two Lilliputian trains, an exact counterpart of our up-to-date express trains, which will tour round the pleasure park. The Station and Booking Office will be in keeping with the line and for picnics, pleasure parties and school outings, it should provide endless enjoyment.”**

Collins’ advertisements in the local press continued to include reference to the railway amongst the attractions of the fair, until the end of the 1923 season, after which there is total silence on the subject.

It would seem therefore that the third railway had a very short life indeed, perhaps just one and a half seasons. There is also well documented evidence from local residents that the little railway fell into dereliction from 1924 onwards and this lasted for many years.

One question that remains unanswered was, why did this short-lived venture fail? The most likely explanation was that Collins found the special disciplines necessary to operate a 15” gauge steam-hauled public railway too much for his fairground staff to cope with.

Whatever the real reason, it was not until 1937 that anything further was heard of a miniature railway. It was during this year that Pat Collins’s name once more made an appearance, although why, after such a long period, he decided to make another excursion into the world of miniature railways, is not clear.

In the event, a miniature railway, with all its associated equipment, was placed on the market for sale by a Mr Richard Parkinson, who had been running it at Great Yarmouth in Norfolk.

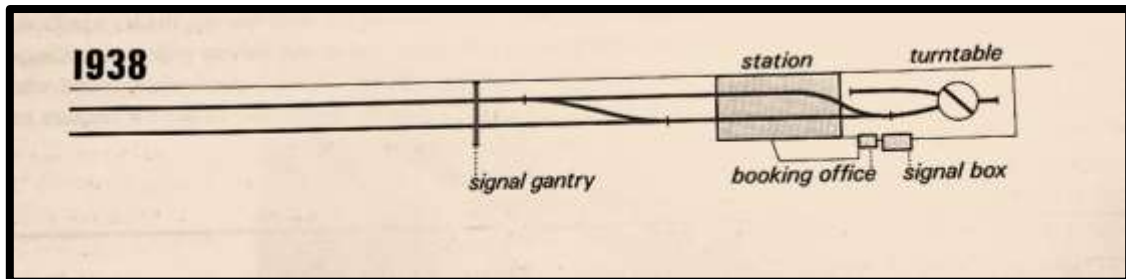
Collins duly purchased the business and, between the Winter of 1937 and the Spring of 1938, Mr Parkinson organised the transfer of the Great Yarmouth railway across to the Midlands and also oversaw the construction of the new line.

The existing shed at Sutton, empty since the mid-1920’s, was demolished, but the old track, running alongside the park fence towards Wyndley, was retained and incorporated into a much larger layout in the form of a large balloon-shaped loop.

A single track, beyond the Station, led to the turntable, off which was one short siding. The Station building consisted of a large covered structure extending over both tracks and platform, open-sided to the fairground, with the legend ‘*Pat Collins Express*’ prominent across the façade. At one corner was

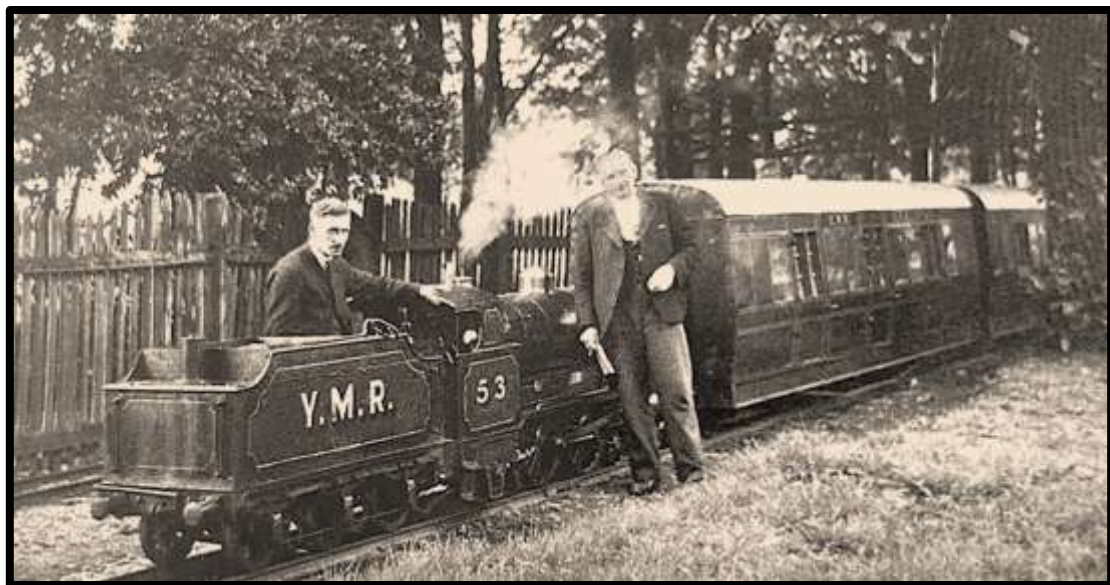
a small ticket office and adjacent to this was the Signal Box. No Engine Shed or Workshop was provided, the coaches and locomotives being stored under cover of the Station roof overnight.

By May 1938, the new line was nearing completion and the steam locomotive '*Prince of Wales*' had also arrived. It is almost certain that no-one ever identified the little engine at the time with the old '*Mighty Atom*', which had departed 19 years earlier and which had, in the meantime, been re-named by a later owner!



**Fig. 53. Layout of the terminus of the Sutton Miniature Railway in 1938.**

For its first two seasons back at Sutton, the engine still had the letters 'YMR' painted on its tender, which signified the 'Yarmouth Miniature Railway'. However, in the Winter of 1940, the engine was re-painted and the letters 'CPR' replaced the outdated initials. The line had, for the first time, acquired a geographically based name – the '*Crystal Palace Railway*'!



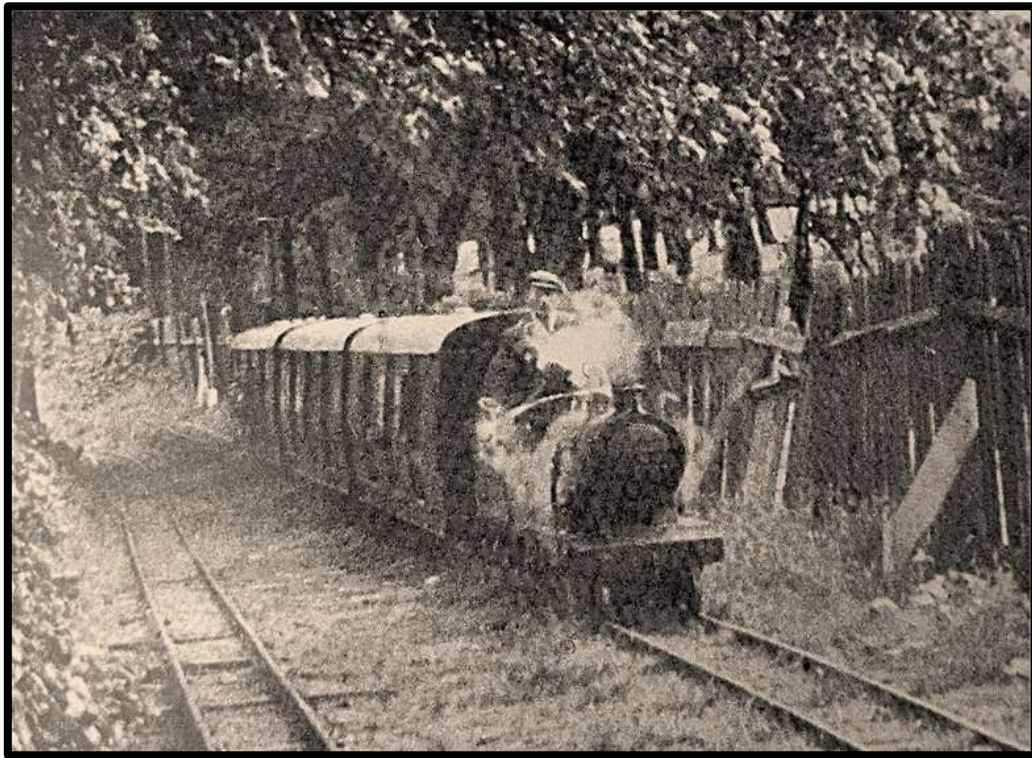
**Fig. 54. The '*Prince of Wales*' locomotive, still in the livery of the Yarmouth Miniature Railway. The driver is Dudley Priestley and the other person is Dan Cartwright the Manager, at the time, of the *Crystal Palace Amusement Park*, 1938.**

Pat Collins employed a local man named Mr C D Priestly to drive the train and he remained associated with the line for the next 11 years. During the times he was not available, the fairground manager, Bill Bagnall, took his place. Fairground hands were employed to sell tickets and the services of a guard were dispensed with. The fare was 3d. for children and 6d. for adults.

Unlike the First World War, when the fairground and the miniature railway closed down for the duration, the *Crystal Palace* was not requisitioned and remained open throughout the Second World



War. In time, however, the war years and general lack of proper maintenance facilities gradually took its toll and by 1946 the railway generally had taken on a very neglected appearance.



**Fig. 55. A typical view of the miniature railway in the mid-1940's, showing the rather run-down aspect of the line. The fencing is falling down, there are weeds growing all over the tracks and the locomotive looks in need of a complete overhaul!**

It was at this juncture that a meeting took place, which was destined to affect the whole future of the line. Mrs Collins, who had come to view the little train with some affection, called in Mr T G Hunt, a Black Country industrialist and miniature railway enthusiast, to examine and carry any necessary repairs to the ageing locomotive. As a direct result of this decision, the engine underwent a major overhaul at Mr Hunt's workshop at Oldbury, which included the fitting of a new firebox.

During the next two years, further meetings took place between Mr Hunt and the owners, which eventually ended in Mr Hunt acquiring the entire railway from Collins and the stage was set for a renaissance on a grand scale. He immediately re-named the line 'The Sutton Miniature Railway'.

Tom Hunt set about his task with characteristic enthusiasm and thoroughness. He was a kindly, warm-hearted man and was never satisfied until he had achieved the highest level of excellence in all his enterprises. These were the ideal attributes needed to breathe new life into a run-down and tired operation.

He soon recognised that his most urgent requirement was to improve the locomotive position and this became the first priority for himself and his son Bill. The problem was solved by the purchase of rolling stock and equipment from Mr Douglas Clayton who ran a private venture at his home, Bredons Hardwick Manor, near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire.

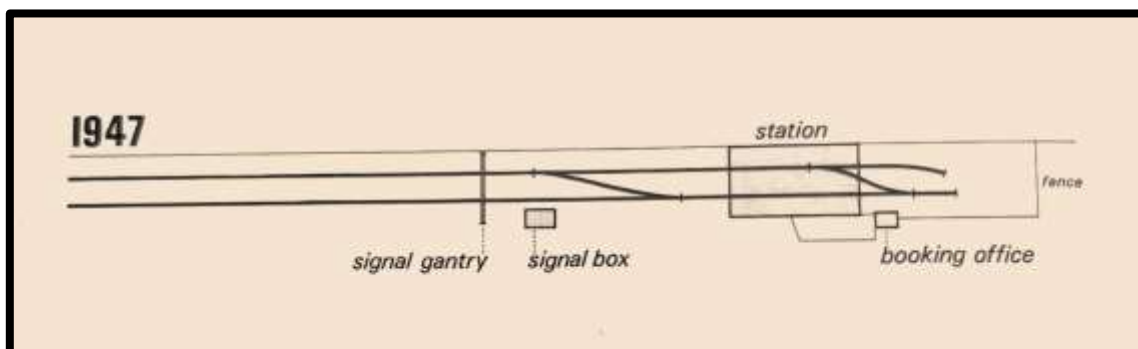
The acquisition comprised a locomotive named '*Douglas Clayton*', which was immediately re-named '*Sutton Belle*', a quarter of a mile of 15" gauge track, three open 'toast-rack' type bogie coaches and parts for a second engine. The '*Sutton Belle*' was a Type 4-4-2 locomotive and was built by Cannon Iron founders in 1933.



**Fig. 56.** The '*Prince of Wales*' and the '*Sutton Belle*' round the curve at the lowest point of the line. The drivers are Bill Hunt and Jim Glover, 1949.

Tom Hunt and his son Bill then arranged for a siding to be laid for the new stock and, during the following Winter, a roomy two-road Engine Shed and Workshop was constructed on the site of the old turntable.

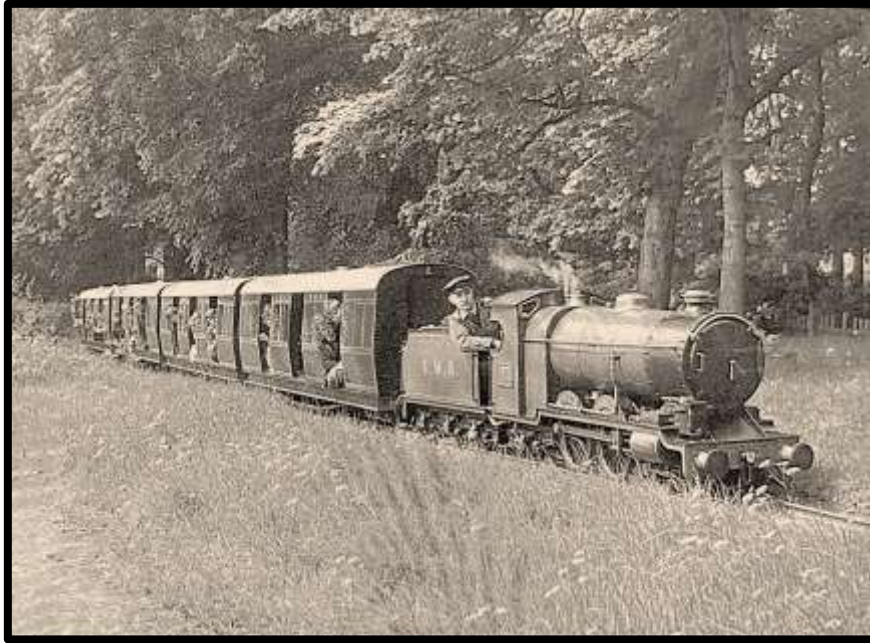
Over the next few Winters there followed an extensive programme of track re-laying and, in some places, re-alignment of the track.



**Fig. 57.** Layout of the terminus of the Sutton Miniature Railway in 1947.

The Hunts then turned their attention to completing a second locomotive, partially based upon the parts they had purchased from Douglas Clayton. As a result, the '*Sutton Flyer*' was pronounced ready for service by Easter 1952. This also was a Type 4-4-2 locomotive, built by Cannon/Hunt in 1950.





**Fig. 58. Bill Hunt driving the 'Sutton Flyer' with carriages full of visitors, in June 1953.**

Three important events took place in 1953. Firstly, '*Sutton Belle*' was completely re-built and later in the year, after 45 years of almost continuous service, the veteran '*Prince of Wales*' was used for the last time before being retired to await preservation. Finally, in June, the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II provided the occasion for a change in the livery of the rolling stock.

'Midland Red' was the colour chosen, with the coach roofs painted cream in the usual manner. For some reason, the '*Sutton Flyer*' retained its dark blue livery.

In 1956, the three open coaches, purchased from the Bredons Hardwick miniature railway, were transferred to the Fairbourne Railway, situated on the Mid-Wales coast. In their place four new light-weight open bogie coaches were built by the Hunts, between 1952 and 1956, each capable of holding 14 passengers. In addition, during the same period, three further closed coaches were built.

From 1957, the coaches all sported a very smart heraldic emblem, designed especially for the railway by Mr W H Faulkner.



**Fig. 59. Heraldic emblem for the Sutton Miniature Railway.**

George Dow, who wrote a definitive work on the subject of Railway Heraldry, described the line and the emblem, as follows;

**“The little 15” gauge railway, which once wound its way for a mile through a picturesque wooded part of Sutton Park at Sutton Coldfield, was one of the very few miniature railways to ornament its steam locomotives or rolling stock with a distinctive emblem transfer. Furthermore, it had two types made, one left hand and one right hand, *a la* British Railways. They were not, however, displayed on the locomotives or their tenders, but on the sides of the closed coaches, one at each end facing inwards.**

**In this case, the beast was a superior looking griffin, with wings addorsed, holding an Oxford blue shield lettered SMR in yellow and standing on a blue and gilt wreath. And well he might have an air of superiority, with his gilt hind parts and wings and red comb, feathers of two shades of green tinted blue and red talons! A gilt-edged ornamental and lettered oxford blue garter formed the surround, giving the transfer a width of four and seven-eighths inches and a height of five and a half inches.”**

The specification of both left and right transfers was typical of Tom Hunt’s attention to detail and the choice of the griffin was a nice link with the family firm, which was the Griffin Foundry of Oldbury.

The little trains which, under Tom’s care, were always maintained in immaculate condition, helped draw the crowds who flocked to the railway throughout the season. This began at Easter and continued until the end of September.

The railway was open every day from Whitson onwards. The fare was 6d. for all classes, until 1959, when differential fares were re-introduced, which were 6d. per child and 9d. per adult. In 1961, the fares rose again to 6d. per child and one shilling per adult.

Simple roll tickets were used on the railway from 1938, right through to its final closure. They were issued from the ticket office and collected, either on board the train before departure or, at peak times, at the barrier, so that access to the platform could be limited to one exact train-load of passengers.

Jim Glover, a Black Country man from Darlaston, was employed as the regular driver and he appeared in many of the photographs of the line taken at the time. At week-ends and holiday times during the 1950’s, he was assisted by two local lads, Michael Phillips and J G Tidmarsh and later by a young man from Kingstanding, named John Ward. At bank holiday times, when traffic was at its peak, Jim Glover’s wife staffed the ticket office and his son, Jimmy, also helped.

Of course, the sun did not shine all the time and many were the days when a locomotive would be steamed-up in the morning, only to spend the whole afternoon in the engine shed and so, in 1957, a Bo-Bo petrol locomotive was purchased from the Dudley Zoo line.



**Fig. 60. Jim Glover driving away from the station in the Bo-Bo petrol locomotive, circa 1960.**



With track, rolling stock and locomotives all now up to a respectable standard, Tom Hunt finally turned his attention to the terminal complex. In 1957, the old Collins station was replaced by a larger structure, to give greater covered accommodation for the trains and also to waiting passengers. A new ticket office was built and the engine shed was extended to take four locomotives.



**Fig. 61. The new and enlarged station on the Sutton Miniature Railway, 1957.**



**Fig. 62. Filling up the locomotives with water, at the start of another busy day on the Sutton Miniature Railway, 1957.**

Throughout the 1950's, large crowds continued to flock to Sutton Park and the miniature railway profited accordingly. During a good Bank Holiday anything between 6,000 and 8,000 passengers were carried each day.

The gates opened around 10.00 a.m. in the morning and only closed when the last visitors had finally gone home in the evening, which was sometimes after darkness had fallen.

The all-time record was achieved on Whit Monday 1960, when 12,000 people were carried over an 11-hour period.

These examples were, of course, the exception to the rule. For the majority of the time, the line opened at 2.00 p.m., at the same time as the fairground and the trains ran according to demand. As soon as a continuous queue had built up a second train was brought out of the sidings and pressed into service. The railway never ran to a published time-table.

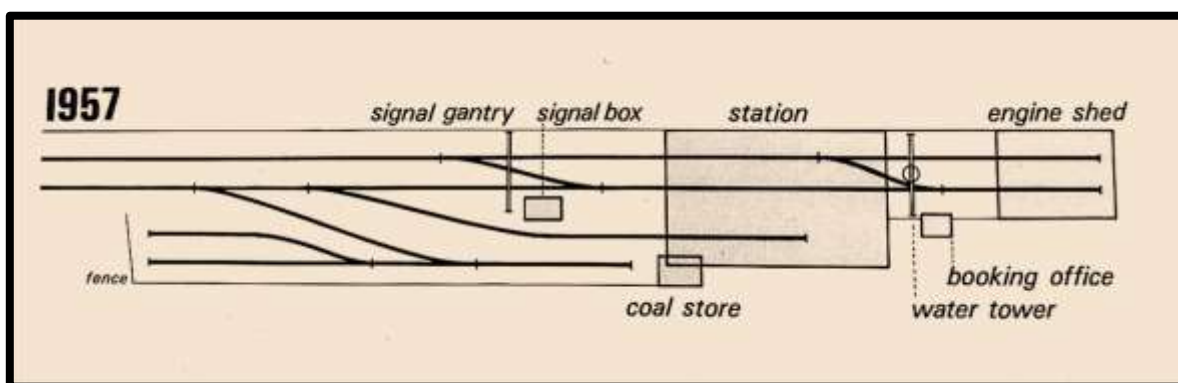


Fig. 63. Layout of the terminus of the Sutton Miniature Railway in 1957.

Public access to the station was via the fairground and, to the unenlightened visitor, the miniature railway was just another ride along with the dodgems, the steam yachts and the big dipper.

As previously mentioned, the line normally opened at 2.00 p.m., but the staff were on site around 9.00 a.m., as steam had to be raised for the locomotives, the engines and coaches thoroughly cleaned and oiled and any repair work carried out. On top of this, the coaches had, in total, 38 double-sided panes of glass to be cleaned and the station and its environs had to be swept and every piece of litter collected up.

Because of the high standard of maintenance, mechanical failures were extremely rare. Each winter, all the rolling stock was removed to the Hunt's workshop and given a full check over.

The Sutton Miniature Railway could justifiably lay claim to being one of the best maintained layouts in the country.

Development of the SMR had now reached its zenith and the line seemed set for an extremely rosy future, with annual passengers of approximately 100,000 and all its equipment in first class condition.

However, the '*writing was already on the wall*' as the saying goes, owing to the fact that the ground lease for the whole of the *Crystal Palace* site was due to expire at the end of the 1962 season. Sutton Town Council now held the freehold and they stated that the agreement would not be renewed.

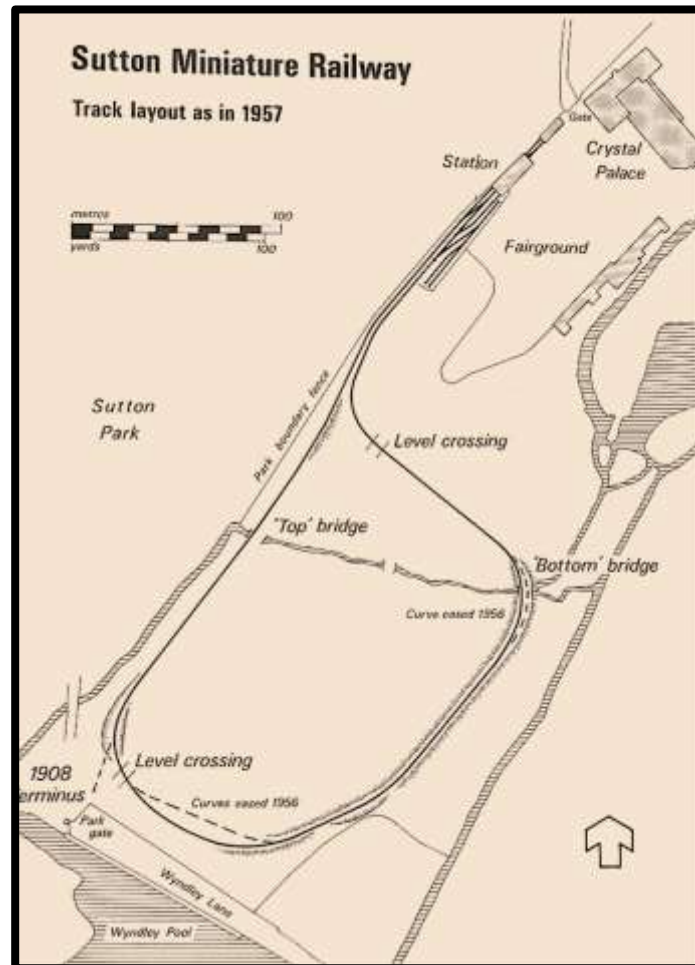


Fig. 64. Track layout of the Sutton Miniature Railway in 1957.

Knowing this, Pat Collins, from 1960 onwards, allowed the funfair to slowly run down in terms of the quality and number of rides on offer and consequently the numbers of visitors also began to decline.

Douglas V Jones in his book commented;

**“The summer of 1962 saw the demolition of another familiar landmark, the Crystal Palace, and there were complaints among some visitors that Sutton Park would never be quite the same again. Later in the same year, the Crystal Palace Funfair closed down.”**

The Hunts made representations to the Council to be allowed to stay on the site, as part of any future re-development, but it was all to no avail. Consequently, after a period of 55 years, the little line's existence finally came to an end on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1962.

Within four months, the track had been lifted, buildings dismantled and all the equipment moved into storage. It is almost certain that Tom Hunt's Foundry at Oldbury was used for this purpose.

A year or two later, the bulldozers moved in as Sutton Town Council began the first tentative stages in the re-development of the site. Eventually, in 1970, the Wyndley Leisure Centre was built. This major complex, which incorporated a 400 metre, 8-lane running track, with grassed central area for field events, all-weather outdoor pitch, squash, tennis and badminton courts, sauna and solarium suites and a swimming bath with a 33-metre pool, was much appreciated by the local population.

Most traces of the Sutton Miniature Railway have been swept away, but it is still possible to find one bridge over the stream and a brick retaining wall alongside the park boundary. The site of the station and sidings can also be identified, if one knows where to look.

Interestingly, history has turned full circle, as the running track lies almost exactly on the site of the old cycle track, which formed part of the Royal Promenade Gardens in 1868.

Remarkably, the little railway remained in storage, in the possession of the Hunt family, for almost 40 years until it was rescued by a company based in Cleethorpes, situated on the East Coast of England.

Sometime earlier, however, there was a false alarm concerning the collection when, in 1988, it was thought the miniature railway would end up being shipped overseas to Canada. An article in the Birmingham Mail on the 10<sup>th</sup> February explained:

**“Sutton Coldfield’s famous miniature railway could be brought out of storage to run again as a city tourist attraction, despite a bid to have it shipped overseas.**

**A buyer in Canada has offered around £125,000 for equipment once used on the miniature railway in Sutton Park.**

**Thousands of visitors, from all over the West Midlands, rode the train until the railway closed in 1962. Now City Councillors have agreed, in principle, to spend up to £150,000 to buy and restore the miniature railway, so it can be operated again, but this time at the Birmingham Railway Museum site at Tyseley.**

**The extra £25,000 would cover track and other small items of equipment needed.**

**Much of the equipment was kept by a Black Country firm of engineers and, although in storage, it is in good condition.**

**Mr Bill Hunt, a director of the firm, is a Trustee of the Birmingham Railway Museum. He has received an offer for the equipment from Canada, but would prefer to see it remain in the Midlands.**

**The museum is keen to acquire the miniature railway and members of the City Council’s Economic Development Sub-Committee were told this week that its restoration could coincide with Birmingham City Council’s centenary year in 1989.**

**The sub-committee approved spending up to £150,000 from the Partnership Programme to buy and restore the Sutton Miniature Railway, subject to agreement by the Finance and Management Committee and the Environment Secretary.”**

In the event, the scheme did not progress further due, no doubt, to the fact that all the parties concerned were unable to reach a satisfactory agreement.

The little railway therefore remained in storage for another twelve years, before another offer was accepted.

### **Cleethorpes Coast Light Railway**

The Cleethorpes Miniature Railway was formed in 1948 when a Mr William Botterill of Peterborough was selected by Cleethorpes Borough Council to open a 10¼” gauge railway behind Cleethorpes Bathing Pool, near the sea front at Cleethorpes, a holiday destination in North East Lincolnshire, situated on the East coast of England, quite close to the fishing port of Grimsby. It ran for a distance of 300 yards and was opened to the public on the 17<sup>th</sup> July.



The line was re-located and extended the following year and, subsequently, it ran southwards for 760 yards from Cleethorpes Town to Thrunscoe Recreation Ground.

Although the miniature railway was an instant hit, relations between Botterill and the Council were often uneasy and, when the lease came up for renewal in 1953, new tenders were invited to be submitted.

Discussions took place, which resulted in Mr Arthur Clethro becoming the new owner. Mr Clethro was from an amusement background and he decided to build three battery-electric locomotives. The Cleethorpes Miniature Electric Railway was formed and the line was re-opened on Good Friday 1954. Although not as eye-catching as the previous steam locomotives, they proved to be extremely reliable.

Arthur Clethro was, however, a busy man, with many interests elsewhere and, in October 1958, he offered the railway for sale to the Council. The line was therefore 'nationalised' in 1959!

Throughout the 1960's, the railway sometimes found itself in difficult waters. It was becoming increasingly hard to maintain the rolling stock, after years of hard use. By the end of the decade the battery locomotives were showing their age and the railway's existence was being continuously called into question.

Not without a certain amount of controversy, the Council determined to extend and modernise the railway. At a cost of £40,550, a larger and extended railway was built, opening in June 1972. The new track of 14¼" gauge featured two gas propane locomotives. As part of the upgrade, the line was also extended both north and south. The northern terminus was re-positioned slightly closer to the town centre, whilst, at its southern end, it ran as far as the Zoo.

Despite there being high hopes for the re-birth of the railway, it gradually found itself in financial difficulties again towards the end of the 1980's. This was due to a general decline in tourism in the UK, with families increasingly turning to holidays abroad. There was also the rising cost involved in maintaining the engines, rolling stock and track.

Fares continued to mount, in an attempt to meet these rising costs, but passenger numbers were down and therefore little investment took place.

Happily, the railway's fortunes were about to change. A group, led by Chris Shaw, approached the Council and an agreement was reached to purchase the business in 1991. A new company was formed when it was privatised and the line was re-named the Cleethorpes Coast Light Railway (CCLR).

The new company invested in the infrastructure and rolling stock upgrades, which were needed, plus the track was standardised to 15" gauge in 1994. In the interim period, the zoo had closed to visitors and was abandoned and so a new southern terminus was built called 'Lakeside'.

In 2000 there was further good news, as a successful National Lottery bid enabled the railways supporter association to acquire stock from the long-dismantled Sutton Miniature Railway, which had operated in Sutton Park almost 40 years previously and was now referred to as the SMR Historic Collection. Not included in the transaction was the evergreen Bassett-Lowke steam engine named the 'Mighty Atom', which had originally been built in 1908.

The locomotive remained in the hands of a private owner, in storage, awaiting restoration. In 2008, however, this engine was finally secured by the CCLR, thus completing the SMR Historic Collection.

The CCLR was further extended in 2007, from Lakeside to Humberston North Sea Lane, which lengthened the railway to 2,130 yards.

Unfortunately, however, during its latter years at Cleethorpes, the SMR Historic Collection fell into disuse as it was no longer wholly suitable for the Cleethorpes Light Railway's operating plans and sadly the fleet of carriages were left open to the elements and the harsh sea air.

The business once more changed hands in May 2014, when it was sold to the Seaside Railway Group. Over the winter of 2014/15, the station at Lakeside was completely reconfigured and improved, with a new café and further developments around the site. In 2021, the company purchased the Scarborough North Bay Railway and, with this second railway, the two sites were able to pool their resources for mutual benefit.

Following the COVID pandemic shut down, the railway grew in popularity and the 2021 season was the most successful for decades. The railway is now a thriving business and was voted the No. 1 tourist attraction in North East Lincolnshire.

The miniature railway has been delighting generations of visitors since 1948, when it started as a post-war seaside ride. In 2023, it celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and has now carried over 5 million passengers.

The line takes you on a two-mile journey around the Boating Lake, over a splendid viaduct, before joining the sea-front path, with views of the coast, before winding inland.



Fig. 65. Locomotive and carriages of the CCLR crossing the viaduct over the boating lake.

### Vintage Trains Charitable Trust

Turning back once more to the SMR Historic Collection, the opportunity to rescue the collection and return it to the Midlands was seized upon by Vintage Trains Charitable Trust (VTCT), formerly the Birmingham Railway Museum Trust, as the preservation of such items was very much in keeping with their aims and aspirations.

Their principal activity is to **'Encourage and promote public interest in the preservation of steam and other railway locomotives and rolling stock of historical importance.'**

The VTCT is located at the Tyseley Locomotive Works, 670 Warwick Road, Tyseley, Birmingham and plans are in hand to re-furbish the various locomotives and rolling stock now in their possession. These include the 'Sutton Belle', the 'Sutton Flyer' the petrol railcar 'Dudley', four 'toast-rack' open carriages and a coal wagon.

It is their intention for the SMR Historic Collection to visit other 15" gauge railways and plans are well advanced for a miniature railway layout of their own, as part of the wider VTCT Tyseley site development. This will start as an initial short stretch of line for demonstration and educational purposes only and will be extended, as funds and site access allow.

In fact, way back in October 1973, the Trust contacted the Hunt family and agreement was reached for the 'Sutton Belle' to be brought out of storage in Oldbury for a special festival of steam, which was held at the Birmingham Railway Museum in Tyseley.

A newspaper article in the Sutton Coldfield News gave the details;



The delights of "steam" were experienced by 11 years old Georgina Sears and her brother Roy and sister Judy, when they saw the miniature steam engine "Sutton Belle."

## 'Sutton Belle' among the giants of steam

The "Sutton Belle" steam train which once ran on a miniature railway in Sutton Park, was brought out of retirement for the first time in many years on Sunday.

The little engine was one of the attractions at a steam festival held at the Birmingham Railway Museum Tyseley.

More than 15,000 people gathered to see and ride steam engines, made famous by their engineering and character.

Britain's world famous "Flying Scotsman", built in 1923 and which once ran from Kings Cross to Edinburgh, proved to be a favourite with most visitors.

### SCRAP MERCHANT

The festival was held to raise money for the renovation of the "Thornbury Castle" steam train, which once ran between Worcester and Hereford.

When steam gave way to the faster, cleaner diesel train "Thornbury Castle" was sold to a scrap merchant in Barry, South Wales, where for ten years it lay rotting.

The British Railway Museum rescued the train from the scrap heap and transported it to Tyseley, where it was on show on Sunday. More than £10,000 is needed to restore the train to complete main line operation.

Also on display was a miniature train from the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch light railway, the famous "Clun Castle", "Albert Hall", "Eric Treacy" steam trains, traction engines, a steam organ and side-shows.

Admission may be free

Pedestrians residents involved have to pay to rally in Sutton month.

Last year residents who to the park with their money but.

However, everybody may Mr. J. P. Hodge Clerk, said: "The being considered mittee.

They are re-tution but no made until the October 29."

The rally, which event, is expected some 50,000 visitors.

SUTTON 19.

Edlin

Fig. 66. An article from the 'Sutton Coldfield News', dated 10<sup>th</sup> February 1988, describing how the 'Sutton Belle' was brought out of retirement for the day.'

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### **Photographs**

**Fig. 1.** *St.Werburgh's Catholic Church, Chester, where Pat Collins was christened.*  
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**Fig. 2.** *St. Peter's Church, Liverpool, where Pat Collins married Flora MacDonald Ross.*  
<https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=st+peter%27s+church+church+street+liverpool>  
**Fig. 3.** *An advertisement for the Zoo, which opened around 1900.*  
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**Fig. 4.** *Pool, Youth Centre – Sutton Coldfield: An Archaeological Survey, 1977.*  
**Fig. 5.** *The pools, laid out by Job Cole in the Royal Promenade Gardens, Crystal Palace, circa 1900.*  
*Photograph courtesy of Lilywhite Ltd.*  
**Fig. 6.** *Plan of Job Cole's house and land, which was named 'Park View'.*  
**Fig. 7.** *A view of the Crystal Palace complex from Sutton Park, circa 1880.*  
*'The Old Photographs Series – Sutton Coldfield'. Compiled by Marian Baxter. Published by Alan Sutton Limited, Bath 1994.*  
**Fig. 8.** *The large glass dome, which formed part of the Crystal Palace. 1931.*  
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**Fig. 9.** *Advertisement for the Royal Promenade Gardens, placed by Job Cole.*  
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*Advertisement courtesy of Zoe Toft, a member of the SCLHRG.*  
**Fig. 11.** *A distant view of the Crystal Palace, taken from the Sanatorium, previously the Royal Hotel, 1890's.*  
*Origin of photograph unknown.*  
**Fig. 12.** *Another view of the Crystal Palace, taken from Sutton Park, circa 1890's.*  
*'Buildings of Birmingham' by Roy Thornton, Sutton Coldfield Library, Local Studies Section, Ref: No. BCOL.942. 496. BIR.*  
**Fig. 13.** *An advertisement for the Crystal Palace in 1880, when the Proprietor was a Mr O E McGregor.*  
*'Sutton Coldfield, A History and Guide' by Eliezer Edwards, 1880.*  
**Fig. 14.** *The gardens of the Crystal Palace, circa 1880's.*  
*Photograph courtesy of Eileen Donohoe, a member of the SCLHRG.*  
**Fig. 15.** *Artist's impression of the Royal Hotel, with a locomotive on the turntable below, prior to its return journey to Birmingham, circa 1865. Painting was probably commissioned to celebrate the opening of the hotel the same year.*  
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**Fig. 16.** An advertisement for the Royal Crystal Palace placed by Charles Earle in 1890. The Warwickshire Herald dated the 14<sup>th</sup> August 1890.

**Fig. 17.** A view of the Crystal Palace Hotel, from Sutton Park, 1904. Chester Vaughan Series of Postcards.

**Fig. 18.** A huge party of deprived children from Smethwick arriving at Sutton Park in a long column, via the Town Gate entrance. It is headed by a brass band to enliven the proceedings. 'Sutton Coldfield – A Pictorial History' by Sue Bates. Published by Phillimore & Co. Limited, West Sussex 1997.

**Fig. 19.** A group of 'Royal Robins' children taken in 1898. They look so cheerful, but they had nothing but the very barest of necessities. Compare these with the children of today. 'The Old Photographs Series – Sutton Coldfield'. Compiled by Marian Baxter. Published by Alan Sutton Limited, Bath 1994.

**Fig. 20.** A horse-drawn brake, circa 1890. [www2.westsussex.gov.uk/learning-resources](http://www2.westsussex.gov.uk/learning-resources)

**Fig. 21.** A horse-drawn wagonette. <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com>

**Fig. 22.** Advertisement for the White House, Hollyhurst, Sutton Park, circa 1901. 'The Popular Guide to Sutton Park' by G Sidwell & W J Durant, Third Edition 1901.

**Fig. 23.** The White House Tearooms, Hollyhurst, Sutton Park, circa 1901. 'The Popular Guide to Sutton Park' by G Sidwell & W J Durant, Third Edition 1901.

**Fig. 24.** Mr R H Delaney, Manager of Pat Collins' Amusement Park. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 25.** A bioscope at Nottingham Goose Fair in 1908, showing the ornate carved and gilded proscenium. The bioscope at this time was at the height of its popularity. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 26.** Poster advertising the opening of the 'Grosvenor' cinema in 1922. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 27.** The 'Grosvenor' cinema, Bloxwich, shortly after its sale to Oscar Deutsch & Associates in 1931. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 28.** Pat & Flora Collins sitting outside their trailer, which they used when they were travelling around the country, circa early 1930's. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 29.** Pat & Clara Collins on their wedding day on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1935. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 30.** The newly built Big Dipper, or Scenic Railway as it was sometimes called, 1937. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 31.** Pat & Clara Collins, at the time they were elected the Mayor and Mayoress of Walsall, 1938. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 32.** 'Lime Tree House', Bloxwich, circa 1930's. 'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.

**Fig. 33.** Fig. 26. Mass being held at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Bloxwich for Alderman Patrick Collins, 1943. <https://www.stpetersbloxwich.org.uk/historical-gallery.html>

**Fig. 34.** The Pat Collins Memorial Clock, Bloxwich Park and Promenade Gardens, Walsall, 2013. <https://thebloxwichtelegraph.wordpress.com/history/bloxwich-parks-history>

**Fig. 35.** The Boating Pool at the Crystal Palace Amusement Park, Summer 1934. Keith & Janet Jordan's Photographic Collection, No. 1417.

**Fig. 36.** Another view of the Boating Pool at Crystal Palace Amusement Park, showing how popular the venue was to the general public, Summer 1934. Photograph courtesy of A C Aston.

**Fig. 37.** Advertisement for the Crystal Palace Amusement Park, 1936.  
*Sutton Coldfield Guide 1936, Sutton Coldfield Library, Local Studies Section.*

**Fig. 38.** William Bagnall, Manager of the Crystal Palace Amusement Park in 1948.  
*Photograph courtesy of Sutton Coldfield News, date unknown.*

**Fig. 39.** Plans for a new toilet block at the Crystal Palace, 1943.  
*Borough of Sutton Coldfield Plans No. 8568, dated 4<sup>th</sup> November 1943.*

**Fig. 40.** A new Big Dipper, or Scenic Railway, in the process of being erected, 1946.  
*Sutton Coldfield News, dated 17<sup>th</sup> April 1946.*

**Fig. 41.** The Big Dipper at the Crystal Palace Amusement Park, August 1950. Not long after this photograph was taken, the ride was dismantled and taken to Battersea Park, London.  
*'Pat Collins-King of Showmen' by Freda Allen & Ned Williams. Published by Uralia Press, Wolverhampton, 1991.*

**Fig. 42.** The 'Jack and Jill Glide' at the Crystal Palace Amusement Park in 1952. The concrete stumps of the Big Dipper, which had been dismantled earlier, can still be seen on the right-hand side.  
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**Fig. 43.** The Crystal Palace in May 1962, just prior to the start of demolition.  
*Keith & Janet Jordan's Photographic Collection No. 2157.*

**Fig. 44.** A worm's eye view of Sutton Coldfield's old Crystal Palace, now in the course of demolition, with the glass panes removed.  
*Sutton Coldfield News, dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 1962.*

**Fig. 45.** The Crystal Palace site in 1964, two years after it had officially closed.  
*Photograph by D J Cadwallader, March 1964, Sutton Coldfield Reference Library.*

**Fig. 46.** The 'Nipper' at Bricket Wood, with George Flooks driving, 1904.  
*'The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway' by J G Tidmarsh. Published by Plateway Press, Brighton, 1990.*

**Fig. 47.** The 'Nipper' at Abington Park, Northampton, travelling across the viaduct, with Fred Smithies driving, Easter 1905.  
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**Fig. 48.** 'Nipper' at the Crystal Palace in 1907, shortly after the new line opened.  
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**Fig. 49.** The 'Mighty Atom' on the new 15" gauge railway at the Crystal Palace, which opened in 1908. The locomotive is shown crossing the viaduct over the stream towards the Wyndley end of the track.  
*'The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway' by J G Tidmarsh. Published by Plateway Press, Brighton, 1990.*

**Fig. 50.** Ordnance Survey Map of 1886, showing the site of the Crystal Palace, the Royal Promenade Gardens and the line of the Miniature Railways of Great Britain Ltd. (MRGB) track.  
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**Fig. 51.** The 'Mighty Atom' surrounded by the boys of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, together with their Schoolmaster.  
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**Fig. 52.** Example of the ticket issued to visitors.  
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**Fig. 53.** Layout of the terminus of the Sutton Miniature Railway in 1938.  
*'The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway' by J G Tidmarsh. Published by Plateway Press, Brighton, 1990.*

**Fig. 54.** The 'Prince of Wales' locomotive, still in the livery of the Yarmouth Miniature Railway. The driver is Dudley Priestley and the other person is Dan Cartwright the Manager, at the time, of the Crystal Palace Amusement Park, 1938.  
*'The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway in Pictures' by J G Tidmarsh. Published by Plateway Press, Brighton, 2009.*

**Fig. 55** A typical view of the miniature railway in the mid-1940's, showing the rather run-down aspect of the line. The fencing is falling down, there are weeds growing all over the tracks and the locomotive looks in need of a complete overhaul!

*'The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway'* by J G Tidmarsh. Published by Plateway Press, Brighton, 1990.

**Fig. 56.** The 'Prince of Wales' and the 'Sutton Belle' round the curve at the lowest point of the line. The drivers are Bill Hunt and Jim Glover, 1949.

*'The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway'* by J G Tidmarsh. Published by Plateway Press, Brighton, 1990.

**Fig. 57.** Layout of the terminus of the Sutton Miniature Railway in 1947.

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**Fig. 58.** Bill Hunt driving the 'Sutton Flyer'; with carriages full of visitors, in June 1953.

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**Fig. 59.** Heraldic emblem for the Sutton Miniature Railway.

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**Fig. 60.** Jim Glover driving away from the station in the Bo-Bo petrol locomotive, circa 1960.

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**Fig. 61.** The new and enlarged station on the Sutton Miniature Railway, 1957.

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**Fig. 62.** Filling up the locomotives with water, at the start of another busy day on the Sutton Miniature Railway, 1957.

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**Fig. 63.** Layout of the terminus of the Sutton Miniature Railway in 1957.

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**Fig. 64.** Track layout of the Sutton Miniature Railway in 1957.

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**Fig. 65.** Locomotive and carriages of the CCLR crossing the viaduct over the boating lake.

<https://www.cclr.co.uk/the-railway>

**Fig. 66.** An article from the Sutton Coldfield News, describing how the 'Sutton Belle' was brought out of retirement for the day.

*'Sutton Coldfield News'* dated 10<sup>th</sup> February 1988.

### **Acknowledgements**

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*Keith M Jordan.*

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