

EGYPT STATUE – RADCOT ROAD. Faringdon House Grounds



It wasn't ever part of the Great Exhibition of 1851, but it's easy to see where the confusion arises.

The 1851 Great Exhibition was housed in the first “Crystal Palace”, built in Hyde Park for a budget of just £150,000 (£14mil in today’s money). The Great Exhibition was scheduled to run for just six months, but it was such a commercial success (it also housed the first public lavatories – costing a penny – hence the phrase “spending a penny”! – as well as more than 100,000 objects from 15,000 exhibitors) that the decision was made to build an entirely new Crystal Palace at Sydenham. This was significantly bigger, with a new design for the main building, and substantial gardens. The cost for the new building (they did re-use the old Hyde Park components where possible) was a much chunkier £1,300,000 (£120million today).

They then had to fill the new Palace and the new gardens! Over a thousand copies of the best of the world’s statuary were constructed, and new works were commissioned.

A series of 26 statues along the Upper Garden Terrace (running along the entire front of the new Palace) represented countries and cities. One of these, Egypt, was sculpted by the Italian-born French sculptor Baron Carlo Marochetti. Another, by Antoine Etex (also French), represented Marseilles. Both are now in the grounds of Faringdon House.

After opening in 1854, the second Crystal Palace was initially a great success, But, difficult times followed (blamed on strict observance of the sabbath - it wasn’t allowed to open on Sundays!) culminating in a disastrous fire of 1936. Remaining statues and vases from the terraces and grounds were sold by public auction in 1957. It was here that Robert Heber-Percy snapped up a couple of bargains, and bought his two figures for £1.10s.0d. each. Putting “Egypt” on a pillbox was presumably his idea...

Sjoerd Vogt

P.S. For full 1851 Great Exhibition Catalogue, see <https://archive.org/details/officialcatalog06unkngoog>

For 1854 plan of New Crystal Palace and park:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/71/Crystal_Palace_Park_-_1857.jpg

7/1/2016