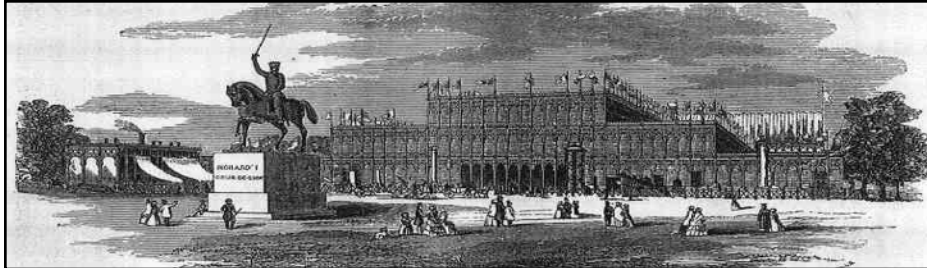


**Beard and Fitch: From the Victorian age to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**



The Great exhibition 1851

**Beard and Fitch** was founded in the Victorian age in the year of the Great Exhibition of 1851, held in Hyde Park, London in the purpose-built 'Crystal Palace' (a new glass building three times longer than St Paul's cathedral. It attracted more than 6 million visitors, of which 4.5 million visited on the cheap 'Shilling Days'. At the entrance to the exhibition stood an enormous block of coal, weighing 24 tons – a symbol of power married to technology. The exhibition also featured the latest in consumer goods, including matches, steel pens and envelopes. 1851 was a turning point in British history, when, for the first time in history anywhere in the world, more people in Britain lived in towns than in the countryside. The British Isles, including all of Ireland, at that time had a population of 26.16 million. The average income per head of population was only around £40.00.

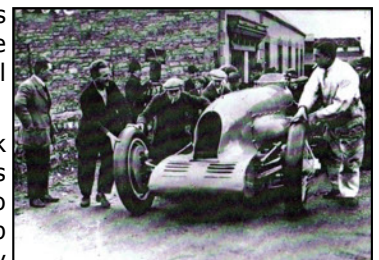
The Victorian age was a time of inventors and inventions, of rapid progress in creating the objects of modern life. From the steam engine to the steam printer, the skyscraper to the machine-gun, the radiator to the flush toilet. In general, steel replaced iron as a material for ships hulls and boilers, refrigeration was developed and petroleum harnessed for the first motorcars.

It was at this time in history that Mr John Beard for the manufacture of clock wheels founded Beard and Fitch in Clarksenwell, London. London at this time was the largest city in the world with a population of 2,362,000 and the 1851 Census records that 1,296,000 people were employed in the textile industries, 572,000 in metal manufacture and 394,000 in mining. A time of economic expansion and social change.

Mr Beard managed his company until 1905 when control was passed to his son Mr Charles T. Beard and then to his son Jack Beard who as fate would have it would be the last member of the Beard family to run the business.

During the 1914-18 World War the company was given over entirely to war work manufacturing gears for armaments of all descriptions. After the war the company became less involved with the declining clock industry and increasingly engaged in supplying gears for all sorts of industrial applications.

The company had the distinction of manufacturing the entire transmission for Malcolm Campbell's world record breaking car which in 1927 and 1928 achieved new world land speed records. The company still holds a letter of thanks from the great man. The photograph right shows Campbell moving the car just before the first test run at Pendine Sands in 1927.



During the Second World War the company was again given over entirely to war work manufacturing gears for armaments of all descriptions but in particular the manufacture of gears for torpedoes. Elaborate defences were put in place around various machines in the factory to minimise damage, including building bomb shelters over two particular machines should a bomb hit the factory! Fortunately other than some very minor incidents with incendiary devices the factory survived the blitz undamaged.

The board of directors at the time generously agreed to pay apprentices six pence a night to undertake fire watch duty on the roof of the factory during bombing raids!



After the war the company reverted to supplying gears for industrial applications and in 1961 the company and most of its employees moved to Harlow in Essex as part of the national government's master plan for the redevelopment of London and development of new towns in the south of England. The picture left was taken during the move.

The descendants of the founding families disposed of their interest in the company in 1981 to Acran Gears Ltd a private locally owned company.

Having survived the recession and industrial changes of the early 1990's it became obvious that if the company were to prosper a major reorganisation and larger premises would be needed. So in 1994 the company moved from its premises in Edinburgh Way to the new factory premises at Crammond Park, part of the Pinnacles Industrial area of Harlow where it can be found to-day.