Crystal Palace Ladies have embarked upon, possibly, the biggest move forwards in their history. In a bid to reinforce their identity within the area that they take their name from, Palace Ladies have joined forces with the team at GLL who run the National Sports Centre within the grounds of Crystal Palace Park. The Centre offers a host of high quality football training facilities including the 3G Dome and 3G outdoor pitches. In addition, the players now have the benefit of a whole host of other sports facilities, including the state of the art gym for additional strength and cardio work. For match days, the partnership has provided use of The Lodge pitch and the World famous Crystal Palace Athletics Stadium with it's perfect central pitch facility.

Sport is not new to the location. In fact, almost from the moment that the magnificent structure that gave it's name to the area was built – Crystal Palace has been synonymous with football, athletics and more.
The Crystal Palace was originally built to house the 1851 Great Exhibition, held in Hyde Park. However, when the Exhibition was over and the Park was restored to its former glory, the building was not lost. Joseph Paxton, its designer, had other plans for his masterpiece and formed a company to raise the capital to purchase the building and find an imposing site to house it on. The site chosen was 200 acres on the side of Sydenham Hill in South London, called Penge Place, which was formerly the home of Leo Schuster. At the top of the hill the Crystal Palace was re-built and opened in 1854. Paxton then set about designing a park with ornamental gardens, terraces and fountains. Significant elements of the park were two massive fountain basins, each with a jet of water at its centre that rose over 200 feet into the air.
Unfortunately, the cost of operating these marvels was so large that they were only used on special occasions and it was not long before thoughts were given to other uses for these vast garden and fountain areas.
Football was soon seen as a good use of the space and was played in various locations within the Crystal Palace Park, particularly in the early days. However, the first formal football stadium originated in 1894 when it was decided that the FA Cup Finals should return to London, and the vast area which had been the southerly fountain basin was turned into a massive arena. In 1895, the correspondent of The Sunday Times described the scene at the first Cup Final there: " The banked-up sides of the ground formed a natural grandstand for thousands upon thousands. The sea of faces that met one's gaze on all sides presented a sight far easier imagined than described, whilst the excitement and enthusiasm was pulse-stirring enough to be trying to weak nerves".

In 1905, when the FA gave the Crystal Palace Company more security with a five year agreement to hold the FA Cup Final, the Company made a number of improvements including larger stands and better views of the pitch. This was, of course the year that Crystal Palace FC was formed. The Crystal Palace Magazine detailed, at the time: "The new arrangements will provide room for over three thousand more people, bringing the total seating accommodation up to just over sixteen thousand. The extra facilities will entail an expenditure of something like £5,000".

By 1911, the Crystal Palace was in a dire financial state and so the building and grounds were offered for sale. In 1913, there was a proposal to acquire the Crystal Palace ground for the nation. The FA considered this but rejected it. However with the on-set of war in 1914 it was taken by the Admiralty as a recruiting and training centre for the Royal Naval Volunteers and other units. Here over 125,000 men were trained, and at the conclusion of that war the building was utilized as one of the great centres for demobilization. Football returned after the war, but Crystal Palace as a club soon moved to a new home at Selhurst Park in 1922.
Sadly, the Crystal Palace was destroyed on the night of 1 December 1936 in the most spectacular fire seen in Britain for many years. This started about eight o'clock in the evening near the Egyptian Room and spread with such amazing speed, that within half an hour the great building was ablaze from end to end. Only the two towers escaped destruction. Ninety engines and five hundred firemen were engaged in fighting the flames, which rose to a height of three hundred feet. The cause of the fire was never discovered. Only the two towers escaped destruction but these were taken down in 1941 because they afforded a conspicuous landmark to enemy planes in World War Two.

Throughout these dramatic changes, the original sports arena remained substantially unchanged, albeit adapted for the increase in public interest in motor sports, until it was swept away to build the athletics stadium and the adjacent National Sports Centre in the early 1960s.

It is probable that the first footballers to play for Palace may not have always had the greatest conditions in which to play. They more than likely played on Penge Common without a marked-out pitch. In time they would have played at the venue that gave them their name before the later moves. However they started out, they were among the pioneers of the game and their team had the distinction being the first to bear the name 'Crystal Palace'.

It is therefore perhaps, somewhat poetic, that we at Palace Ladies find ourselves based at The National Sports Centre today, with use of some of the most modern facilities, yet living within the very history created our club in the first place. We are very proud to be back at the true home of Crystal Palace.

Complied by Richard Spokes, CPLFC Chairman - 2011.

Extracts taken from texts by Harold P.Clunn, Ian Bevan, Stuart Hibberd and Michael Gilbert

Crystal Palace in all its glory from the air

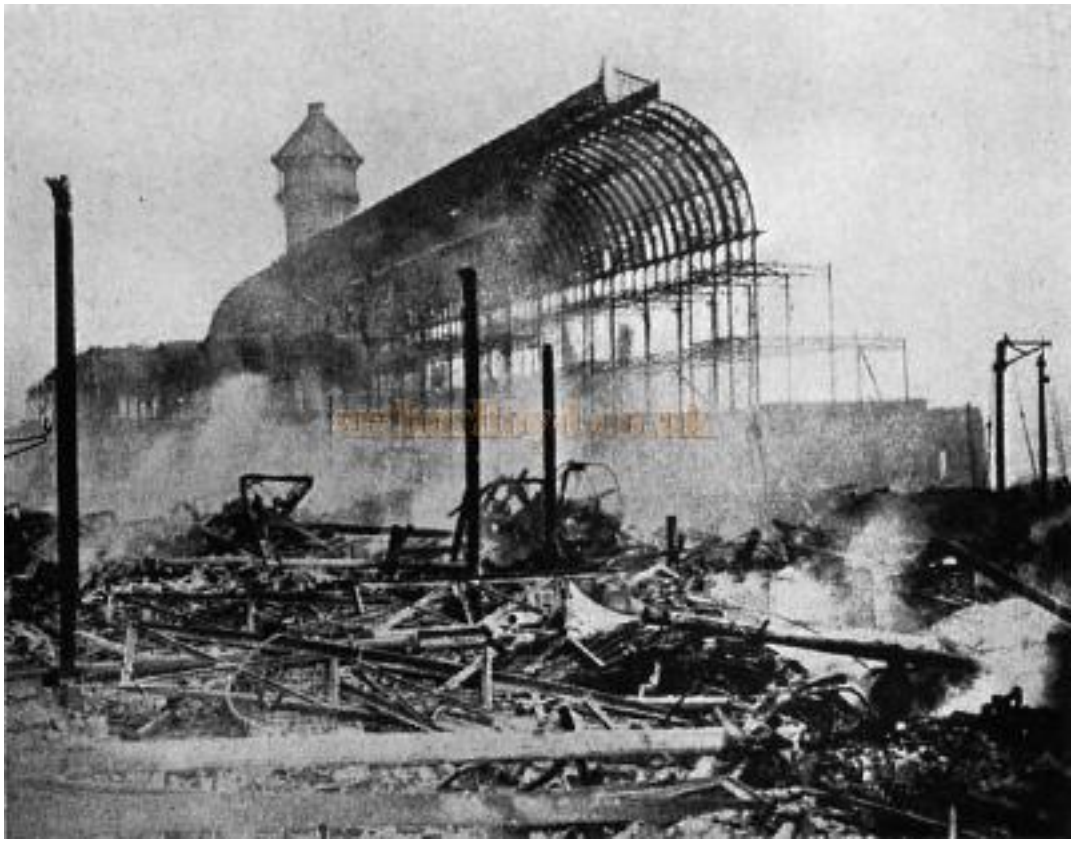
Joseph Paxman, designer of the Crystal Palace. His statue overlooks the NSC from above the car park today.

BELOW: CUP FINAL GROUND 1900. THE PAVILION FLANKED BY FURTHER SEATING FOR 6,000 PEOPLE.

The original football stadium in 1900, where we play today, in the shadow of the mighty Crystal Palace

BELOW: CUP FINAL GROUND c1913
POSSIBLY DURING THE CUP FINAL?

The later, updated football and sports stadium (c1913)



After the fire in 1936. The building is gone but the legend lives on !!

The 20th Century version of the Crystal Palace. Not as beautiful, but it is where we call home and we are proud of it

The athletics Stadium and central pitch

.