Public access description

Object Type
These sketches are Joseph Paxton's first thoughts for the building for the Great Exhibition of 1851, later known as the Crystal Palace. He drew them during a Midland Railway board meeting in Derby. The two sketches show the side elevation and cross section. They are mounted with a telegram that was sent to Paxton's wife confirming acceptance of the plan.

Design & Designing
Within a week, the sketches were converted into proper drawings and presented to the Commission board. Paxton's design was accepted by the Royal Commissioners for the Great Exhibition partly because all the other architects' schemes had been rejected. Time was running out and Paxton's idea of building a glass and iron structure from prefabricated sections meant that the building could be constructed quickly.

Place
Paxton had successfully designed and built glass houses at Chatsworth, in Derbyshire, where he had been head gardener. These sketches for a building made of glass and iron were based on the lines of the Lily House at Chatsworth. Paxton used many of the same principles for both buildings. The Crystal Palace was the first structure to use iron on such a large scale.

Descriptive line
First sketch of Crystal Palace, Great Exhibition 1851, by Paxton

Physical description
The two images on the blotting paper show the fundamental idea for the Great Exhibition building, later known as the Crystal Palace. A week after he created the rough sketch, Joseph Paxton has his horticultural staff draft proper drawings. As these designs were later accepted for use, the telegram to Mrs. Paxton announcing this fact is mounted on the sketch.

Dimensions
Height: 39.1 cm unframed, Width: 28 cm unframed

Museum number
E.575-1985

Object history note
Drawn in Derby by Sir Joseph Paxton (born in Milton Bryant, Bedfordshire, 1801, died in Sydenham, Kent, 1865)

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O18167/the-great-exhibition-building-architectural-sketch-paxton-joseph-sir/