



SARAH HOLBECHÉ

**A Victorian Lady who lived
in Sutton Coldfield
(22.9.1803 – 20.8.1882)**

A Talk (with illustrations)
given at
Sutton Coldfield Library
on Wednesday, 27 June 2001

by

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PRE-AMBLE

Those of you who have done research on the history of Sutton Coldfield may have come across the name of 'Holbeche' and will have heard about 'The Holbeche Diary', which is in the local studies library here.

For those of you who have never heard of it, it was an account, written in 1892 by Richard Holbeche, about his childhood days, growing up in the Sutton of the 1850s. His recollections contain amusing details of the town, with little pen pictures of its quaint inhabitants, their activities and the houses they lived in.

We do, in fact, know quite a bit about this Family. For a start, they were landed gentry and they lived in Sutton in the 1800s. The Holbeche men were Sutton's professional elite; many of them were solicitors and as such became legal advisers to the Corporation. One even became the equivalent of Mayor (known in those days as 'The Warden'). Another became the first Town Clerk and those of you who know Falcon Lodge will recognise Holbeche Road, named after him. But Richard Holbeche didn't follow the family trait. His future led him in other directions. But that is another story, which, again, you will find on the library shelves.

Richard wasn't the first to keep a diary. Several of the family appear to have been very keen on it! In fact, it was an account written by Helen Holbeche, who was one of his six spinster aunts, that prompted Richard to do the same.

There are actually several photographs with Richard's original diary that he 'borrowed' from the work of someone else. That someone was his Aunt Sarah, his eldest aunt. She has made a contribution to the archives of Sutton which

may become equally important, and, whereas Richard's diary was more of a series of recollections, hers is more of a proper diary because she dated events as they happened.

So, how did her diary turn up? Well, it was after tracking down the present-day descendants of the family that I found it in Stoke on Trent in 1999, at the home of Richard's great niece. She allowed me to take a photocopy, which was no mean feat, because it was over 150 pages long. It took the form of a large, bulging scrapbook. On its cover were the words 'Omnium Gatherum' (meaning roughly 'a collection of everything').

Over the years, the present family had believed its author to be Helen Holbeche, the family genealogist, and they were quite surprised when I discovered that it had been written by her elder sister, Sarah.

So we are about to recall Sarah's diary. It is packed full of all sorts of incidental happenings in Sutton, in an era that spans more than half of the 19th century. Her writing was very difficult to read at times but well worth persevering with, and her story begins more than 200 years ago.

In 1794, ten years before she was born, her father, Thomas, moved from Coleshill, where he was a solicitor's articled clerk, to Sutton, at the age of 22. He rented rooms at The Old School House, Church Yard, at the top of Trinity Hill (then called 'Blind Hill').



Blind Hill, now known as Trinity Hill, c. 1800.

1. The Old School House

He must have been quite a bright young man because, in the next five years, he qualified as a solicitor and joined Mr Croxall in his thriving legal business. Before long, he joined the Sutton Coldfield Corporation (which was known then as 'The Warden and Society') and he was actually made Warden when he was only 26 years old

In **1802**, he married Sarah Gamble, who was also from Sutton, and they moved into Ivy House in the High Street. Sarah was born there one year later, the first of their fifteen children, making quite an addition to the population of Sutton at that time, which was about 3000!



1. *Ivy House*

So, with their ever-increasing family, Thomas and his wife needed larger living accommodation. They found a house that they could rent just a few doors away, just a bit further up the road. - Sarah remembers it later being called 'Sadler's

House' after Mr Sadler, the solicitor who eventually owned it, and it was there, almost on a yearly basis, that 9 more children were born.



3 *Sadler House (indicated by 'a flag' attached to the photo).*

When she was 6, Sarah went to Miss Everitt's school at 'The Rookery', which was a large house, surrounded by beautiful gardens, set back from the Lichfield Road and situated on the site of the present Police Station. However, it was not until she was 9, in **1812**, that she first learned to write. This would have been at the time when 'dames' schools, run by educated women, and Sunday schools were the norm - conventional schooling didn't start in Sutton until 1825. Those

Sunday Schools were really looked forward to, bearing in mind that Sutton was a sleepy little town, still steeped in the Georgian era, with no gas or electricity, no running water, no lavatories (only chamberpots) - no railways and certainly no summer holidays!

No 12 The Rookery 25

One of my first recollections connected herewith was going as a little child to see Capt. Handley's black puffs, and my lesson of Capt Handley and his gouty foot; after that I went there to school, Miss Everett the presiding power, and Miss Longue's successor then, on the death of the former, created by Miss Webb's about 1820 - Miss Webb dying in 1861 left it with her whole property to her only nephew W Webb of Great Yarmouth - Huntington St -

Sold in 1866 to Mr Bullamys Miss Webb added the bay window; and connected with it, much can be connected the remembrance of good works; great talents; unselfish consideration for others; charity boundless both by justice; added to strict, untiring industry, and christian sympathy, must have seen her actions while health and energy lasted and in sickness and death, seen through her for the good of others friends and neighbours, and in these little bits see the world she did away at her sleep.

26
27
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DR. BUCKLAND'S GEORGE SYDNEYSON - One year a lion, in the province of "San spirit" at Dayton, Mass. Dr. Buckland, Mr William Follet, and Mr. George Chapman, were among the guests assembled. The immortal midway signpost is remarkable for peculiar notice on dispensable points in various situations. For instance, he leaves by the office of simplicity on a tall wheelbarrow the road gate or not; and, as he has gone about as deep as most have laid the bowels of the land, he rejoins with the theories of Warr and Hutton - the advocates of ice and the advance of water - and announces his own views with as much impartiality as the other.

4. The Rookery (as described by Sarah in her diary)

There wasn't much to do at all in those days for middle class women, such as in this family, and they would have whiled away their hours by reading books and sewing - very often, making rather useless items. During the day, they would sit close to the window struggling to see their work in the natural daylight, and then in the evenings, huddling around expensive candles, probably with aching eyes and stiff necks!



5. *Sewing by Daylight/Reading by Candlelight*

But Sarah's mother made use of these skills. She got herself involved in the 'Lying in Charity', a group which was set up in Sutton to help poor young mothers through the expense of childbirth, by providing blankets and clothes for them and their babies free of charge, during their confinement. Sarah was coerced into sewing for this Charity, which she continued to do for most of her life - already showing signs of her generous nature!

This was also a time when nights were a real problem in the Sutton streets, which were dimly lit by oil lamps. Watchmen used to patrol the town at night, occasionally calling out the time - they were paid 10/- (50p) a week. Their route took them past the Holbeche residence, where the family left out a glass of elder wine on the steps for them - which more often than not filled up with snow or froze solid in the winter!

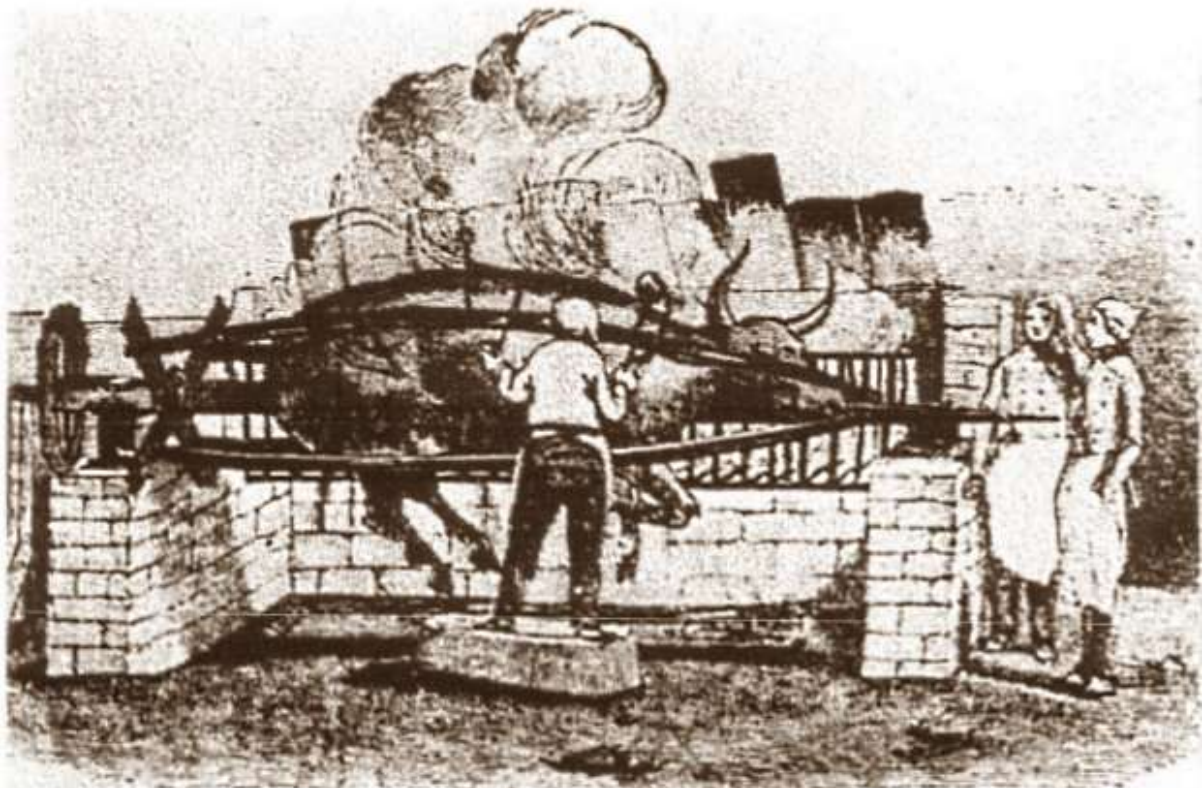
Of course, that elder wine would have been homemade, because there were no shops as we know them. People could buy domestic goods at fairs, which were held a few times a year, but it was still to be several years before the arrival of canvas hooded wagons, drawn by horses, which would come trundling down



6. *Horse-drawn Wagon*

the streets, selling all sorts of other types of produce, such as haberdashery, matches and toys. Song sheets, too, were a very popular item - most necessary for the evening's entertainment! Then there were the travelling salesmen, who brought their wares in to the local villages and town - they sold things like fish, or material. And, finally, there would have been the tinkers and gypsies that we still see today, who sharpened knives and sold clothes pegs.

Bread, of course, was also homemade; a staple food then, along with cheese. Meat for many people was a luxury. Therefore, Sarah remembers it vividly when they roasted an ox on the open common at Ley Hill, Mere Green. It was to celebrate the Declaration of Peace on 14 June **1814** at the end of the Napoleonic war. Loaves of bread were distributed from carts to the crowds that had gathered there. She also remembers the awful weather; in particular a heavy storm, which soaked her parasol, causing its green dye to run down, all over the bread!



7. *Ox Roast*

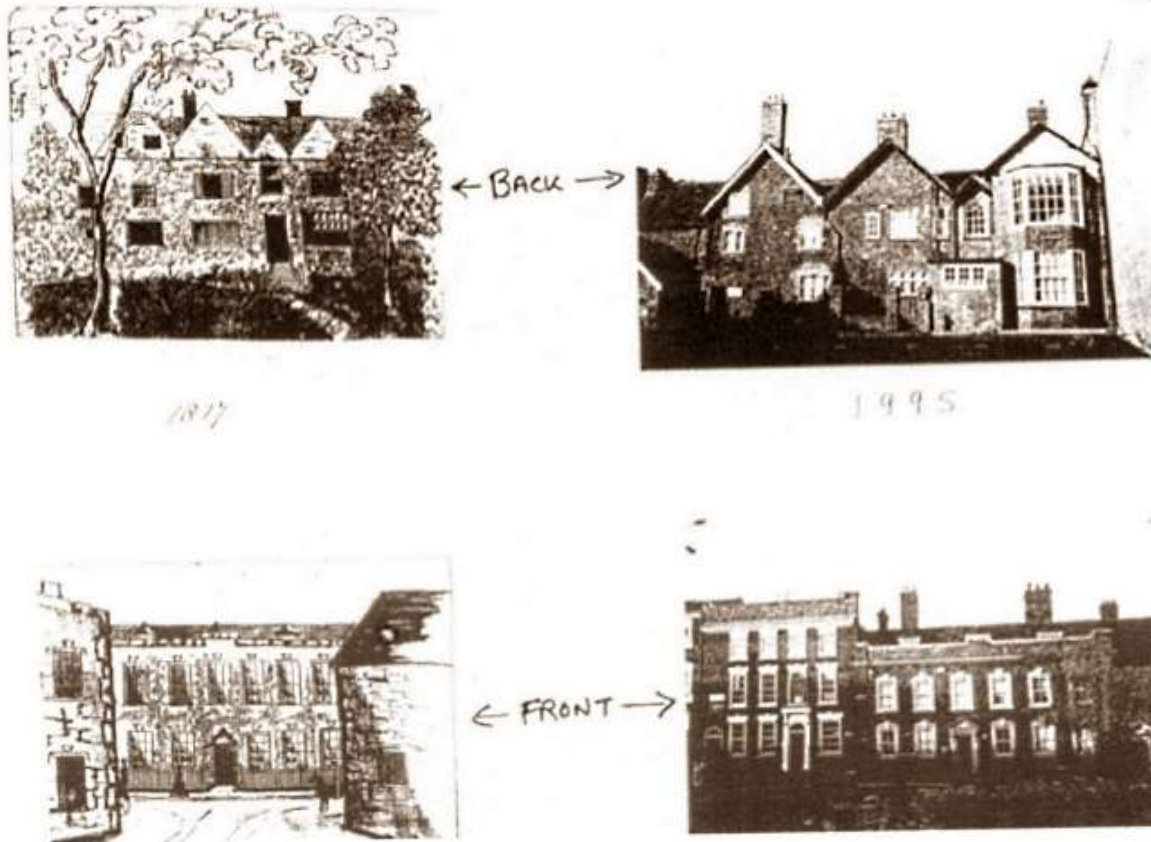
Another exciting event for her - in **1816**. - The Smith Family ran what was called 'a caravan' from the Three Tuns, being a form of transport initiated nationally by Pickfords, the removal people that we know even today. It was a sort of glorified wagon for passengers and the only means of public transport from Sutton to Birmingham other than the through coaches (that is, the mail or stage coaches). When the Smiths exchanged it for a coach which ran 4 days a week, it caused quite a stir! Sarah says it was a real sight to see it start off - and travelling on it was quite a thing. It cost 4/- (20p) to travel inside and 2/6 (12½p) for the hardy souls who sat outside - which seems to indicate it was a 'stage' coach.

As Sarah reached her teenage years, a family tragedy occurred - the first of her brothers to die, baby Martin and, not long after, another blow! This was when their landlord sold their house to Mr Sadler, over the head of Sarah's father, leaving the family desperate in **1817** to find a new home - not so easy when there were nearly a dozen of them at that time. But they had a lot of support, because of Thomas' social standing as a Solicitor in the Town. In particular, the old Rector of Holy Trinity Parish Church, Reverend John Riland, proved to be a real friend in need.



8. *The Old Rector*

He owned the Old Rectory in Coleshill Street, which was absolutely ideal for a large family, and, feeling sorry for them, he offered to sell it to Thomas for £1,700. These days, it is known as No 1 - 3 Coleshill Street.



9. *1-3, Coleshill Street*

With this house went a pew in the south gallery of the church, a separate bargain at £50. It was quite common in those days for wealthy families to own a pew in the church. So, both items were purchased and the family moved in to the Old Rectory. They were to live in that house for the next 75 years!

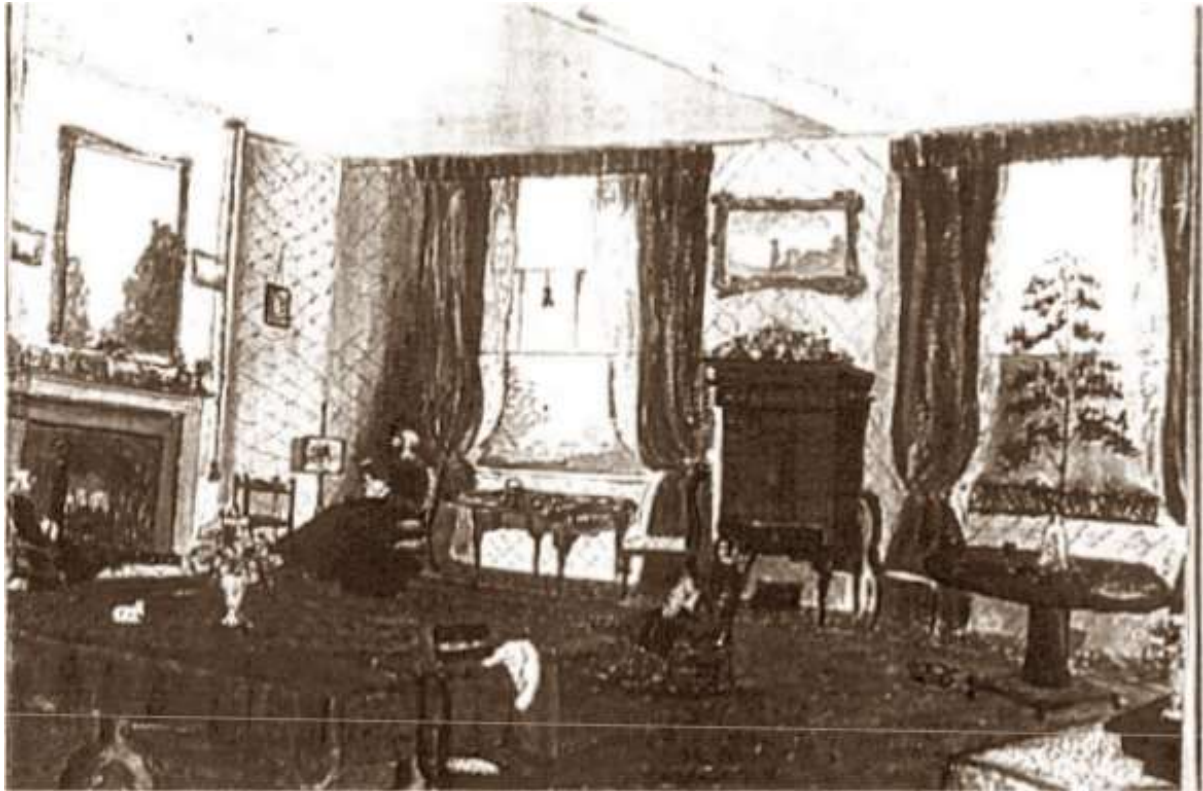
Holy Trinity Church

The 1760 Chancel and Nave



10. Pew in South Gallery

In 1818, Sarah left school at the age of 15. She was destined 'to make herself useful' And why - because another five children were now on their way, twin boys amongst them, and what a godsend Sarah proved to be! No doubt, all her 'spare' time would have been spent sewing for the family, as depicted by one of the family members.



11. *Inside of 103 Coleshill Street*

She was by now her mother's right hand and quite an adult. Soon, she began to notice Town events and, no doubt due to her father's interest in the Town, she had always been well aware of the activities of the Mayor and Corporation (which, as we know, was called the 'Warden and Society'). She knew who they were and what they stood for. Every year, she knew that November 2 was a very important day - it had a strange name, it was known as 'Warden's Choice' - the day when the new Warden was elected - and it was quite a day in the Holbeche household, as Thomas, her father, was very involved with the Society.

When, many years later, a 'Warden's Calendar' was published, recalling events in the lives of people involved with the Warden and Society, various members of the Holbeche family were recalled and there was even a note of the day Sarah died.

THE "WARDEN'S" CALENDAR FOR 1899.

JANUARY.	APRIL.	JULY.	OCTOBER.
1 S First Sunday after Christmas	1 S Royal Assent to the Poor Laws Act, 1877	1 S Sutton Park Rates, 1879	1 S Female Friendly Society estab. 1811
2 M First Football Club started '79	2 S Easter Sunday	2 S Five in Park for more than a week, 1868	2 M Appointment of new Trustees by Legislature, 1873
3 Tu Hon. E. S. Parker buried '96	3 M Corn. give leave six lower part Town '86	3 M Meeting to con. best means paying 20 Ch	3 Tu Fine Amal. Com. meet. of E. C. Inst. 1874
4 W New Charter for Sutton Inc'rs signed '86	4 Tu Sir E. C. Hartopp's lie in ch. '86	4 W Rev. W. R. Bedford died, '48 (deat. '72)	3 W Mrs A. E. Lloyd (1848 Hall) mar. 1876
5 Th Execution Tuesday Day	5 W Very deprived of his son, 1872	4 Th Joseph Webster died, 1875	4 M
6 F Loss of Colton, 1755	6 Tu King John's date from Sutton, 1848	5 M Sporting Bye Laws made, 1872	4 F
7 S	7 W Ad. made to close South Lane, 1877	5 Tu Committee of Alder Pines in C. Ch. 1769	4 M
8 M	8 S Lett B. Stone elected first mayor, 1865	6 M Ethel Frances Ethel Bedford married, '86	4 W
9 M	9 S Meet. of 2,000 inhab. Clifton's Hill, '55	6 Tu Joseph Chibberly died, 1849	4 M
10 Tu	10 W W's pass. Wainall & Mil. Ry. Bill disc. '79	6 W Rev. W. R. Bedford born, 1825	4 Tu
11 W	11 Th Joseph Duncombe, Esq. buried, 1763	6 W Edward Hands (2000 Mook) prof. Diocesan	4 M
12 Th	12 F Great Fire in Sutton Park, 1866	6 Th Marysle Pat. Sutton Park, '88	4 W
13 Th	13 S Sutton Gasworks off. in Conn. 21,000, '91	6 F "Penny" and Newington Estab. sold '84	4 M
14 F	14 M Mrs Jane Hallock died, 1861	6 S Major Webster's Com. to hold eng. '84	4 Tu
15 M	15 Tu Maria Chastock Wey, nee Shaw, died, '91	6 M Des Bank, The Anchorage, etc. etc. sold	4 M
16 M	16 W Meet. of Trustees, re old Gram. Sch., '30	6 Tu The Sycamore, Maner, sold, 1870	4 W
17 M	17 Th "Simon Tregonwell, Esq. 1478 1-Drugg. d. 1728	6 W	4 M
18 Tu	18 F Fast Scheme for Schools, etc., 1863	6 W	4 Tu
19 Tu	19 S P. A. Muntz, Esq. addressing voters, '84	6 M	4 M
20 W	20 M John Oughton, Esq. died, 1849	6 Tu	4 W
21 W	21 Th Prop. to enlarge Grammar School, 1869	6 W	4 M
22 F	22 F Reg' Yards as to Fabrics at Gram. Sch. '77	6 M	4 Tu
23 F	23 S Pub. of New Gram. School Scheme, '77	6 Tu	4 M
24 F	24 M Rev. J. H. Gibson died, '81 (1830)	6 W	4 W
25 M	25 Th Richard, Earl of Warwick, Lord of Maner,	6 M	4 M
26 M	26 F	6 Tu	4 Tu
27 M	27 S	6 W	4 M
28 Tu	28 M	6 M	4 W
29 Tu	29 Tu	6 Tu	4 M
30 W	30 W	6 W	4 Tu
31 W	31 Th	6 M	4 M

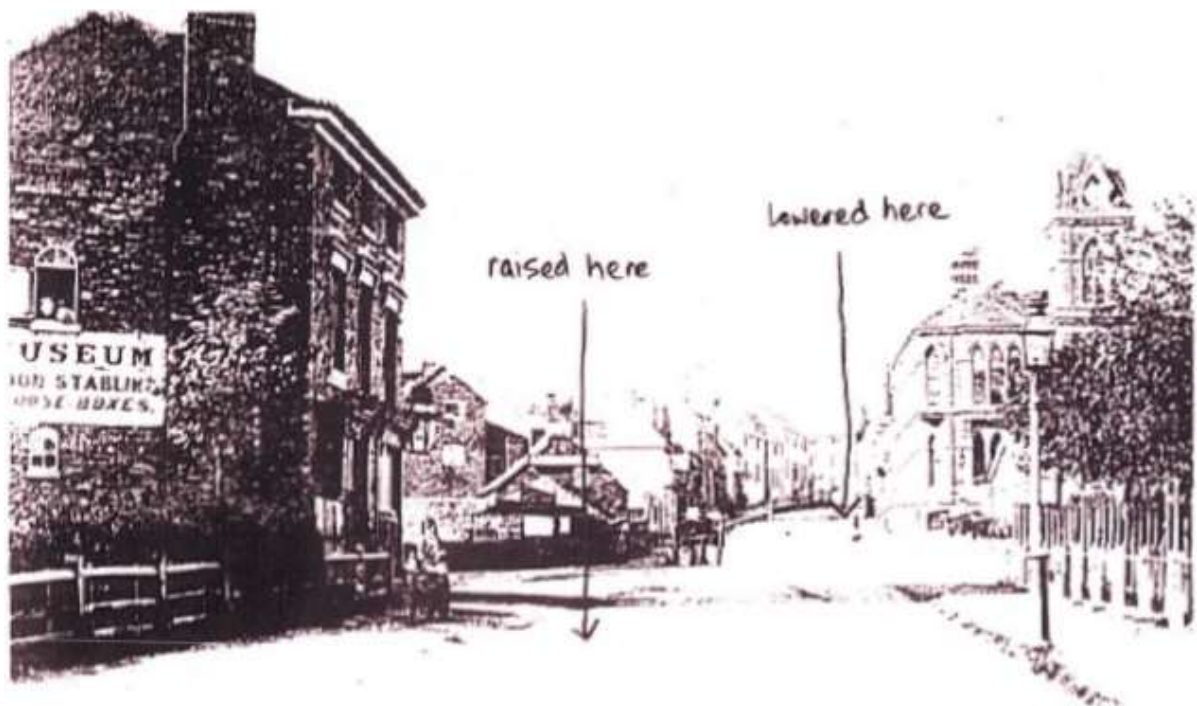
12. Warden's Calendar 1889

Unfortunately, at that time a dark cloud hung over the organisation of the Warden & Society. It was well known that it had been abusing the Town's funds

for many years, for centuries in fact - ever since Bishop Vesey's time. They were taken to the Court of Chancery, which ordered them to set up a Charity Scheme, in **1825**, to provide proper schooling for the town children, with funds earned from Sutton properties.

This was just one of the many changes about to take place in Sutton. Following behind the rest of the country, it was, however, about to be catapulted into the Victorian age. The population everywhere was increasing rapidly and cities and towns were becoming more and more affluent as trade between them increased. To cope with the additional traffic, Sutton's roads desperately needed attention.

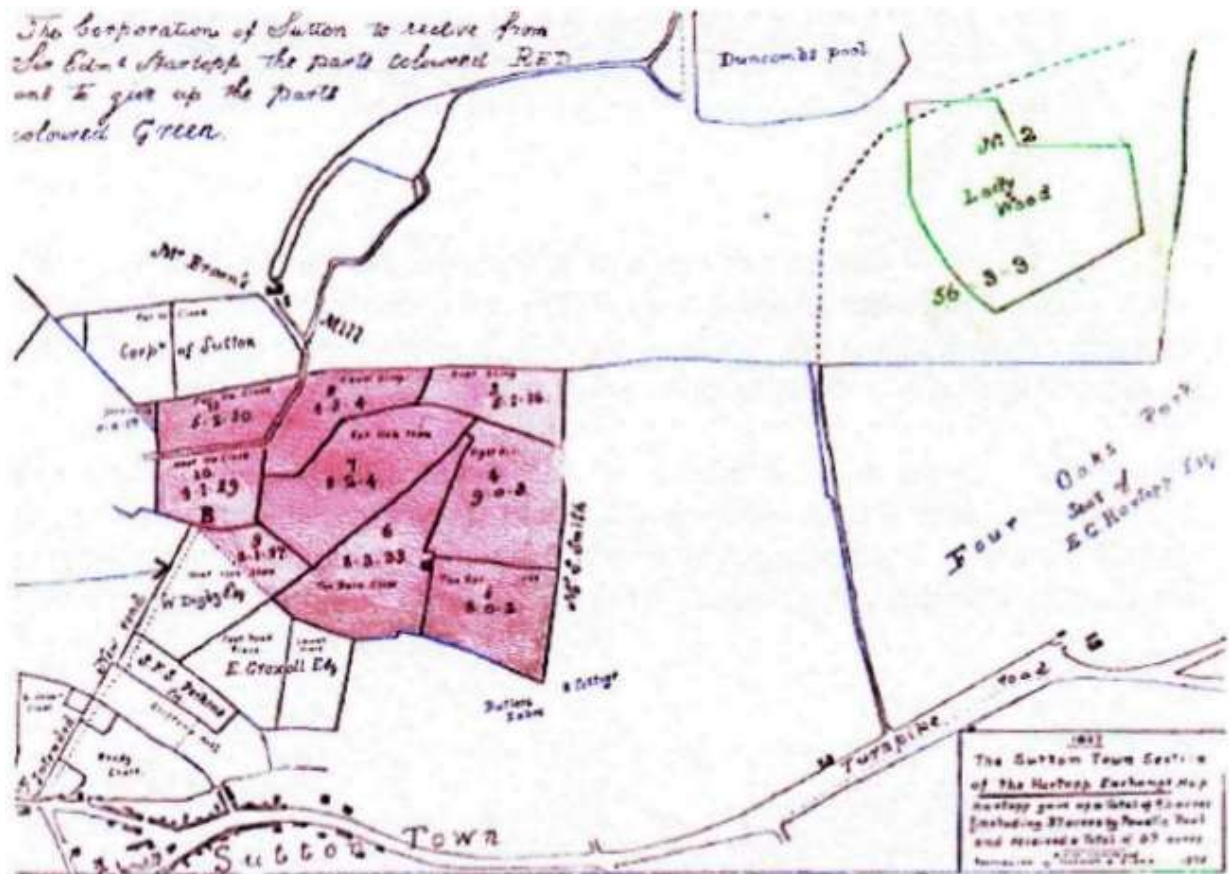
Mill Street, in particular was a real hazard. In the early 1800s it was even steeper than today and was very difficult to negotiate, particularly for the horse drawn carriages. But they solved the problem quite simply by removing earth from the top of the hill and taking it down to the bottom, thereby reducing the incline. **(1824)**



13. Levelling Mill Street

The area outside the Holbeche home in Coleshill Street must then have looked like a bombsite. Sarah remembers it well, pleased that they had also put pavements down and added a stone step to the front of their house. **(1825)**

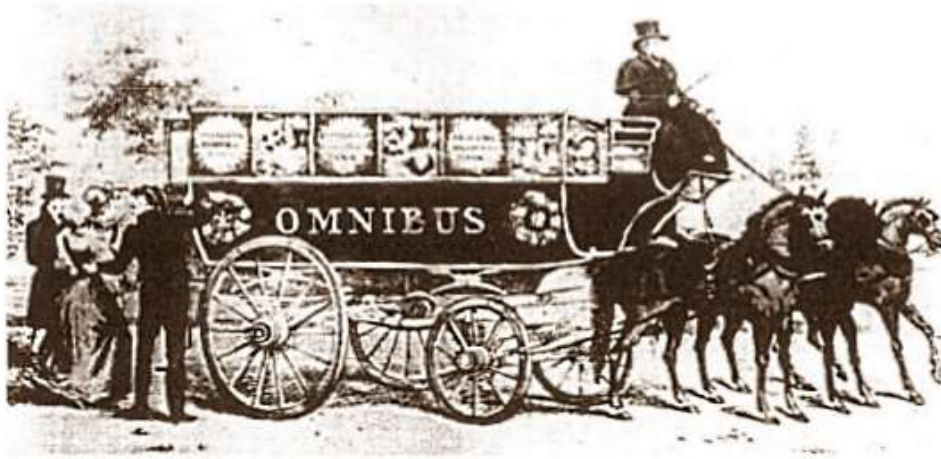
In due course, there was also another road built that made their lives much more pleasant - a road leading from the Town straight into the park. This was brought about by an exchange of land between the Corporation and Sir Edmund Hartopp, a very wealthy inhabitant of Sutton. **They** wanted land of his which lay between the Town and the park, and **he** wanted land that they owned near his home at Four Oaks. So a beneficial arrangement was struck in **1826**- now known as 'the Hartopp Exchange' - making it possible to gain access to the park from the Town for the first time.



14. Exchange of Land 1826

Life was never dull for Sarah with so many brothers and sisters, and one marvels at the fortitude of her mother. Luckily, her parents could afford the occasional break.

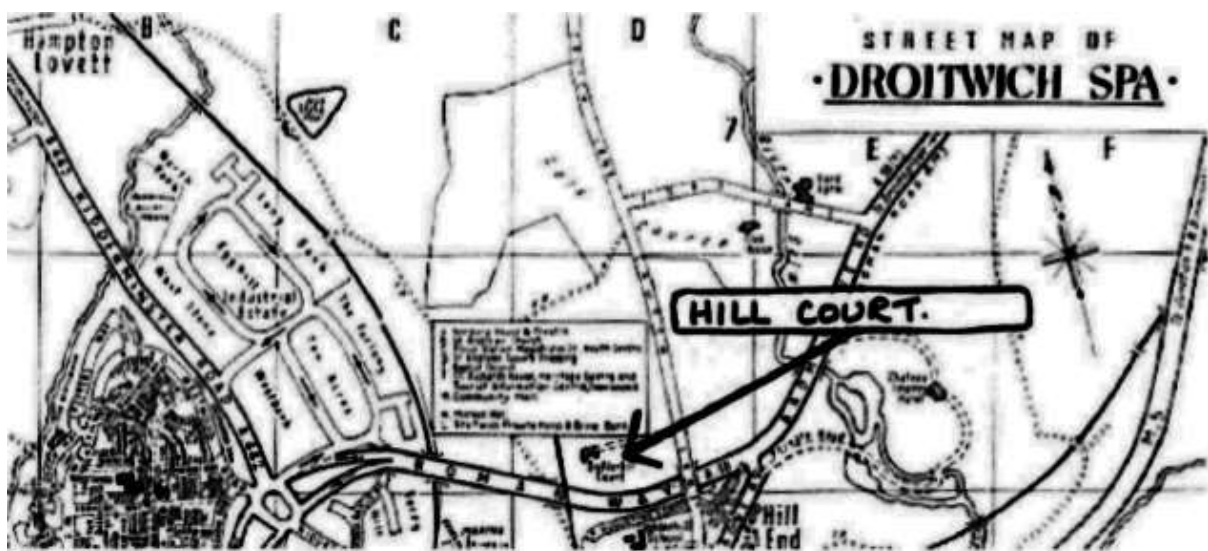
In 1830, they visited London and returned with a picture of the first omnibus that they had seen, there being only two or three running at that time. People wondered then whether the buses would be a success and, even if they were, whether they would be allowed on the streets, due their large size.



15. *1830 London Omnibus*

Sadly, Sarah's mother had a seizure soon after this visit and Sarah, not surprisingly at 27 years old, felt unable to cope with the resulting burden on herself, being the eldest, although later on, she said, she realised what a crushing load of sorrow and trial it was to her father, with all those children to bring up.

But help was at hand a month later in a most amazing coincidence... A letter from France brought news of an almost unbelievable double death in the family, making Thomas recipient of an inheritance of a large property in Worcestershire (Hill Court, Dodderhill in Droitwich) - thus alleviating any money difficulties in caring for his children and sick wife.



16. *Inheritance*

From now on, there was plenty for Sarah to do, seeing to the needs of the younger family members, visiting friends, and becoming more involved in her mother's Charity work. She went on lots of outings and followed the Races in Sutton Park. She also spent time writing letters and keeping in touch with her brothers who had already left home.

One of these was Tom. A bit younger than Sarah, he had been sent to join the Merchants Service at an early age - they said it was because of his lack of education and proneness to associate with those beneath him! He was shipwrecked twice, suffered hardships, privations and exposure; his lungs were diseased and Sarah had even kept some of the hard stones of lime which he had coughed up! Poor Tom was not to live long. In **1834**, when he was only 27, due to an oversight he missed a ship sailing from Lisbon to Liverpool and had to make his own way back home, a journey which was just too much for him.

When Sarah went to see him in Liverpool, she too had a traumatic journey! She boarded Smith's coach from Sutton to Birmingham, where she slept at a friend's house until midnight. They called her out of bed and she was put into the Express Coach for Liverpool. What particularly amazed her were the countless fires they passed on the journey - (she probably meant the furnaces, for example, in the Black Country - those being the days of the Industrial Revolution). At 8 O'clock in the morning, they reached a place called 'Mount Pleasant' in Liverpool. Afraid of what might confront her, she asked if Tom was still alive. They said he was, and lodging with respectable people. However, **she** found it a dreadful ordeal, on her own and not knowing who to turn to, although she says the Doctor was very kind and the Clergyman who attended him was very sympathetic. But Tom died a fortnight later when she was alone with him and they buried him in Liverpool Cemetery.



17. *Birmingham Stage Coach, c.1840*

Another brother, John, looked on her as a mother. He still lived at home, being 13 years younger than her. He wrote her a poem.....

... *Dear Sarah* ...

*Having nothing better to do
I take my pen and write to you
Fair as the Rose, that blooms above,
And lovelier, still, art thou,
No-one thee can so well love,
As those thy kindness know.
With motherly care thou me hath watched,
And with a vigilant eye,
Hath overlook 'd both great and small,
In our large family.
If I've transgressed, which sure I have,
At heart I now repent,
And this is sent, oh, Sister dear,
From a true Penitent.*

1833 July 20th



28. John 's Poem

Two of her brothers were twins, but both of them died young - Henry at 5 and Robert at 22, probably succumbing to illness - Sarah didn't explain why they died. A short life wasn't unusual in those days, and one can see why parents produced so many children!

When her mother died, in **1841**, it must have seemed as if the family were falling apart. As Sarah said, "She left us, gradually, and without violent suffering, I trust in the well grounded hope of a blessed resurrection hereafter, leaving, beyond her family, a good name in its best sense, as a helper to the helpless, a friend to the sick and comfort to the dying". Three portraits remain to this day with the Holbeche family as a reminder of Sarah Gamble and her parents, who came from Leicester and Nottingham.



FRANCIS GAMBLE

(Born 5.8.1759 at Saxelby)

Grandfather of Sarah Holbeche



SARAH GAMBLE
(née CHADBURN)

(Born 6.7.1755 at Wollaton, Notts)

Grandmother of Sarah Holbeche



SARAH GAMBLE

(Born 21.7.1779 at Sutton Coldfield)

Mother of Sarah Holbeche

Some years before, Sutton had become a polling place. The Holbeche house had been headquarters for the Tory Party (1837) and they dealt with all the razzmatazz that went with it. Such an honour showed how far the Holbeche firm's connection with the Corporation had progressed. They were the legal advisers or Deputy Stewards to the Warden & Society. However, following his wife's death, Thomas decided to retire and take up a new position as Chairman to the Aston Union Board of Guardians. The family's legal practice then became known as 'Holbeche and Willoughby', the Holbeche being Vincent, Sarah's eldest brother - he was also the father of Richard Holbeche, of whom we have already spoken.

In 1844, one of the great joys of Sarah's life appeared in the shape of Dr Richard Williamson, who became the new Rector of Holy Trinity Church. A very charitable man, who wasn't averse to putting a hand in his own pocket to help people in financial difficulties. He did a lot of good work in the parish - earning her deep admiration. When he left 6 years later, she was very sad. She said they had had "light thrown upon our worship and services, the Sacraments upheld, the Christian Festival kept; souls cared for; poverty relieved, sorrow or suffering sympathised with and alleviated, vice rebuked, industry encouraged and everyone who needed knew he had a friend" - in other words, she thought he was a jolly good all round chap!

After his death in 1865 she was to honour him by paying for and dedicating to him a new stained-glass window in the church. It is the north window, immediately above Vesey's tomb, and depicts three shields. One shows the arms of Bishop Vesey, one the Bishopric of Exeter (which was Vesey's see) and one the heraldic arms of Dr Williamson. At first sight, she was disappointed with the window, but said that merit or demerit was with Hardman, who was presumably the engraver. However, her views softened once the public had seen it.



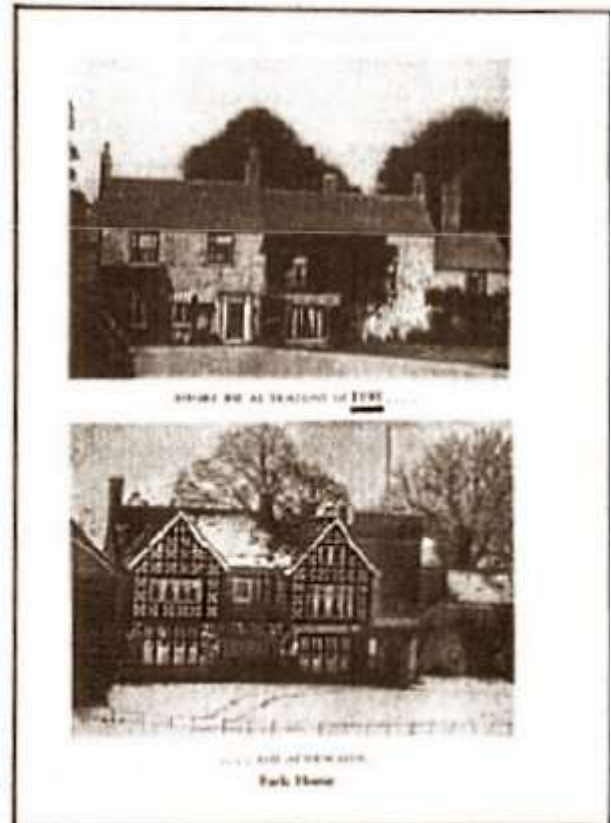
20. *Sarah's Window to Dr Williamson*

In **1866** a brass was put in place in the church, with the inscription "For the House of God and in memory of Richard Williamson Dr of Divinity of Westminster. Some years faithful and devoted Rector of this Parish, he died Sept 11th, 1865 - the window is given by Sarah Holbeche."

Another joy in **1845** saw Vincent's wedding to Emma Addenbrooke of Kingswinford, their first home being at Park House - in Sutton Park - and before 12 months had passed, Sarah's first nephew was born - Thomas Vincent - who was destined to follow his father's footsteps!



Park House 1846



21. Park House

But soon there were more deaths - brothers Aemilian, who died at 35, and Frank who died in Adelaide, Australia, at 36. However, it was her father's death from erysipelas (a sort of skin infection) on **12 Feb 1848** that had the greatest effect on her. Before he died, she was so worried about her future and that of her 6 sisters (Mary, Elizabeth, Jane, Catherine, Helen, and Fanny) that her father made Vincent promise that he would maintain and provide for all of them.

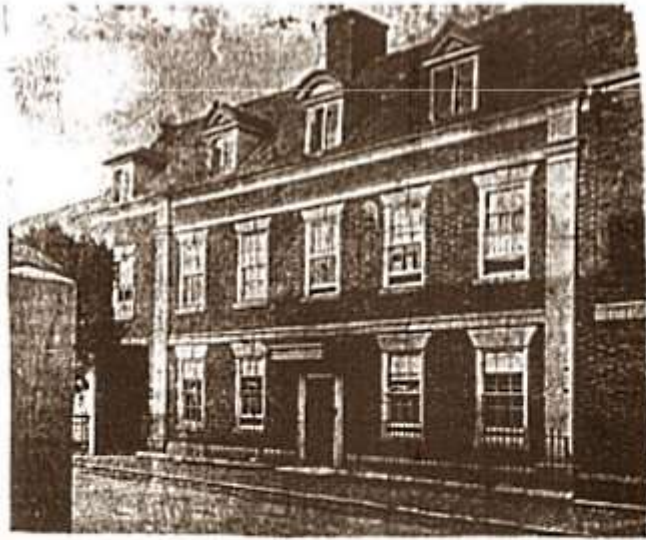


22. *Sarah's Father (Thomas) and Sarah's Brother (Aemilian)*

But there is a mystery here. There is strong evidence from other papers still in the family archives that Thomas left his daughters £2000 each (£2,000 is worth £86,000 today) - enough to keep them in comfort for the rest of their lives and one wonders why Sarah never mentioned this in her diary.

Whatever their financial position was, their immediate concern was for their future accommodation, bearing in mind that the sisters were currently living in the family home in Coleshill Street, which Vincent had inherited from their father. But the problem was solved. They found a beautiful Georgian house further up the High Street and on **May 29 1848** they moved in. It was then known as No.58, not far from the present College of Further Education and on the same side of the road.

In fact, Richard Holbeche's diary describes it wonderfully, if you want to know more.



Holbeche house (1848)
←

Next door neighbour (1996)
56, High Street →



23. *Holbeche House (1848), High Street*

Vincent then sold his house in the Park and moved in to 3 Coleshill Street, giving it a facelift by having it re-roofed and putting urns on the parapet, reflecting the healthy state of the family funds.



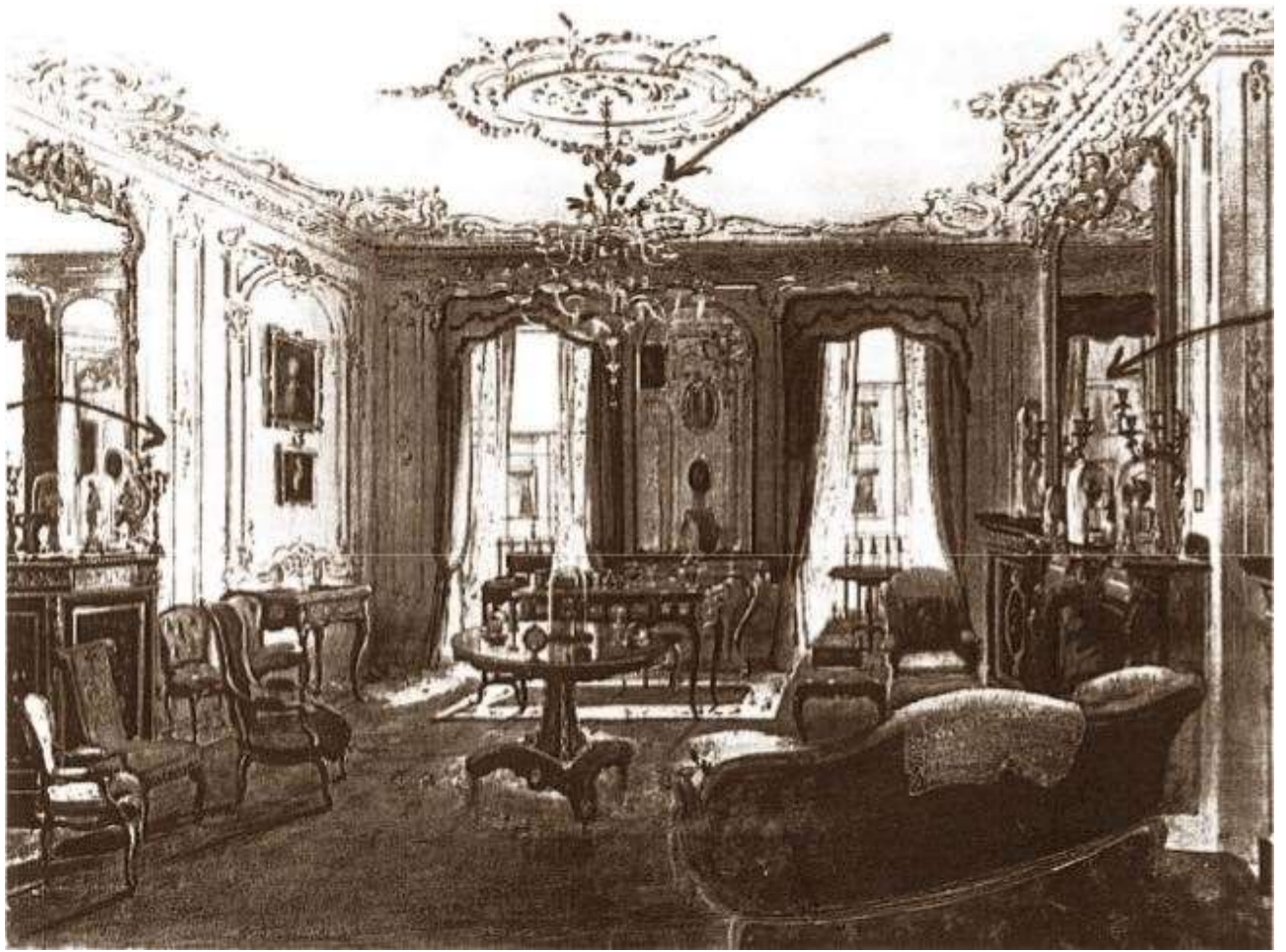
24. *"The Urns" at No. 1-3 Coleshill Street*

Another pointer to their increased affluence was the fact that Sarah, Vincent and John, as Executors of their father's Will, were able to put up a memorial tablet, on the south wall of the church, to their father and mother, which can still be seen there even today along with other family memorials.



25. *Memorial to Sarah's Parents in Holy Trinity Church*

The family's prestigious town houses also made them candidates for the new gas supply that was connected initially only to a select area of the town, including the Church, Town Hall and the old Police Station. (**approx 1852**)



26. *Gas Lighting in Town Houses*

So, being very comfortably settled in their new home, Vincent and Emma's family began to grow, much to the delight of Sarah and her sisters, who became very attached to their nephews and nieces, of which there were seven!

Members of
THE HOLBECHE FAMILY
who lived in Coleshill Street (1847-1892)



VINCENT HOLBECHE
1806 - 1867
(brother of Sarah Holbeche)



Vincent's wife, **EMMA**
(? - 1841)



THOMAS VINCENT
("TOM")
(eldest son)
(1846 - 1904)



RICHARD
(1850 - 1914)



AEMILIAN ("MILL")
(1851 - 1915)



EDWARD ("TED")
(1847 - 1887)
(died at sea)

Also Twins **ARTHUR** (1855 - 1931) and **GERTRUDE** ("GERTIE") (1855 - 1937)
and **EDITH** (1860 - 1935)
(No photos)

The eldest was **Thomas Vincent**, who carried on the family tradition by becoming a solicitor, eventually succeeding his father in the family business. He, too, became Deputy Steward to the Warden & Society and when the borough became incorporated in 1886, he was elected the first Town Clerk.

Edward was the next to be born. He left home in 1861 at the age of 14 for a life on the Ocean Wave. He didn't come home again for 7 years and, later on, he emigrated to New Zealand, where he became Captain of a New Zealand Shipping Company, but he died in a fire on board ship.

Sarah found a drawing of these two boys, which she reclaimed from the rubbish because she felt it was valuable! It shows them as very young lads wearing 'skirts', as boys did in those days before they were 'breeched' (in other words, they were old enough to wear trousers - which was at around 9 years of age).



28. "Tom" and "Ed" in skirts

The third nephew was **Richard**, who wrote 'The Holbeche Diary'. He was a worry to them. Not a particularly bright scholar, nevertheless, his parents spent quite a bit on his education. However, following his final year at Bromsgrove School, there was a long period of uncertainty as to his future. During this time Sarah tried to use her influence to help him into the Marines, but was unsuccessful. So, she decided to try for a place for him at Sandhurst with the

Army. Fortunately this met with more success and her reward was to see him become a Major in the Royal Munster Fusiliers. He led a very fruitful life in the Army, attaining the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. When he retired from the Army, a second career led him to work for the St John's Ambulance Brigade, where he became involved in sending parcels out to soldiers fighting in the Boer War in South Africa. Later on, he was appointed Librarian of the Order and he joined with WK Riland Bedford, one time Rector of Holy Trinity Church, in writing the history of the Order, working from their headquarters in Clerkenwell, London. They honoured him by making him a Knight of the Order shortly before his death in 1914.

If you are interested in his life, you can read more about him in the library.

The next boy was **Aemilian** - 'Mill' for short - and he was Richard's best friend. They got up to no end of pranks together, but Mill was a very weak child and long illness kept him away from school. When he found work as a Bankers clerk with Lloyds & Co in Sutton, all he earned was £40 per annum (which is approx. £1,600 today), so it is no wonder that he always lived with his mother.

Then there were the twins, **Arthur and Gertrude** who were born in **1855**. All that Sarah recalls of Arthur is the cost of his singing lessons, which she paid for. They were 2/6 each (that's £5 today) and a book which cost her 1/- (that's £2) - not that expensive!

Gertrude ('Gertie'), Arthur's sister, and **Edith**, the last little girl to be born, just aren't mentioned at all

Sarah's memories, in fact, seem more influenced by the deeds of the men around her and even her sisters are not individually recalled, apart from Elizabeth, who was blind. She had a nasty fall in May 1858 from the top to the bottom of their first flight of stairs. Sarah says it was "a dreadful event". What had happened was that Elizabeth had wanted the housemaid. She couldn't find her way thro' the drawing room and, returning to her own room, she turned too quickly and fell down the stairs. It was no-one's fault - because she normally found her way from room to room quite easily. Unfortunately, it hastened her death later that year.

But the other sisters led very active lives. They were involved in all sorts of charitable work which they shared with the other Town ladies, such as the Bodington and Bracken sisters. For example, they would arrange financial help for the local needy and find places for them in almshouses, they made things for bazaars and were very generous with their time and money. Once they even paid for new railings in the churchyard. (Incidentally, Agnes Bracken was, even

then, a well known local authoress and her excellent book called 'The Forest & Chase of Sutton Coldfield' is still in the library, as well as her sketches of Sutton.)

Agnes Bracken



Caroline

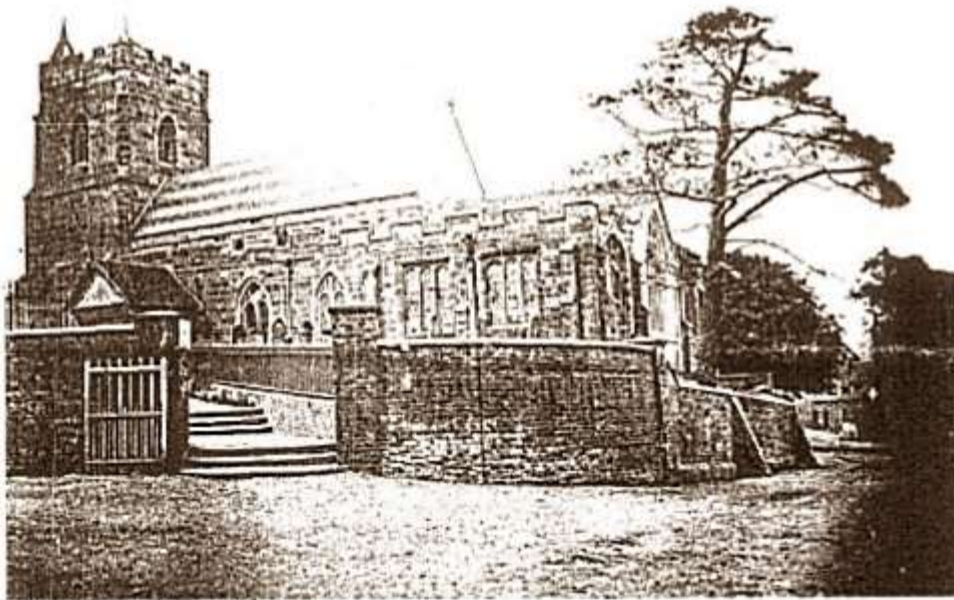


29. *Agnes & Caroline Bracken*

It's not surprising, therefore, to hear that these ladies were also tied up with the social running of Holy Trinity Church, which, after all, was just down the road.



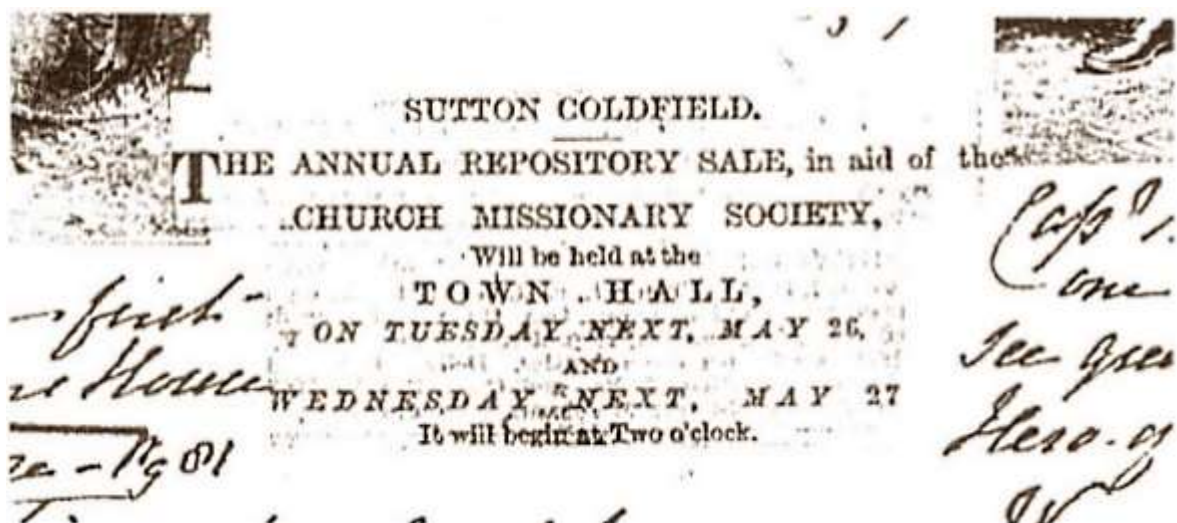
30. *Holy Trinity Church (Local Parish Church)*



31. *Holy Trinity Church, 1864*

Sarah, herself, was a regular churchgoer and belonged to The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Church Missionary Society, the Female Benefit Club and the Curate Aid Society. In fact, all matters relating to the church were of great importance to her and she can remember who gave the sermons on different occasions and the successes and failures of the various bazaars and church fêtes.

There was another charitable organisation that she supported - the Church Missionary Society - and she collected funds for it at an Annual Repository Sale for many years.



32. *Repository Sale, i.e. Bazaar*

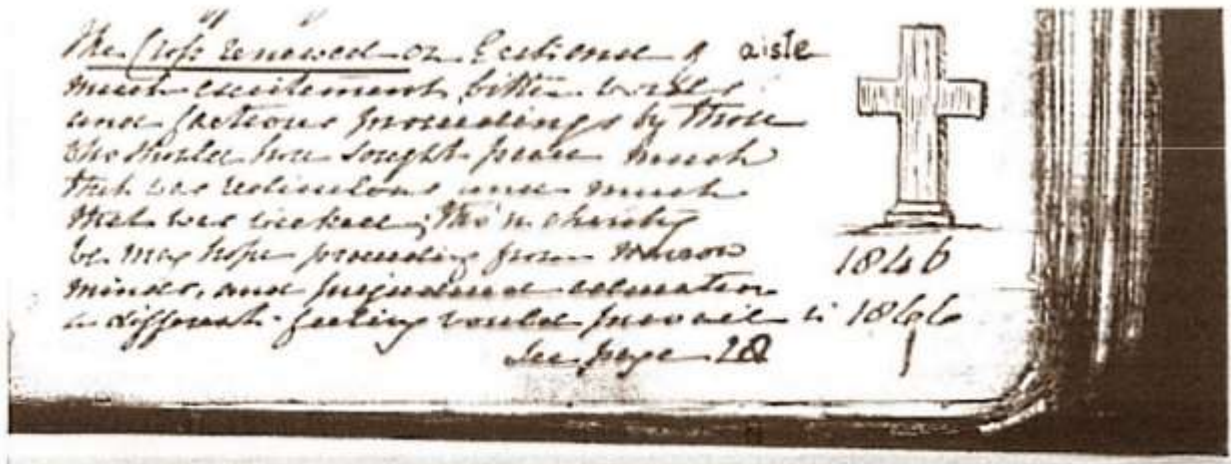
And when the Sutton Coldfield Institute and Reading Room was opened in the new Town Hall, in Mill Street, it must have seemed a real godsend, as it provided a wonderful opportunity to raise yet more money. At the Institute, there were concerts, public meetings and lectures and the famous 'Penny Readings' (where strangers paid one penny to attend).



33. *Invitation to Opening of New Town Hall, Mill Street, 1859*

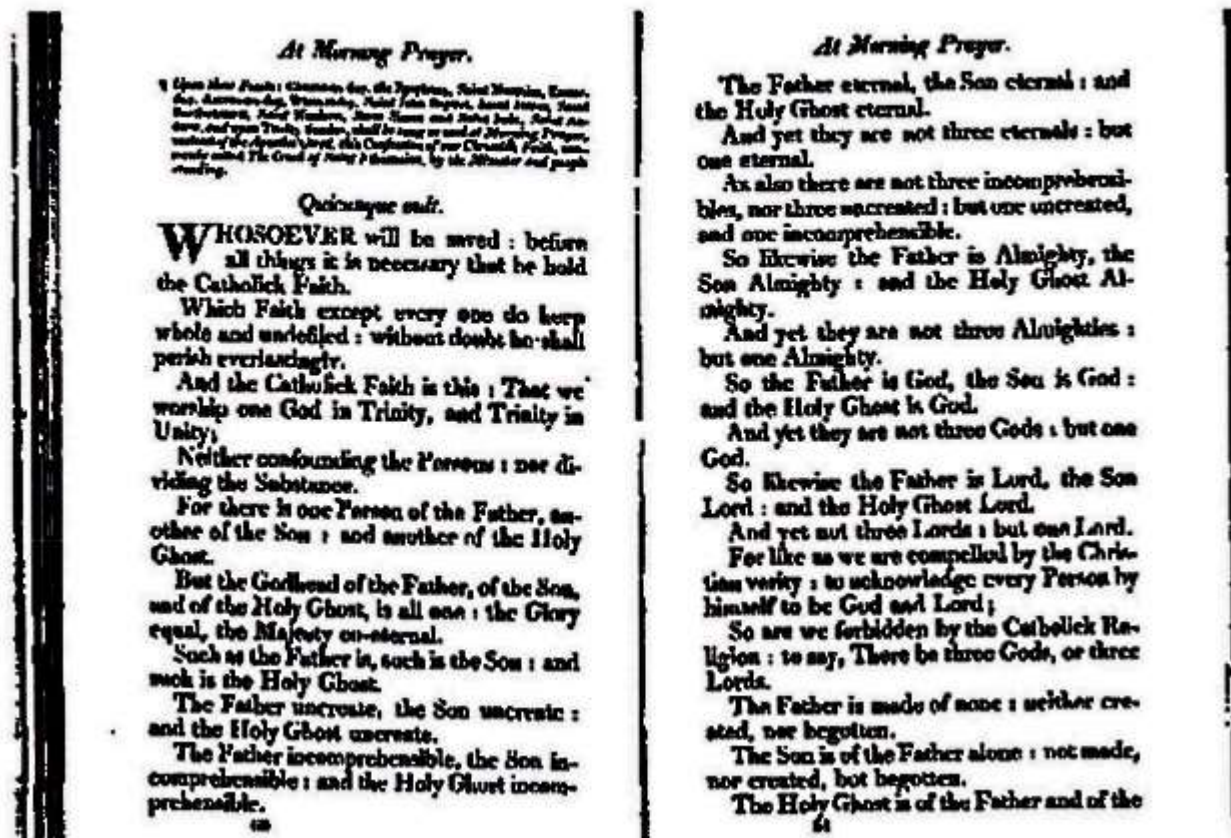
Although apparently a very kind person, Sarah was somewhat formidable at times. Her diary is littered with comments upon the conduct of various Rectors and Speakers in the Church and there was one occasion when an atmosphere was definitely present.

It involved the Cross in the parish church. There had been a time, prior to Dr Williamson's arrival, when it was the view of the Church of England that Crosses were idolatrous icons and Holy Trinity's Cross had been taken down and put away. Dr Williamson had other views and reinstated the Cross during his stay there. When he departed, it was taken down again, in a very furtive manner. Sarah said it happened at dusk. "By order of a Parish Vestry Meeting convened for the purpose" - it was said. She said, that wasn't true! She recalls that the man employed to do the deed was told "not to enter it into his book", but she suggested, rather scathingly "May it not be entered in some other book, then, against the so called members of the meeting?"



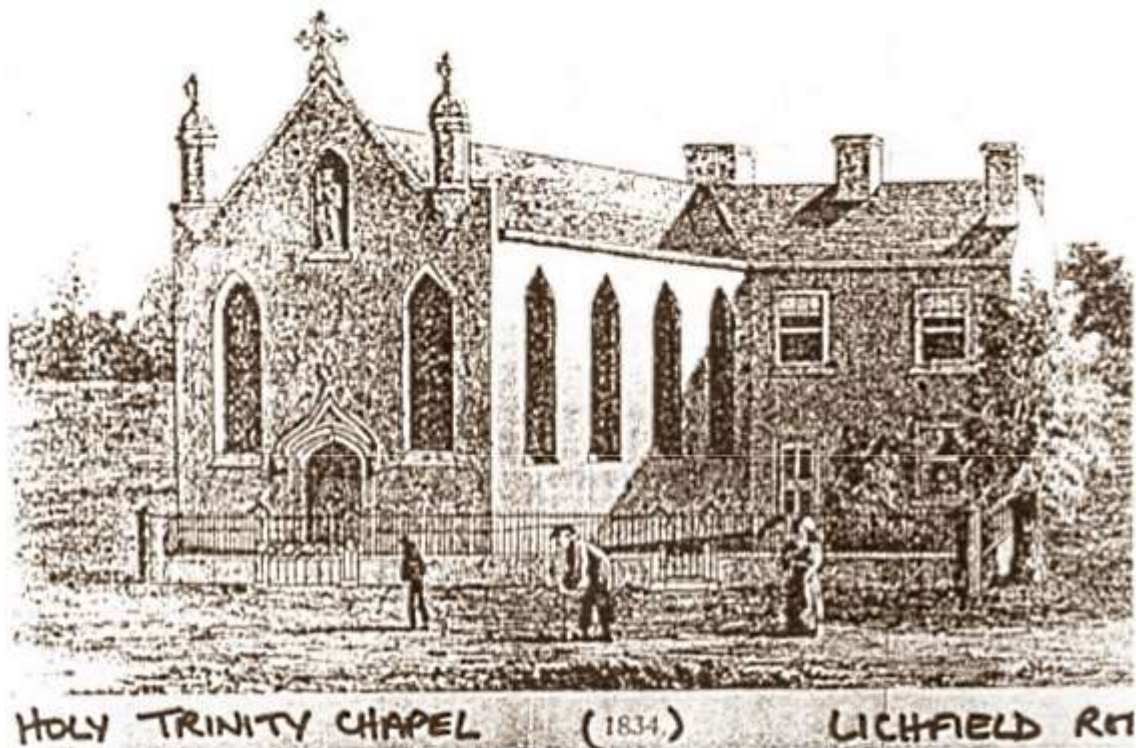
34. Problems with the Cross

And then there was another scandal at the church service one Whit Sunday. Mr Newman, one of the Curates, left out the Athanasian Creed, in spite of being warned not to. On the following Trinity Sunday, it was included again by Mr Packwood, another Curate. Then, on the 30 August, Mr Newman omitted one of the Creeds again, and the Rector said, if it happens again, he would go to the Bishop - which a certain Mr Webster did, on his behalf, twice, but got nowhere. Sarah was not impressed!



35. Athanasian Creed

Sometimes she attended Church Congresses in Liverpool and Wolverhampton. Quite happy to make allowances for other religions, she felt that the one she was baptised in was the best for her. However, she wasn't quite so happy with the local Catholic Chapel further up the road - she said all she could hear from the new Bell Tower was - "Tang, Tong, all day!"



36. *Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Chapel, 1834*

But, putting Church matters aside, Sarah still found time to take a keen interest in all current affairs and local matters, so that her diary abounds with a variety of different topics. There are far too many to recount them all, but some really stand out

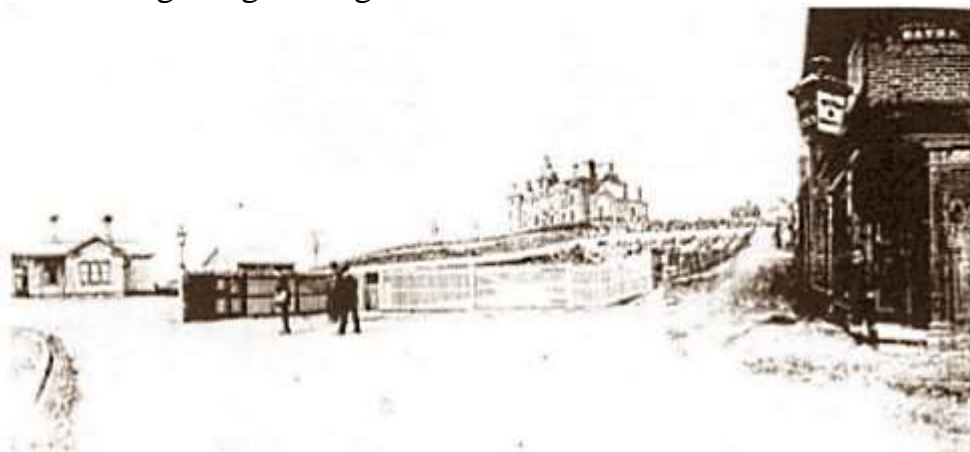
First of all, there was the arrival of the **Railway** in June **1862**. That dramatically changed Sutton for her. She remembered a sleepy little Warwickshire town and it was changed into a bustling suburb of Birmingham. People came flocking to the area, particularly to Sutton Park. In fact, on Good Friday 1865, there were 3000 who came, and on Whit-Monday 3 years later there were 6000 (in the Park!) - 800 had come on one train! But Sutton was to reap great financial

benefit from this - already they were charging "foot people", as they called them, to come to the Park.



37. *The New Railway (overlooking Sutton Coldfield) in 1865*

Many of those visitors stayed at the **Royal Hotel**, overlooking the Railway Station (we now know it as the Council Offices). Unfortunately, the early years of this hotel were disastrous! It was opened in May **1865** and cost E21,000 to build - Sarah remembers a neighbour, Mr Genders, having to sell his house, shop and buildings so they could make a road to the Hotel, which had been built without means of getting carriages to the door!



38. *The Royal Hotel (from the top of Station Road) in 1865*

A year later, it was showing signs of failure and, in fact, someone put in a bid for it - at just £4,000 - and by early 1867, it was no longer an hotel but a Sanitorium - having been bought for £6,000. But, two years later, it was opened once again as the Royal Hotel.

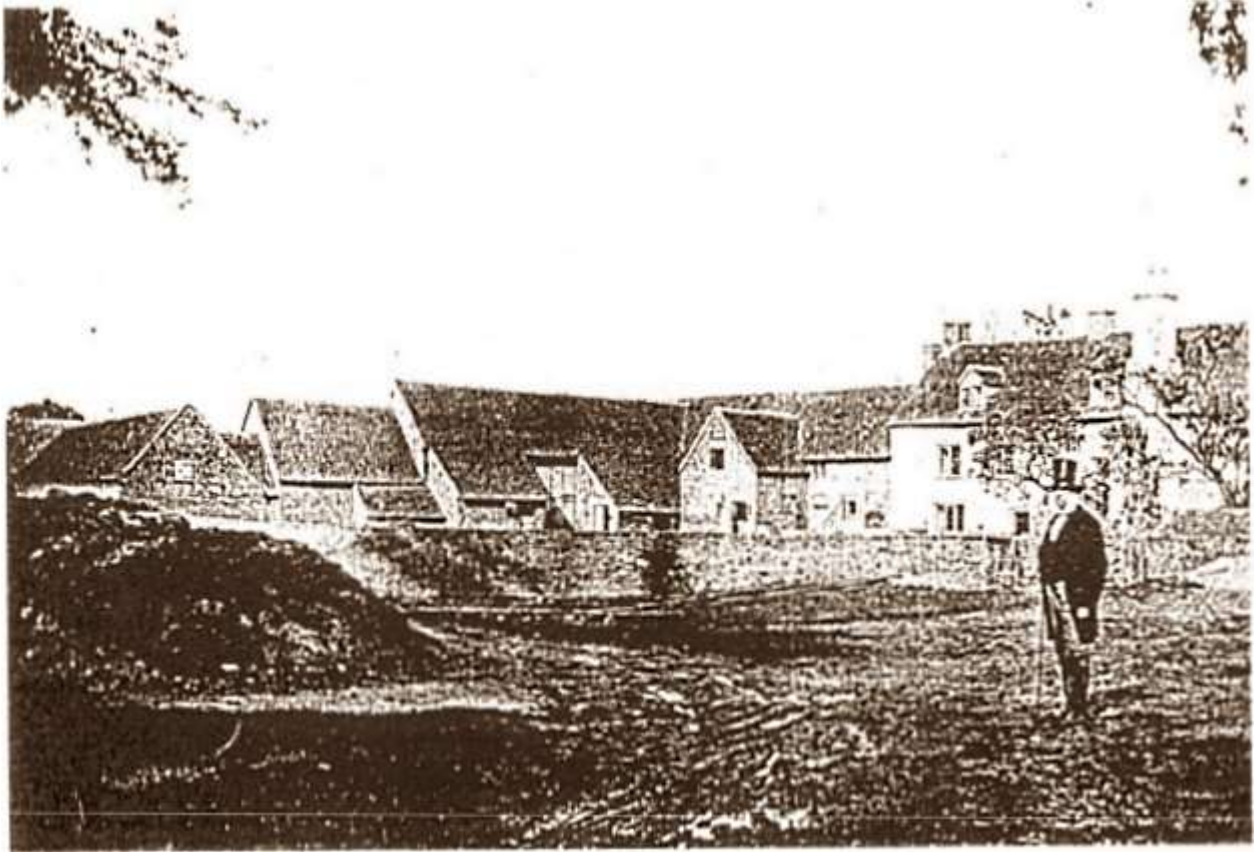
But this was just one of many new building developments in the town. Houses were going up everywhere. Many of her acquaintances, well known characters of Victorian Sutton, were moving into these new houses, but Sarah mourned the pretty lanes that were disappearing and described some of the changes as "disgusting".

One of her walks brought home these changes to her. She'd gone to see a Mr Fowler in Maney Fields and she says it was "a peregrination in unknown lands that were once familiar enough". She noticed the new 'Holland St' and 'Duke St', and, in particular, two new houses in Duke Street called 'Myrtle Cottage' and 'Victor Cottage' (which are still there - nearly 150 years later). Hedges had been cut down and replaced by roads leading to the Manor Hill estate and two more houses built opposite the Old Driffold House, 'Rose Villa' and 'Trent Villa' (which I think are still there). She was also interested to note that Mr Eddowes' new house was nearly finished, he being another Solicitor of repute in the Town.



39. *Duke Street - Houses built 1868*

These new houses caused quite a stir in Sutton because there hadn't been much building in the area for many, many years. She even kept a 'photo of one in her diary, but unfortunately its location remains a mystery. I'd be interested if anyone can offer a suggestion?



40. *Mystery House (?)*

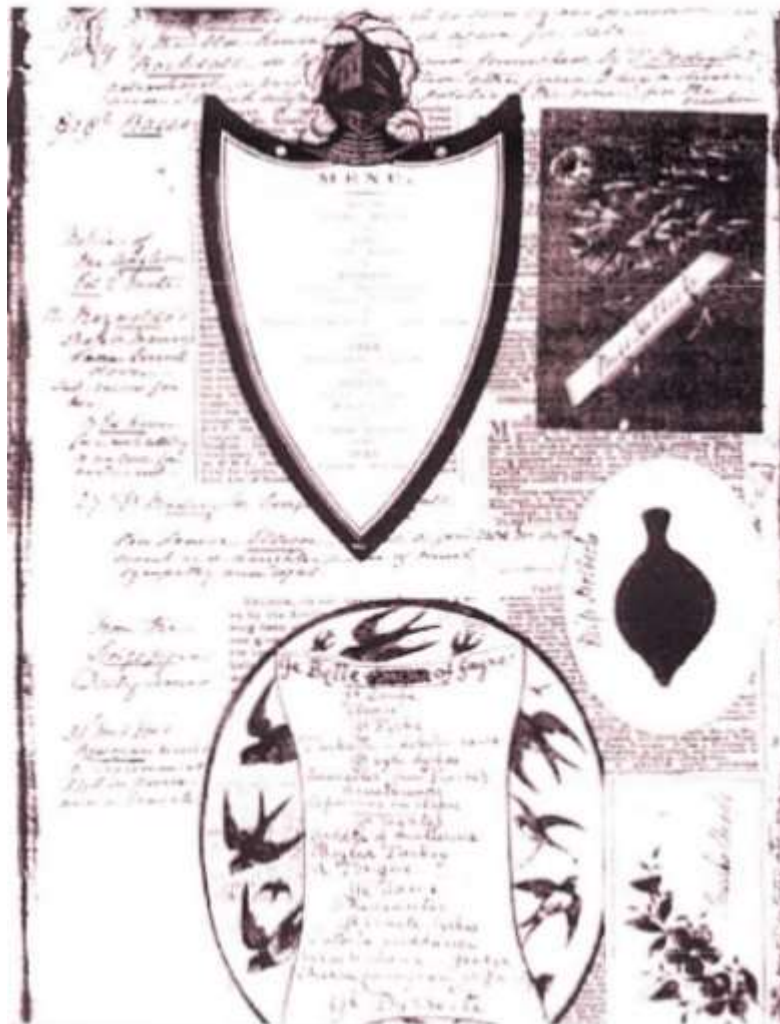
Going back to the Eddowes' house, this **was** of interest to her because Mrs Eddowes was a member of the ladies committee, which Sarah, and her mother before her, had belonged to. For years, these ladies had run the organisation we know as the 'Lying-in Charity', which provided blankets and linen to women in childbirth. However, something made her smile in 1866, when a somewhat controversial appointment left a man, William Bailis, as Master of the Lying in Linen - usually the ladies' domain!

What didn't cause her to smile, though, was the state of her teeth, which badly needed attention. She debated whether to persevere with the pain or give in and go the dentist. She was 63 and was looking at the imminent removal of five teeth. "It was a matter of necessity - I had no option" she said as she gave in. Her dentist was in Edgbaston (Noel Road), where she says she "took up residence". The treatment she likened to purgatory, indeed martyrdom - and who can blame her, for dental treatment was still in its infancy in those days!!

Another nasty experience when she felt she'd had a brush with death by mistakenly dosing herself with Dover's Powders (which were painkillers) instead of Jallap's Powders (which were laxatives)!

But a happier event for her, was the Masonic Ball of 1866. Her recollection of the occasion sounds a bit strange to us.

"For once in my life," she said "causing a sensation, by having the courage to do what I wished, in spite of its not being 'the thing'. My good natured and equally bold neighbours, Mr and Mrs Addenbrooke, giving me their countenance, to see what was to be seen, what the present generation is, and conclude what the future will be, (I was) much entertained, my mind enlarged to see that, like a treadmill, as one set of pegs go down another set rise up!" (I think she means that although generations change, people's attitude to life remains the same.)



41. *Menus and Visiting Cards*

One can see from this escapade that in her 60s she was quite modern in her outlook. Another example was her interest in the Paris fashions - at that time, dark eyebrows were worn with blonde hair and blonde eyebrows with dark hair

but she felt that was really a bit too absurd. Chignons, too, made an impact on her - the newscutting in her diary referred to them as deceitful embellishments!



42. *Le Chignon - 1867*

There were many other outings that she went on. She visited her friends, both working class and professional who were scattered throughout the Sutton area. Some she may have visited in the family carriage, which, with the sisters' income, they could well afford. They were so proud of one that they bought at Four Oaks/Mere Green, that they kept a drawing of it with the family papers.



43. *The Family Carriage*

Most of her friends were the well-known Sutton families: the Bodingtons; Grundys; Terrys and Packwoods; the Wrights and Chavasses; the Perkins and

Webbs, and so on. She travelled all round Sutton to visit them, seeing them move into grand new houses that had been built specially for them in the more affluent areas of Sutton, such as the Driffold and Maney.

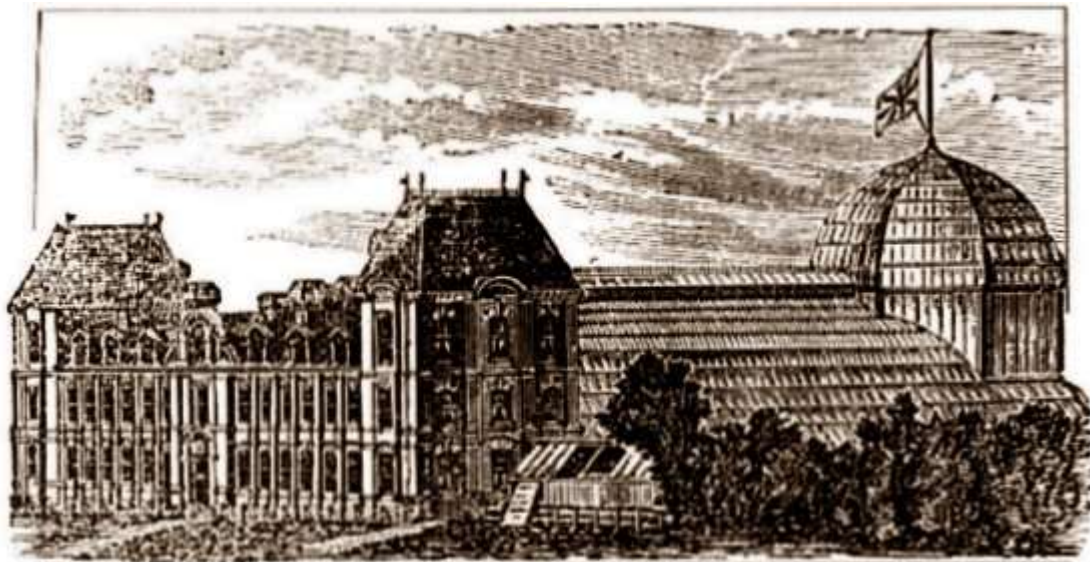


44. Sarah's Friends

There were also other new places to visit in Sutton - in fact, two big venues opened up in the late 1860s. There was the new Sutton Race Course in the Park, not the first one, but one which proved very popular and which Sarah followed with great interest.

There was also Coles' Royal Promenade Gardens, which, she says, on her first visit left her mute with astonishment. It was situated then between Clifton Road and the Park boundary (approximately on the site of today's Wyndley Leisure Centre) and replaced 40 acres of swampy, useless ground, which had been drained and filled with plants. Broad handsome walks had been laid out and there were lakes and streams, a bandstand, vases and statues, and she said there was a large room capable for all purposes required.

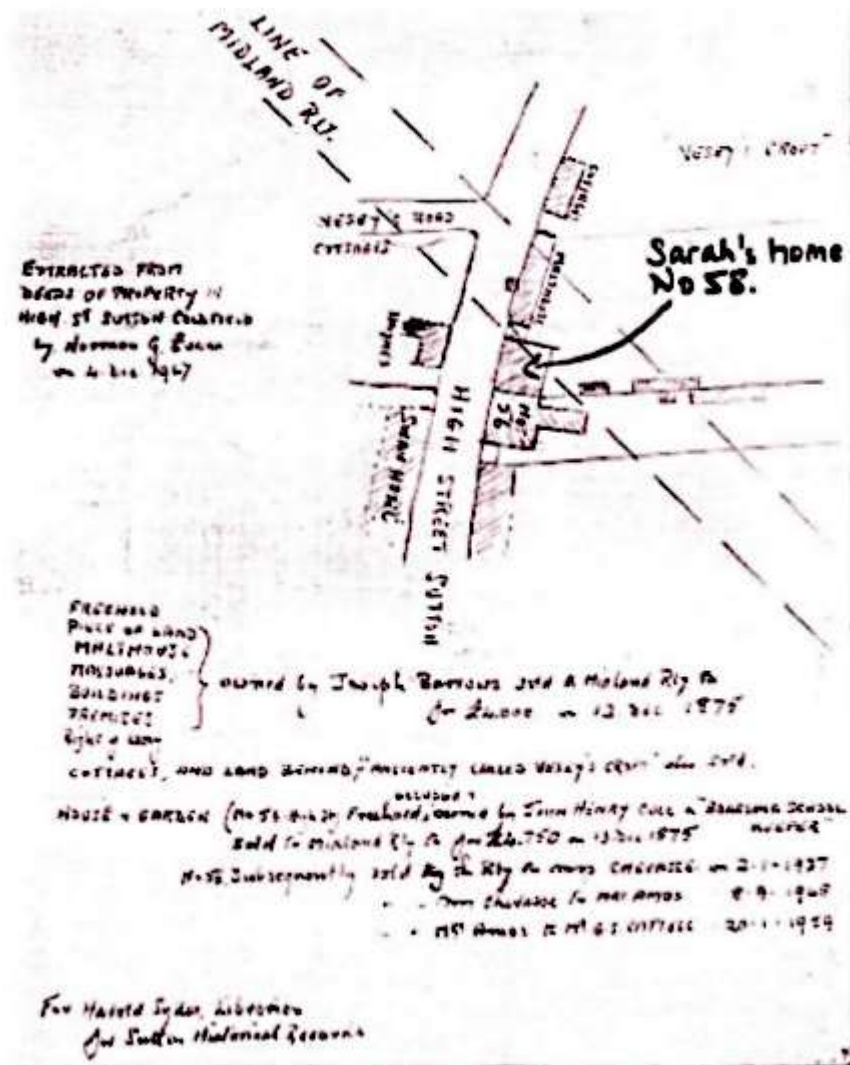
This may have been a reference to the famous Crystal Palace, which was built in the Gardens to emulate the one in London at that time. But she called it 'A Sutton Vauxhall' (referring to the gardens at Vauxhall & Duddleston that were in their heyday) and she said that Sutton had become a vulgar suburb to a large town.



45. *Crystal Palace*

The large town, of course, was Birmingham. She also hated them because they were trying to impose **their** water works system on Sutton, even though she acknowledged that by 1866 the local sewerage problem was pretty awful because of the increase in housing and population.

But then no one likes to see changes in a neighbourhood that one has grown up in. However, there was to be one major change that would drastically affect the lives of all the sisters. In 1866, a notice was put up suggesting a new railway line that would pass through their house, before crossing the Park towards Walsall, "making mincemeat of us all", she said.



46. Proposed New Railway Line 1866

Before long, their garden wall had been knocked down to make way for a new road (possibly leading to the future Town Station, in Midland Drive).



47. *Town Station, off Midland Drive*

Meanwhile, other worries beset them - their Landlord had put their house up for sale. Luckily, a good friend of theirs bought it, but, as their new Landlord, he was quick to make alterations to the front of the house. As Sarah recalls "our beautiful ivy - shorn of its glory - no longer to attract the Brumagemes in passing by, our Towns folk to stand and admire".

Lot 8.—All that excellent and substantially-erected Three-storey FAMILY RESIDENCE, in the occupation of Miss Holbeche; containing Entrance Hall, Dining, Drawing, and Breakfast Rooms of good dimensions; best and second Kitchens, China and Cook's Pantry, seven Bed Rooms and Dressing Room, good dry Cellars, Brewhouse, Yard, and Outbuildings, large Garden, ORCHARD, LAWN, and PLEASURE GROUNDS,; also, the capital MALT-HOUSE, in the occupation of Mr. William Wilkins; the whole possessing an important frontage of 42 yards 1 foot 6 inches to the street, and containing an area of 3,841 square yards, or thereabouts. The last lot is subject to an annual land-tax of 19s., and to a chief-rent of 2s. per annum, payable to the Corporation of Sutton Coldfield.

48. *Sales Particulars*

And then Sarah's beloved brother, and Richard's father, Vincent, died in December **1867**. It affected the whole family greatly and she wrote at length of

the occasion. Suffice it to say that she felt he had left a young family in what probably seemed to them impoverished circumstances, and they were worried about the future prospects of the children. In spite of this, money was found to provide a new vault for him in Holy Trinity churchyard and, in fact, it is still there, to the left of the path leading to the south east door of the church, and his wife Emma and son Richard are now also buried there with him.

And this is where we leave her memories. There are far more little nuggets of information littering the pages of the diary. But what they don't tell us is that, fortunately, the dreaded railway was not completed until **1879**. Even so, the sisters were forced to move out in **1875**. They went to Northgate Street in Warwick, where Sarah spent the rest of her days until 1882, dying at the age of 79 and leaving an estate then worth £2,500 (£115,000 in 2000).

On a final note, there seems to be no photograph of any of the Holbeche sisters, but it is just possible that nephew Richard may have provided one. In his diary, there is a small cameo picture of a lady, beside his aunts' house in High Street. I like to think it is his favourite aunt - who has left us with a Victorian's eye view of Sutton Coldfield - Sarah Holbeche.



49. *Sarah Holbeche (?)*

SOURCES

TEXT:

Sarah Holbeche Diary (BCOL Q942.496081 HOL)	Sutton Coldfield Library, Local Studies Department ("SCL LSD")
Richard Holbeche Diary in Holbeche Family Papers	SCLLSD
Sutton Coldfield Town & Chase 1904 by Midgley (SH97SUT1904)	SCLLSD
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History of Myddle by Richard Gough, pub. 1979 Caliban Books (942.453)	Birmingham Library
The Royal Hotel (QSH38)	SCLLSD

ILLUSTRATIONS (as numbered): -

1.	<i>The Old School House</i>	Photos (SCLLSD)
2.	<i>Ivy House</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary SCLLSD
3.	<i>Sadler House (indicated by 'a flag attached to the photo)</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
4.	<i>The Rookery (as described by Sarah in her diary)</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
5.	<i>Sewing by Daylight/Reading by Candlelight</i>	Georgian Houses for All by John Woodroffe, pub. Routledge & Kegan, Paul 1978. (SCLLSD)
6.	<i>Horse-drawn Wagon</i>	Georgian England by Peter Lane, pub. Batsford 1871 (942 07.LAN) (SCLLSD)
7.	<i>Ox Roast</i>	The Railway Navvies by Terry Coleman, Hutchinson Pub. Group Ltd. 1972
8.	<i>The Old Rector</i>	The Rilands of Sutton Coldfield SCLLSD pub 1889.
9.	<i>1-3, Coleshill Street</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary and Author's Photographs
10.	<i>Pew in South Gallery</i>	Holy Trinity Church by NG Evans, (SCLLSD)
11.	<i>Inside of 1-3 Coleshill Street</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
12.	<i>Warden 's Calendar 1889</i>	With Holbeche Family
13.	<i>Levelling Mill Street</i>	With Holbeche Family
14.	<i>Exchange of Land 1826</i>	Hartopp Exchange Map, reproduced by NG Evans SCLLSD
15.	<i>1830 London Omnibus</i>	London - 2000 years of a City and its people by Felix Barker and Peter Jackson. pub. Cassell & co 1974 (SCLLSD)
16.	<i>Inheritance</i>	Street Map of Droitwich Spa
17.	<i>Birmingham Stage Coach c.1840</i>	Photo of The Bull Ring in Mid-19th C., Birmingham Local Studies Library, (WK/B11/6330)
18.	<i>John 's Poem</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
19.	<i>The Gambles</i>	Portraits with Holbeche Family
20.	<i>Sarah 's Window to Dr Williamson</i>	Author's Photo.
21.	<i>Park House</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary, and Sutton Park: A History & Guide (SH 27.3), (SCLLSD)
22.	<i>Sarah 's Father (Thomas) and Sarah 's Brother (Aemilian)</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
23.	<i>Holbeche House (1848), High Street</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary and Author's Photos

24.	<i>"The Urns" at No. 1-3 Coleshill Street</i>	Richard Holbeche's Diary Original Manuscript in 'Holbeche Family Papers' (SCLLSD)
25.	<i>Memorial to Sarah 's Parents in Holy Trinity Church</i>	Author's Photograph
26.	<i>Gas Lighting in Town Houses</i>	Victorians at Home by Susan Lasdun, pub 1981 The Viking Press. Birmingham Lending Library (747.22)
27.	<i>Vincent and Emma 's Family</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary and Richard Holbeche's Diary Original Manuscript t
28.	<i>"Tom " and "Ed" in skirts</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
29.	<i>Agnes & Caroline Bracken</i>	Richard Holbeche's Diary Original Manuscript
30.	<i>Holy Trinity Church (Local Parish Church</i>	Painting of High Street, c. 1850 (Author's) Copy with SCLLSD
31.	<i>HOI Trini Church, 1864</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
32.	<i>Repository Sale, i.e. Bazaar</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
33.	<i>Invitation to Opening of New Town Hall Mill Street, 1859</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
34.	<i>Problems with the Cross</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
35.	<i>Athanasian Creed</i>	The Book of Common Prayer, 1820 (Author's)
36.	<i>Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Chapel, 1834</i>	Centenary Church of Holy Trinity (SCLLSD)
37.	<i>The New Railway (overlooking Sutton Coldfield) in 1865</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
38.	<i>The Royal Hotel (from the top of Station Road) in 1865</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
39.	<i>Duke Street - Houses built 1868</i>	Author's Photographs
40.	<i>Mystery House(?)</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
41.	<i>Menus and Visiting Cards</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
42.	<i>Le Chignon - 1867</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
43.	<i>The Family Carriage</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
44.	<i>Sarah 's Friends</i>	Sarah Holbeche Diary
45.	<i>Crystal Palace</i>	Sutton Park by City of Birmingham Publicity Section, printed by James Cond 1980
46.	<i>Proposed New Railway Line 1866</i>	Newspaper Cuttings, High St 1966-1983 (QSH47.14HIGH)
47.	<i>Town Station, off Midland Drive</i>	The Old Photographs Series, Sutton Coldfield by Marian Baxter, pub Alan Sutton Limited
48.	<i>Sales Particulars</i>	With Holbeche Family
49.	<i>Sarah Holbeche(?)</i>	Richard Holbeche 's Diary, Original Manuscript in 'Holbeche Family Papers