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THE FAIRGROUND

MERCURY

Vol. 4 No. 2 Summer 1981

THOMAS

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Editorial

This summer's edition of *The Mercury* is a bumper one, probably the largest to date. This is due in no small measure to the history of Tidmans of Norwich, contributed by Ronald H. Clark. As many of you will be aware Mr. Clark, a Vice-President of the Newcomen Society, is an acknowledged authority on the steam engine and has written several books on the subject, including histories of Savages and Burrells. We are delighted, therefore, that he has agreed to allow us to publish this short but comprehensive history of one of the early fair-ground ride builders, first compiled over a decade ago but revised for this publication. In passing we should also mention Geoff Wyatt of Messrs Wyatt & Reynolds, Bath, who allowed us to rummage through his collection of Victorian wooden typefaces for a suitably appropriate display line to introduce this article.

Sadly, our roving ambassador from Teignmouth, Chris Russell, has been forced by increasing personal commitments to resign his position as Western Area rep and committee member. Chris—one of our founder members—has been a tremendous advert for the

Association with his forays to the four quarters of the compass in pursuit of fairs. We regret that he has chosen to step down but are glad to record that he remains as a member. In his place as area rep. we welcome another long-distance runner, Martin Burrige, who can be contacted at 50 Gould Road, Fordes Estate, Barnstaple, North Devon. Western members also please note that our other rep. in your area, Peter White, is to be found at an address different to that printed in our last issue. His correct location is 'Beachside', 3 Beach Terrace, Long Rock, Penzance, Cornwall. Tel: Penzance 711177.

Finally, subscriptions! Please, please, check your membership card and renew your sub. by the due date. It will save time and money being unnecessarily expended chasing up overdue subs. and—if you should be on the overdue list—a lot of disappointment (followed no doubt by telephone calls of complaint to the Chairman/Treasurer/Secretary) should you fail to receive the next issue of this magazine. For the record all subs. should be sent to John Ray, 57 West Way, Stafford, and the current rates are: Individual £3.00; Family £3.50; Students and OAPs £1.00.

Cover: Fine art, fine day. A sunny July afternoon enriches the splendours of Tom Benson's Hall & Fowle-decorated Ark at this year's Horsham Carnival.

All contributions to the magazine should be sent to the Editor, Graham Downie, 1 Holly Court, Frome, Somerset.

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Roundabouts

Since the last issue, a great deal of information has come to light regarding new machines and changes in ownership from the winter into the early part of the season. In spite of the recession, showmen are still acquiring new and second-hand machines in large numbers.

1981 looks like being "The Year of the Rock-o-plane" as a number of these has been imported from the U.S.A. and this ride could well become an epidemic craze in the same way that the Meteorite, or Round-up, has been in the last few years. There is an historic parallel here in that when Rose Bros. acquired their U.S. imported Meteorite in, I think, 1958 it was for many years the only one and it passed to Monte's and Graham's in turn.

In the mid 70's these rides started to appear in ever greater numbers with the imported American one to Michael Phillips and the first British built one to Reg Gale.

Similarly, the only travelling Rock-o-plane up to the end of last year was J. Remblance's, acquired by them around 1970.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. J.E.A. Manning who has very kindly sent me a list of the rides which have been imported by J.E.A. Manning and Sons in conjunction with K. Emmett since 1978 and this list will appear at the end of my report.

Your Editor has asked me to dispense with the list as used in previous issues altogether and write my notes in narrative form. First of all then some corrections from my last lists. I am indebted to Pete Tei who has pointed out that the "20th Century Thriller" Rocket Ark of Harry Marshall's passed to Arthur Holland some time in the late '50's and not the early '60's as I had thought.

I have also received an informative letter from Stephen Smith concerning E. Atha's small Orton Ark, the one which P. Gray now has. He says—and having further examined photographs I am convinced he is correct—that this machine was new to Harniess's in the early '30's, and is not the one which Ben Hobson had new. The shapes of the tops of the rounding boards make this clear. Steve poses the question of what happened to the Hobson machine. New information indicates that the original two arch front was at some time expanded to four arches involving, not a complete redecoration, but a "carrying on" of the original design on to the new arches which were fitted each side of the original front. This being the case, can you suggest the subsequent history of that machine? Could it be, for

example, that it later became Harry Hall's Waltzer which certainly had four arches across the front, and was a famous sight at Goose Fair for many years?

I have also received a helpful letter from Les Ashbolt which, amongst other things, indicates that the Octopus purchased by S. Shepherd Junior, stated in my last notes as going to Whitley Bay will be travelling in Oxfordshire and surrounding counties. Les also mentions that Billy Lee acquired a fresh Chance Trabant from a seaside. In fact this made its debut in Lee's ownership at Wokingham in April. Further information from Les is that Walter Conoley has returned to travelling this year with a Dodgem, details as yet unknown. His previous travelling Dodgem was that which saw more celebrated service as John Thurston's for many years, and was originally a very handsome track indeed.

Returning to the subject of Rock-o-planes, by my reckoning there have been certainly six imported during the winter, these going to Tommy Matthews, John Bugg Junior, Henry Anderson, Glen Smith, Rennie Manning and William Woods. It is safe to say, I think that all these are of Eyerly make.

H. Anderson's Rock-o-Plane, Hampton Court, Easter 1981 (T. Darby).



The Turnagain Company have supplied new Trabants to G. Traylen Junior and Arthur Stevens. The Stevens' one is called the "Hully-Gully". Why this seemingly ridiculous name you may ask? Well you may have noticed in the lavish advertisements in the World's Fair inserted by the German Mack Company that their Trabant is called a Hully-Gully. In this case the ride has elaborate back scenery, a floor sloping downwards, and the machine travels clockwise unlike British and American machines which travel anti-clockwise. You are still asking where "Hully-Gully" comes from. It was in fact the name of an American dance craze which grew up in the wake of Twist during the early 1960's on American Band-Stand along with such other Twist variants as the Watusi, the Mashed Potato, the Fly, the Monkey Time, etc. Chubby Checker and the other "Twist Stars" were introducing a new dance craze almost every week at that time. Now that Fairground Rides have been named after the Twist and the Hully Gully, what sort of machine will have the name "Mashed Potato" I wonder!?

Other new machines supplied during the winter are Pollard Coasters to Bernard Matthews in place of his previous one which has gone to Paul Lang, and J.J. Rogers & Sons.

A new Jackson Waltzer was supplied to Albert Barker and made its debut at Rugby in March. This has the low front flat which is in vogue at present, rather spindly metal hand rails and, to my eyes at least, very ugly Tinsley rounding boards and front similar to those fitted about 18 months ago to another Waltzer on a permanent site.

Albert Barker's Waltzer, Tamworth April 1981 (J. Ray).



Apart from the much publicised Super Loops to J. Stevens & Sons, Perrin Stevens has built a further Twist for his own use. This is the fifth Twist to be owned by Stevens and apart from the first, all have been built by Stevens themselves. Number one, new in 1962/3 was a Bennett and is now travelled by Charlie Edwards on the Rose Brothers' circuit. Number two, the

first home-built one came out in 1972 and is now owned by Monty Hammond having passed to him from Billy Irvin, the previous owner, during the winter. Number three, again home-built, this time under Stevens' supervision in the Midlands, was new in 1977 and passed to Billy Studt in 1979 when Stevens presented number four which was very similar to number three. This has now gone to Michael DeVey.

A new Eli Twist was expected at Southsea for Wally Shufflebottom at Easter, U.S. imported.

A new Matterhorn Ghost Train was reported as being supplied to Collins at Barry Park in April.

Turning now to some fresh second-hand machine changes, a set of Chairs accompanied by a rare Guy lorry went to C. Coombs (Notts. & Derby) at the beginning of the season, from Bobby Foster (Wales).

J.W. Adcroft's Rotor was acquired by Albert Barton at the beginning of the season who presented it for the first time at Bob Wilson's Durdham Downs Fair at Easter. This machine is reputed to have once been Botton Brothers' at Battersea.

A fresh Octopus has been sold to Peter Burnett by Alf Bond Junior as reported in May, and a fresh Italian set of Jets was acquired by Carl Wallis from Butlin's at Mossley near Dublin.

Another imported machine from Ireland is a fresh Chairplane to Johnny Wesseldine (Notts. & Derby) and another Chairplane has been acquired by Albert Noble, both reported in May.

J.A. Turner has acquired an Octopus from Crow's called the "Discotropical Psychedelical Giant Octopus".

In late May we heard that Pat Phillips had sold his Wheel to Bobby Foster and bought, in its place, Reg Gale's Meteorite, this being the first such ride ever built in Britain.

W. Clark has acquired J. Houghton's Coaster, and Marshall Herbert now has the Twist from the Winter Gardens Morecambe and this is trailer mounted.

A sign of the times in the West Country is the acquisition by David Rowland of T. Whitelegg's big Lakin Dodgem. It will be remembered that Tommy Rowland already has the other of Whitelegg's two tracks. In their hey day, these were two of the most handsome Dodgem tracks on the road, the side rounding boards being two layers high surmounting beautiful false pillars. This latest change means that the once mammoth firm of T. Whitelegg & Sons who used to travel eight or nine big machines is now down to one only, namely the big three hill Lakin Motor Cycle Ark which incidentally has recently been redecorated.

Further West Country news is the fresh



J. Stevens' Super Loops, Hayes, Easter 1981 (T. Darby).

Maxwell Lifting Paratrooper to Simon DeVey, ex Alfred Codona of Aberdeen. John Carey's smart Ghost Train has been sold by Henry Clack.

A new Lifting Paratrooper, Bennett make, has been supplied to John Wall which I managed to see at Mitcham Common, standing alongside his magnificent Maxwell Waltzer.

Jimmy Appleton's Waltzer has gone to the seaside at Morecambe and has been replaced by a fresh Ark from John Remblance, this originally being Sedgwick & Thurston's.

A fresh Twist has been acquired in February by H.J. Sharland, ex John Collins'.

Mrs. M. Gray's handsome Lang Wheel Dodgem from the Vale at Hampstead has been sold to Len Bibby and is reputed to be at the Kursaal, Southend. For this information I am indebted to Malcolm MacKenzie, to whom many thanks.

On my customary round up of London fairs at Easter in the company of members Phillip Bradley and Pete Tei I noticed some changes and improvements to various machines. Not all changes are improvements, but starting with those that are, G. Heath's large Maxwell Waltzer has been beautifully redecorated for this season, a process which was begun last year. Also, F. Cox's Dodgem appeared on Mitcham Common in superb new decor and, best of all, T. Benson & Sons' Dodgem track has been lavishly redecorated by R. Carter. This, for my money the most handsome track on the road, looks marvellous in its new paintwork. The accompanying photograph cannot begin to convey how good it looks, but it does indicate the handsome Lang Wheel trellises and brackets. Benson's

Dodgem was seen on the top heath at Hampstead alongside that of R. Edwards', another very handsome machine and the longest track on the road. Following the unfortunate accident two years ago, all the Orton and Spooner uprights have now been repaired, or replaced and repainted.

At Hayes we noticed that P. Appleton's Skid, the ex Joe Stevens' Lakin machine, has further succumbed to its black transformation now that the false pillars, hand rails and trellises have now been repainted on black background to match the cars. Only the rounding boards now still have the handsome 1959 Lakinesque decor on them. Also at Hayes we noticed that a start had been made to replace the rounding boards on Ronnie Buggs' Ark, this being the famous ex Stevens' "Sputnik-Chaser" machine. The front and roundings which carry a magnificent example of Fred Fowle's work, done in 1958/9 have almost completely rotted away, so replacement is essential.

On Wormwood Scrubs we noticed that Wynns' Orton Dodgem Track has been very nicely redecorated during the winter, and, still on the subject of Dodgemes new Reverchon cars have been installed on Fred Gray's oblong Dodgem and some attempt has been made to improve the appearance of this, it must be said, very plain and unattractive looking track.

You will recall that in the last issue I compared the riding quality on John Biddall Junior's new Easyrider unfavourably with Crow's. I am pleased to say that since the alteration of the drive which is now underneath the machine and achieved by wheels pressing against flanges under the platforms, is now much smoother.

Freddie Wright's unique 28ft. Ark, previously Nash's, has now gone to Ireland.

The Orton and Spooner Ark of Phillip Gray's has now gone the way of nearly all covered round machines, and the conical bird cage top has gone and is replaced by the inevitable flat top. The same thing has happened to Mrs. S. Smith's

T. Benson's Dodgemes as repainted, Haywards Heath April 1981 (M. Hanna).



Waltzer, and at the time of writing is due to happen to Albert Proctor's Jackson Waltzer as well. Soon there will be no Arks, Waltzers, Skids or similar machines with conical traditional tops. The flat roof obviously saves a great deal of work and is less susceptible to wind damage, and inside it can make the machine feel warm if skilful lighting and an attractive paybox are employed. However, if the rounding boards are not fitted the machine looks terrible from the outside in my view, and I lament the loss of the centre drums and radial flights which used to give covered round machines such atmosphere. The only machine I know on the road which still has the full set of such adornments regularly fitted, is Tommy Benson's Swirl, the most magnificent Swirl ever built without doubt.

More Dodgem news is that Frank Halls' Supercar track has passed to Freddie Wright. This was previously R. Franklin's machine and was new to Walter Scott. Albert Matchett has acquired from Ireland a fresh Supercar Dodgem which is being presented in the London area. At Easter it was on the Vale at Hampstead in place of the Lang Wheel track of Gray's. This track of Matchett's looks rather rough I regret to say, not that it was exactly handsome even when new. It was originally supplied to Bob Wilson in 1964 and replaced a beautiful Lakin track which has been travelled for the last 15 years by G. Guyatt and still looks superb.

Keith James has become the first showman to purchase an Invader Ride from makers Norsen Powell of Glasgow. A second such machine—similar in style and action to an Orbiter—was due for delivery in July to Guild Senior Vice President (and F.A.G.B. member) Billy Whitelegg.

Finally, a few interesting transport items deserve mention. Fred Gray (Mitcham) has now dispensed with the services of his big red Scammell Pioneer Tractor and replaced it with a more modern vehicle from Parnhams. This means that the Scammell Pioneer is probably extinct on fairgrounds.

Similarly, J. Scarrott has finally laid up his second World War Albion Military Tractor which means that this type of vehicle is doubtless also extinct. These handsome vehicles though not as numerous as Scammells were seen in some numbers on fairgrounds during the early '50's. Showmen who had them included Botton Brothers, T. Whitelegg, William Shaw and Herbert Shaw, and most notable of all Harry Gray who had a fleet of four or five of them.

Further items of news must wait until next time, but as always I welcome any further information to number 3, Powell Road, Newick, East Sussex. Finally, here is the list kindly supplied by J.E.A. Manning and Sons.

American rides imported by Messrs Manning and Emmett, 1978-80

1978

Hrubets Upright Paratrooper, sold to W. Irvin.

1979

Hrubets Round-Up, sold to A. Burgess, London.

Garbrick Big Wheel, sold to G. Sanders, Cambridge.

Garbrick Big Wheel, sold to R. Harris, Cambs.

Hrubets Upright Paratrooper, sold to R. Daly, Midlands.

King Tornado, sold to J. James, London.

Chance Trabant, sold to L. Pettigrove, London.

2 Chance Trabants, sold to Butlins.

Chance Trabant, sold to Lord. Bros., Skegness (now sold to W. Lee, London).

1980

Hrubets Round-Up, sold to J. Wall, London.

Hrubets Round-Up, sold to J. Chipperfield, Weymouth.

Watkins Tempest, sold to J. Day, Cambs.

2 Watkins Tempests, sold to Butlins.

Tilt-A-Whirl (Waltzer), sold to Butlins.

Huss (Germany) Enterprise, sold to J. Booth, A. Croles and H. Case, Wales.

W. House Super Loops, sold to J. Stevens, London.

Chance Trabant, sold to J. Booth and A. Crole, Wales.

Eli Bridge Scrambler Twist, sold to C. Hart, Manchester.

Hrubets Lay Down Paratrooper, sold to F. Rose, London.

American rides imported by J.E.A. Manning & Sons, 1978-81

1978

Watkins Hustler, sold to H.K. Manning, Beds.

1980

Hrubets Upright Paratrooper, sold to A. Rogers, Bristol.

Hrubets Lay Down Paratrooper, modified by D. Ward to Hanglider, sold to J. Manning, London.

Eyerly Rock-o-Plane, sold to H. Anderson, London.

1981

Eyerly Rock-o-Plane, sold to R.H. Manning, London.

Eyerly Rock-o-Plane, sold to T. Matthews, London.

Wisdom Sizzler Twist, sold to J. Beach, London.

Except where stated all rides are of American manufacture.

Mike Hanna

Atha's Arks

In the last issue of The Mercury Mike Hanna mentioned the Noah's Ark of a Yorkshire family, the Athas. The details given were a little inaccurate, probably because of the confusion between the various machines they have owned since the war. This gives me an opportunity to relate briefly the history of each machine.

The first Ark I have reference to them owning was the Orton and Spooner machine new to Harniess's in Easter 1933. This was a small version of the 'super' Speedways made a few years later and was sold to Earnest Atha in 1939. From Atha's ownership it was sold to Ireland and was later converted to a Waltzer. In the meantime Atha's had acquired another Orton Ark, and to confuse matters this had also been new to Harniess in 1932. It was one of the numerous Noah's Arks built by Orton's in the early 1930s to the same pattern, but each one slightly different. This had been owned by Riders of New Brighton and it was from them that Atha's bought it in the 1940s. The decoration was changed to Aeroplanes, which were retained for many years on the front and roundings. The flash was not used in recent years and it was only last May that it Harniess's Orton Noah's Ark "Electric Speedway", the machine sold to Gray's last June.

was painted over. A new centre paybox was added and new shutters and handrails replaced the originals in the 1960s. In later years the mounts acquired from Powell's 'Super' Speedway were used on the machine but these often gave way to a set of Waltzer cars bought in the early 1970s. When a new machine was bought in 1979 it was stored in the yard and eventually sold during 'Town Moor' week last June.

Yet another Ortona nd Spooner machine was purchased in 1957, this time a big Orton 'Super' Speedway, one of four built (the others being Powell's, Shaw's and Collins'), and was acquired from Chas Evans of Porthcawl in South Wales. Atha's had the machine extensively rebuilt about eighteen years ago. It was lowered and a brand new front and rounding boards made, with the distinctive Maxwell canopy and false pillars. The front, one of the best in Yorkshire, was decorated by Hall and Fowle and despite its age (compared to many fronts in use today) is still regularly used. The outside row of bikes are now Easyriders transferred from the redundant set from the ex-Michael Collins machine.

Michael Collins had a new Easyrider built by





Ben Hobson's British Speedway: what did happen to this ride?

The "Super" Speedway still travelled by Atha's,



Maxwells, new in 1977, Silver Jubilee year. It was sold in 1979 to Atha's and opened for the first time in its new ownership at York Easter Fair that year. Since then a 'tenth' Waltzer car has been built to match the existing nine and with the exception of Hull last year the machine always opens as a Waltzer now. The name on the front has been changed to Atha's but it remains the 'Merseyside Scene' and new Maxwell type 'face' handrails replaced plywood boards this season.

All these machines have been travelled by a series of Foden eight wheelers, from DGs through the FG series to fairly modern ones. Indeed, two fairly recent ones with new bodies were put into service this season.

I hope this clears up any problems with the Atha machines, but it does leave one question: what did happen to the Orton, and Spooner Noah's Ark new to Ben Hobson in 1932?

Stephen Smith

Northampton Fairs

Northampton is very well served by Showland during the year, with a fair at each Bank Holiday; Midsummer Meadows being used at Easter and Spring and the Old Racecourse being the location of the May Day and August Fairs. Abington Park is the venue for the Show Fair in late July and there are also smaller fairs at Delapre Park (May) and Kings Heath (June). While none of these fairs normally exceeds six adult riding machines, there is always a good deal of variety with different novelty rides joining the lessee's machines at each fair.

Northampton's fairs were under the control of Henry J. Thurston up until the end of 1973, then Henry retired and took up permanent residence in Thrapston where he had previously spent his winters. His Dodgems and run of fairs were taken over by John Scarrott & Sons, who, although hailing from South Wales, were no strangers to the area, having been regular visitors to Northampton Show, the Whit Fair, Corby and St Ives with their Octopus and Austin Car ride. Since acquiring the run, which also includes several of the smaller Northants Feasts and the Spring Fair at Daventry as well as Olney Cherry Fair, Wolverton, Huntingdon and St Ives, John Scarrott & Sons have progressed to three machines and made a number of transport changes traced out in the following paragraphs.

The Dodgem, a 1950 Lang Wheels track with sixteen Supercar Italia cars, first opened under John Scarrott's ownership in April 1974 at Daventry Spring Fair. The transport then was as bought from Henry J. Thurston, the ex W.D. Albion 6 x 4 tractor (HNH 984F) which towed the plate truck and a frame truck, and a Foden four wheeled twin deck lorry (TFL 694) hauling a frame truck.

The Octopus was transported by an E.R.F. eight wheeler (133 URB) while an Atkinson box

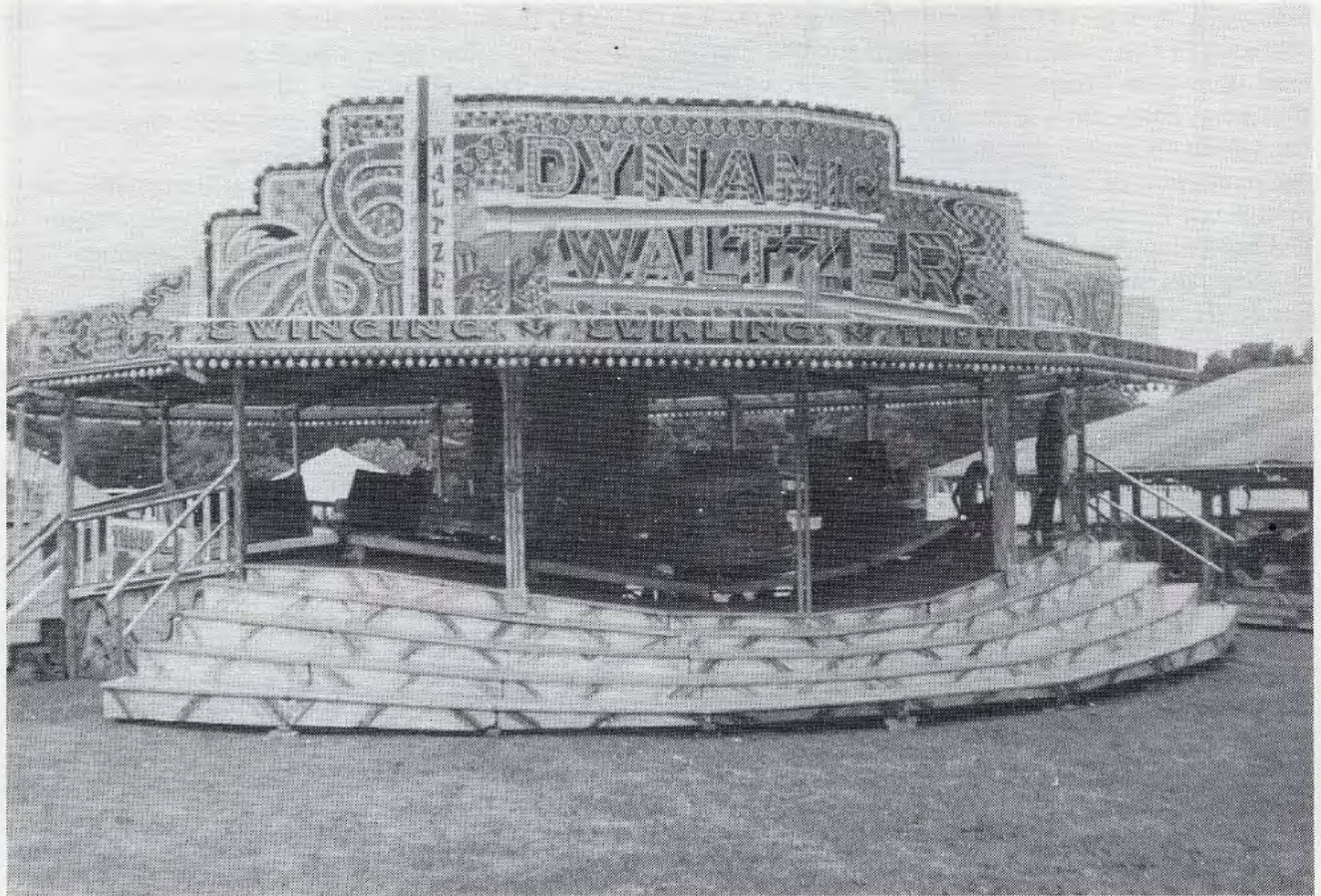
lorry (18 DYA) carried the Austin Car ride and towed the living trailer. During the 1974-75 winter the Dodgem track was decorated in the John Scarrott style (John Snr., being well known as a Showman's decorator) and the first change in the transport took place, shortly after. An E.R.F. eight wheeled flat lorry was bought in May 1975 and used to carry the plates and other floor components. This vehicle was quickly transformed from a dull green to the familiar Scarrott livery of orange and white with gold and red letters and lining.

The following winter the old plate truck was converted to a twin deck car truck to be hauled by another fresh addition to the fleet, an ex-Luozade Atkinson eight wheeler (CMG 236A) which was also fitted with a frame body to be used with the Dodgems.

The ex Henry J. Thurston Foden four wheeled lorry was sold to Ted Pratley Snr., who named it 'The Tiger', and up to this May was still seen using it to carry his swings and car ride. Towards the end of the 1976 travelling season, the Hayes Fabrications built Octopus was sold to Nottingham Showman James H. Mellors and it's place at that year's St Ives Michaelmas Fair was taken by Thurston Brothers' Cyclone Twist.

To replace the Octopus, John and his two sons John Jnr., and Phillip, travelled to Hull to purchase a nine car Orton and Spooner Waltzer from Tim Gallagher. During that winter the machine was completely transformed, the Seddon and Bristol lorries that had brought the Waltzer south were disposed of and the E.R.F. (133 URB), formerly with the Octopus, was converted to carry the platforms, etc., and to haul the box truck. The Waltzer cars were packed into the Atkinson box lorry and a Bedford box van was acquired to carry the juvenile ride.

A new tilt and handrails were fitted replacing



John Scarrott's Waltzer, Northampton Show 1979.

the wooden shutters and the whole machine was decorated to a very high standard making it's debut under the Scarrott banner at Daventry Spring Fair in March 1977.

The Albion tractor, having lost it's Dodgem loads to more modern eight wheelers came in useful again hauling the Waltzer centre and John Jnr's trailer.

In September 1979, the Scarrott family decided that it was time to add a novelty ride to their set up and they travelled to Yeivsey to purchase the Lang Wheels Hurricane Jets from Roses Pleasure Fairs Ltd. The new acquisition was given a try out at Huntingdon Autumn Fair before being taken to the Woodford Halse winter quarters for the full treatment. While John Jnr., and Phillip made new handrails, a new centre flash and tidied up the centre truck, John Snr., did a real eye catching paint job on the cars and uprights, etc., adopting a stars and strips theme throughout. The A.E.C. lorry (PGP 739E) bought with the Jets from Roses has been retained and of course now sports the smart Scarrott livery. Incidentally, the large rocket type centre flash used on the ride in Roses ownership has not been wasted, it is now serving as a flash for the local public house at Woodford Halse!

The machines are fully built up at Northampton's holiday and Show fairs and the transport

is also well worth seeing. Joining the Scarrott family's machines at the various 1980 fairs in the Town were Harry Parrish with his immaculate Skid, Jimmy Appleton's Waltzer and Tommy Connell's Paratrooper for Easter. Pat Phillips with the ex David Gray Big Wheel and Ronnie Bishton's Dive Bomber lent support at the May Fair. Ronnie remained with the Scarrott circuit until the Spring Holiday Fair when they were also joined by John Cole with his Hayes Fabrications Octopus and Teddy Pratley Jnr., with his Skid.

The Show Fair in late July saw David Manning making his yearly visit to the area with his Lang Wheels Jets which have seen service with Traylens, Billy Whitelegg and Bert Ayers.

The last fair of the year, the August Holiday Fair on the Racecourse, at the opposite end to the May Fair, saw the return of Pat Phillips' Big Wheel and Ted Pratley's Skid along with Victor Gray's Scrambler Twist. This latter ride built by Pollards is decorated in a rather unusual but very attractive style and is transported by an equally smart Foden eight wheeled lorry which hauls the centre truck.

David Springthorpe

N.E. Notes

With the 1981 season well under way a number of changes to rides, transport and amusement parks have been noted.

Taking the transport changes first probably the most interesting 'new' vehicle is the ex-Western National Bristol 'Lodeka' bus, 810 KDV, of Barry Aisbetts. As yet the bus is unpainted, but has had the lower deck windows panelled in and also a generator has been installed. Barry transports his Juvenile Speedway and Swing boats in the bus, which must surely be the only double-decker travelling the fairgrounds. John Clifford Culine has yet again renewed his Giant Octopus transport. The Atkinson tractor and Bedford 'TK' commissioned last season have been replaced by an ERF six wheel tractor, GWW 229J, and an ERF six wheel van, GVK 316C, which has come from Gallaghers of Twist fame. Although from Yorkshire the Gallaghers have been wintering with Celines at Tudhoe and during the winter have been busy renewing their Twist transport. Sadly the somewhat rare Guy 'Invincible' has been replaced by an Atkinson Mk 2 six wheeler, RWB 360L, and the above mentioned ERF by an Foden 'Mickey Mouse' tractor. Luke Jobson has retired his AEC 'Mammoth Major' Mk 5 in favour of an ex-Coalite ERF eight wheeler, BRB 370L, which has been fitted with a frame body, Luke still has on fleet the faithful old Leyland 'Octopus' with its coach-built luton body. Seen in Crows' yard was an very nice ERF eight wheeler fitted with an aluminium body but as yet unpainted, this lorry is to come into service with Alan Crow's Dodgems and will carry the cars. With the recent body modifications to the Atkinson eight wheeler

Barry Aisbetts' Juvenile Speedway, Northallerton May Fair 1981 (Barry Brown).



could this mean the retirement of the two lovely old box-trucks at present with the Dodgems. Although not 'new' this season but worthy of a mention is J. Gray's Scania 110 Super six wheel tractor, REE 424H, which travels the north-east with a set of juvenile Luna Jets. The tractor is fitted with a purpose built body and two sets, the unit being painted chocolate and cream with eye-catching speed stripes.

John Murphy has now completed the modernisation of his 'Odeon' Waltzer with the repainting of the machine front. As with the rest of the machine the front was redecorated by local showman Tommy Ling who has made a fine job of it. Tommy has also been busy on Albert Noble's Chairs, the rounding boards now looking very smart. Albert has fitted new lighting to the ride which looks very nice at night. Bill Clark is now travelling a Lang Wheels Coaster acquired late last season from Michael Houghton of Whitley Bay, transporting the machine with an ERF eight wheeler, OYT 351F. To replace his Round-up sold abroad last year John Murphy Jnr. took delivery late last year of a brand new Cadoxton Meteorite, the machine features some nicely painted Space scenes on the paybox. The infamous Astronaut ride from Spanish City, Whitley Bay, has been acquired by J. Manders of Amble. The ride is going to be travelled and its first fair should be in May at Newcastle Exhibition Park. The Astronaut has been travelled before by Noble & Houghton and was transported as an articulated load using an old Leyland 'Octopus' as prime mover. The outfit on the road resembled something that Pickfords would not be ashamed of.

Turning now to local amusement parks one or two changes have been noted. At Spanish City, Whitley Bay, three fresh rides are in attendance. To replace the Astronaut, Fairworld have an Astroliner on its position. John Houghton has acquired the ex-Arthur Stevens Satellite, the ride came complete with Bedford tractor, KGL 531J. To replace his Coaster Michael Houghton now has a brand new Sam Ward Round-up and to transport this machine to some back end fairs Michael has a very smart Atkinson Mk 2 tractor, KHD 359K, which is fitted with the luxury of a sleeper cab. The small Fairworld Park at Crimden Dene has lost its Twist, Dodgems and very smart Waltzer, as yet I have no knowledge of their whereabouts. Two rides have replaced the three removed,

Saunder's very smart Skid from the Seaton Carew Fairworld park and a set of continental type Dodgems. With Gordon Codona opening a new amusement centre in Scarborough, Gordon has moved his Waltzer (open top) and Twist from his Redcar park to Scarborough. As yet he has not found replacements. I paid a visit at Easter to Francis Manders small park at Amble. The only big ride is Francis's unique open top Lang Wheels Waltzer with an auto-

drome outside drive. Originally the ride was owned by Tony Lowe and was at his Seaton Carew park. The park eventually passed to Fairworld and a few years ago the Waltzer was replaced by a brand new conventional Maxwell Waltzer. If anyone can supply any further information on the Lang Wheels Waltzer I would be pleased to hear from them.

Barry Brown

Novelty and Character

It has always been my contention that novelty played a great part in the history and make up of the fairground. People love novelty, something new, something novel to capture the public interest. In view of which let me take the reader back to the twenties when a novelty also became a mystery.

Imagine then a warm August evening and the loads pulling in from Riddings, Derbyshire, on to our fairground here at Clay Cross bringing us the event of the year: Clay Cross Feast from Friday to Wednesday including a flower show and sports—and holidays with pay had not even been predicted by the once famous Old Moore's Almanac.

By late evening the travellers had all arrived, including John Proctor's Golden Dragons, Jim Whittings Steam Boats and, as we say in the paper, all the usual tenants. One thing stood alone as yet unidentified. What is it? "Dunno", say several people, this puzzled many locals who always held an inquest on what the fair had to offer. "Right", said Big George, who was very annoyed because he always knew what was coming—he was one of our bright scholars and could read the posters—"We shall see tomorrow when they start putting them up." Came Thursday morning and we are on the fairground to discover what this new addition is, by which time this thing is beginning to take shape like some monster from the unknown: Perhaps I may be permitted to lapse into our common Derbyshire dialect here which went something like this—"Wots tha reckon it is then?" "It looks like Blackpool Tower". "Dont be daft Blackpool Tower's at Blackpool. Its a lighthouse" remarked another bystander. "Tell thi what go and ask Mr Proctor wot it is".

Big George arrived with his breakfast in his hand to break the tension "Ahll tell you wot it is lads, it's a Helter Skelter". It was indeed.

Time has forgiven our ignorance and

innocence but I don't think anyone in our part of the world had ever before seen this mysterious tower. Even the heads of the scenic dragons nearby seemed to be saying what the hell's that (so much for the imagination of the young).

I'll warrant it sounds incredible to the person reading this, but people came from miles around to watch the erection of this new sensation reaching to the sky. Never have so many held their heads so high.

No longer a mystery on opening night Friday a large crowd assembled around this giant—no one dared enter the door of its domain, "Come on folks", says the man with the mat, "see the fair from the air". (Now copyright by Big Wheel proprietors). Further comments from the punters—"I get dizzy spells, can't stand heights". Woman clutching husband's arm, "Don't go up there duck and leave me a widow with four kids to bring up".

Tis true the honest hard working community of miners and foundry men of Clay Cross were afraid to sample the Helter Skelter until a young soldier on leave decided to give it a try. Up he went and with him the heads of the Clay Cross people, which would have made Mr Churchill very proud of us. We didn't see him for a little while. Then came the mat followed by the soldier. Now if you have never seen a pale face with red cheeks you will have to take my word for it.

So the Helter Skelter made its debut and did quite well for the duration of Clay Cross Wakes. Note: The aforementioned Helter Skelter was of the early type, much taller than the ones now termed as Slip or Glide.

On the subject of novelty it was of course the Sideshow which brought novelty to the tober.

The side-show gave us the fat lady, skeleton man, 3 legged ponies, dancing girls, freaks, wild west shows, illusionists and many others. It was the presentation of these numerous side

attractions which brought out the best of showmanship from the showman—I was just a little too late to catch the original Bioscope, the cinema's grandfather, but I was fortunate enough to see a performance in the travelling fit up theatre. Our parents called them 'Blood Tubs'. No, sorry, I never found out why. The performance I saw, I will never forget. Today if it could be played (as then). It would get an Oscar both for comedy and drama.

Tonight only: the sensation of the century—Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber.

I had never seen a play before. At 7 on the clock I'm there with my penny for children, twopence adults, front seats threepence. The actors were mainly quite young people with the exception of what I learned was the leading man, and the costumes beards were I would think 18th century. The lighting, very much lower than present day standards, gave the play a good opening together with the weird noises from the effects man and a violinist—a lady who also played romantic parts. I'm afraid I can't after all these years give much credit to that particular audience. The cat calls the Oohs! and Ahs! made me decide that whatever life had in store for me I didn't want to be an actor.

Act Two. This is it, we are to witness now something to make the chill chase down the spine, the moment when the unfortunate victim in the chair is to have his throat cut by the villainous Mr Todd—perhaps you have seen the play or the film and these famous lines, "Sit in my lovely chair I'll soon polish you off". There's a hush around the tent because it wasn't every night you could see a man have his throat cut for a penny. In real first class melodrama style Mr Todd advanced upon his victim brandishing this razor. "Now to polish him off, Ha! Ha!" My mouth's wide open, I'm getting the message, never seen anything like this before—bet I have nightmares to night.

Nobody ever volunteered to explain how it got into the act but from somewhere appeared a bull dog. We knew this dog because it used to fetch cricket balls out of the long grass. Straight on to the lap of the man who is to have his throat cut jumps the dog, but very coolly Sweeney Todd lifts the dog on to the floor—which didn't fit in with said dog's plans—and it's back on the actor's knee again, teeth bared and if there's to be any blood shed it won't be by Sweeney Todd. So the great climax failed and it turned into catch that — dog. We youngsters scarpered, under suspicion I think, and the following evening the stock company as compensation presented another daring production:

"Should a Wife Refuse"
No One Under 18 Admitted.

Prominent side show men of that era were Lawrence and Rayner. They covered a wide area including Notts and Derby, Yorkshire and the Midlands. Very shrewd showmen they knew how to cater for working class punters—in spite of tight purses, unemployed or rather unemployment. Out on the show front they could speil that sixpence out of our pockets or maybe sometimes only threepence. So far I have never read a book written by a showman whereby he stated the pranks which the punter played on him. Like trying to stick a hatpin in the fat lady and offering the monkey a small piece of coal concealed in a monkey nut shell—yes I think we were a bit naughty in those days; but in view of the fact that the travelling showman always gave Clay Cross thumbs up I'll dispense with that theme.

If one were asked to account for all the characters met on the fairgrounds it would need a jolly good calculator to do justice. One very interesting gentleman I met during the early post war years was Lord Thomas Howard who travelled a show which he named Temple of Black Magic. I visited this show several times and was quite intrigued with it, more so it was the spiel which caught my attention. For his theme music, played on a panatrope via tape, he used *In a Persian market* which created the atmosphere of, to coin a commercial, 'Eastern Promise'. Inside all the illusions of the magic world with a very pretty and able lady assistant. Among the several spots of black magic was the putting of this young lady under hypnosis—and inviting the audience to awaken her. During a conversation I mentioned that I didn't think a person could be hypnotised. "Well young man", he remarked, "I'll hypnotise you if you are willing to be my guest". I backed out of that suddenly remembering an appointment. He probably thought I would be quieter under his magic spell.

I've never forgot his very confident and challenging invitation to the punters, no roll up-roll up or banging of drums but a direct and sincere spiel—"I don't care who you are, where you've been or what you've seen. When you see this show you will have seen something. All I ask is sixpence; sixpence will neither make you, break you or set you up in business." Personally I thought that contained good logic.

In relating this incident which is a point against me, I know there are those who regard the machine grafter as cocky and are even suspicious of him in every way. Disregarding the moral aspect which can be a matter of concern, I have worked with and alongside quite a number of men from all walks of life and his outward attitude can be taken or is

taken for granted, through the courtesy of your editor I take the liberty of saying that although the gaff lad gets very little praise and isn't listed as skilled with today's fast moving machinery, I'm sure a little credit would help.

So this is a story of cockiness—not a nice word, over confidence sounds better. The event was Derby Easter Fair during the period when our cousins from overseas were coming into the country. Quite a number had been housed in Derby. On the Saturday evening I was working the dodgem, a sixteen car track owned by Harry Hall of that township. The stint was four men, four cars each. I had the four red cars 9, 10, 11, 12, in that order. Without any hint of discrimination I find two white customers and two coloured—between them they tendered a £1 note, a 10/- note and two 2/- fares (in old money of course). I did my stuff at the pay box handed out the change and that's that. But it wasn't, very shortly afterwards I'm approached by a tall young fellow who didn't look very pleased—and he also looked like Cassius Clay. "Hey man, no change man", "What did you give me", I reply. "A pound boss, a pound". (called me boss). Behind him is another chap from the same country demanding to know what I had done with the rest of his ten bob (a clanger indeed). I had given my white punters the coloured people's change and the former hadn't bothered to tell me about it—which proves that you are never too old to learn and it certainly taught me a lesson also it meant no beer or fish and chips that evening.

Character appears in many guises and another well-known grafter who toured the fairgrounds during the pre-war years was Toffee King, together with his son he worked from a mobile van and made a delicious sweetmeat, the content

being pure honey, sugar and butter. The process of making this product was entirely by hand. Having boiled the ingredients the whole compound was stretched on a hook and pulled until it took shape and colour which came out white. It was then chopped into pieces and made up into quarter pounds. Fourpence per quarter pound and, being a family man, its equivalent for two pence to children. Incidentally, I don't think you will see this art of confection nowadays unless it be one of the older type of rock makers found at coastal resorts.

Again he had a very direct selling line and actually condemned glucose. He maintained that some of the chocolate manufactured contained bones! So gentlemen that box of Black Magic which you've bought for the girl friend better give it the dog. "There are plenty of cheap sweets around", he would say—which was true in those days—"some of them",—naming certain products—"are dirt cheap. But as you must appreciate my friends, dirt is cheap".

You've heard of Jack and Jill who went up the hill, well, sorry to say that in those good old bad old days I was very often skint (Mrs Thatcher would only be a very young lady then) so I would take a bucket or pail and fetch water from the bottom of a hill—rewarded with some of the mouthwatering toffee. Perhaps some of the younger members of the Mercury would be interested to know that said gentleman Toffee King was father to the late Mrs Turvill of the Notts and Derby Showman's Guild.

Congratulations to the colourful Mercury and its contributors. To you all good steaming, happy rallying, may the sun of 1981 come bursting through the clouds and singe all the grass on the tobers.

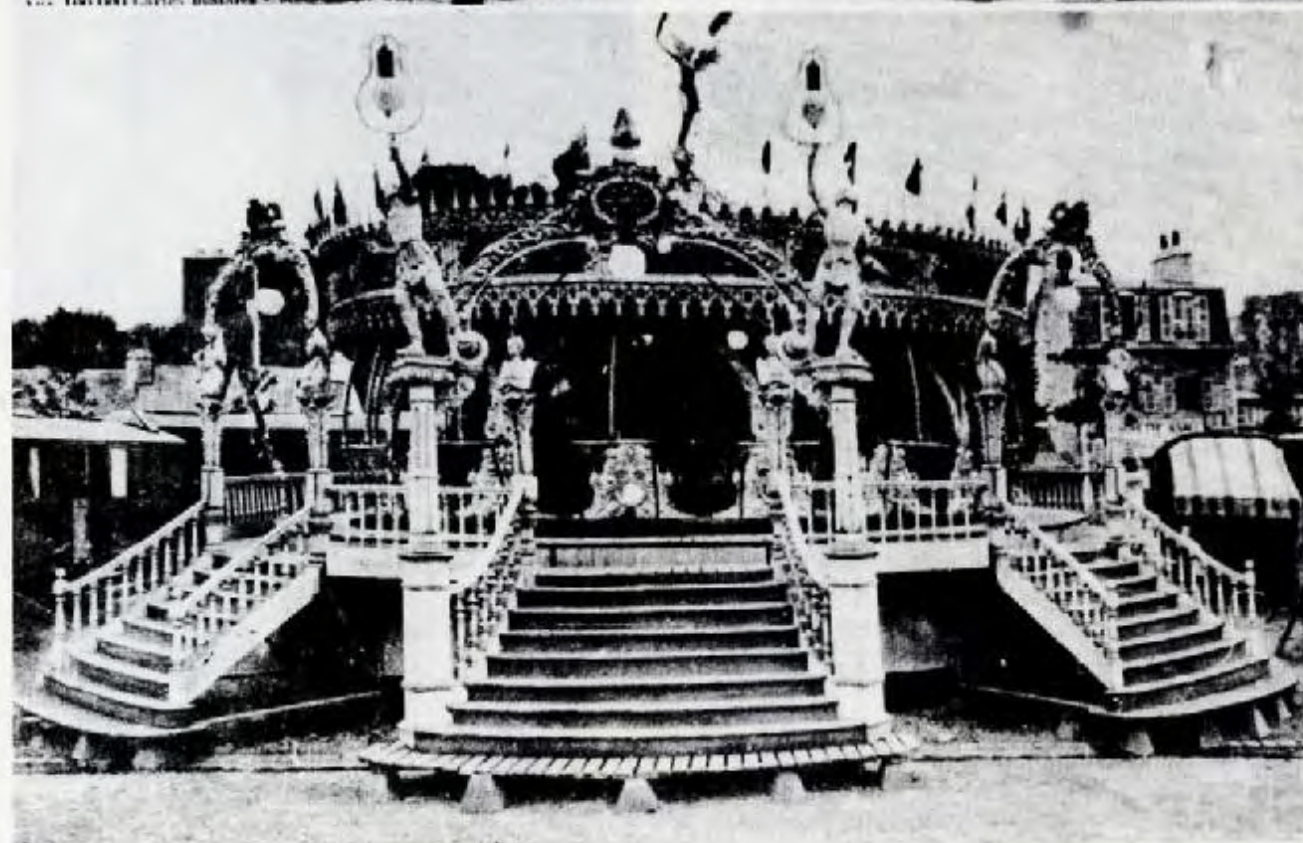
Walter Shore



Souvenirs

Souvenirs de la Foire. . . two more pictures from the collection of our Lille member Albert Lefebvre showing an extravagantly ornate Art Nouveau closed Carousel and a

spinning top, flat platform, gondola ride, both taken in France around the turn of the last century.



Small Ads

Colour fairground photos, send today for my latest list; rides and transport, also circus transport. S.a.e. please. A.E. Davies, 64 McKinnell Crescent, Abbotts Farm Estate, Rugby, Warks. CV21 4AU.

International Model Exhibition, at Stoke Mandeville Stadium, Aylesbury, Bucks. on Sunday 25 October, 11 a.m. - 5.30 p.m. Includes fairground section organised by Association rep. Terry Darby. Proceeds in aid of the disabled. Enjoy a day out and support a good cause.

O.A.P. member wishes to exchange model of traction engine for colour slides of the fairground - the Goose Fair, the Town Moor, etc. Wishes to give slide shows to fellow pensioners. Come on lads, sort out those spare slides and send to Clarence Allen, 67 Limefield Row, Bury, Greater Manchester, BL9 6QG.

Set of 8 fairground photos (in sepia). 50p plus s.a.e. Have postcards printed from your favourite photograph or transparency, send for details. Also interested in selling or exchanging photos/trans of fair organs, Contact D.S. Smith, Pendennis, 27 Tredrea Lane, St. Erth, Nr. Hayle, Cornwall.

Wanted to buy. Photos of R. Townsend and Sons' (Weymouth) NO series Mack 'Garth', Scammell, 'Vanguard' and Mack 'The Leader' as in use late '60s. Graham Vaughan, 82 Park View, Crewkerne, Somerset.

Fairground colour photos and slides, featuring rides transport and on-the-road views. S.A.E. please for latest lists for late 1979 and 1980. N. Vanstone, 1 Valley Road, Bude, Cornwall, EX23 8EP.

Coloured photos of showmen's engines, steam wagons, fair organs, rides (inc. over 60 sets of Gallopers) and showmen's transport. 1980 list now available. Send 1st class stamp to Terry Darby, 26 Old Kiln Road, Flackwell Heath, High Wycombe, Bucks. Tel: 06285 23375.

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Congratulations to members Paul and Alva Angel on the occasion of their marriage in the spring. Perhaps we can look forward to them taking out family membership?

TIDMANS OF NORWICH



AT SOME TIME IN 1847 Robert Tidman of Norwich, having learned the trade of a boiler-maker and blacksmith, was so successful in carrying out repairs to the plant in the watermill at Stoke Holy Cross, five miles south of Norwich, that he deemed it opportune to commence on his own account in small premises at the lower end of Rosary Road, Norwich, and adjacent to Bishop Bridge. Much of his early work covered the installation of small boilers and general millwrighting. As a commentary on individual enterprise at that time—Robert the Founder walked to Stoke in the morning and back in the evening, with his tools on his back, there being no other transport available.

It may not be generally known that at this period Stoke Holy Cross mill, the lowest of three on the River Tas, was owned and used by Jeremiah James Colman, who later erected new premises at Carrow close to Norwich. J.J. Colman needs no introduction as the famous mustard manufacturer and to-day's mustard and other comestibles are still produced at Carrow Works.

After a few years Tidman's premises comprised blacksmith, boiler-maker's and engineer's shops constituting what had now come to be known as Bishop Bridge Iron Works. In 1883 Robert was joined by his two sons, Robert and Frederick, who as a trio, carried on the business until their father's death, after which it was continued by them with the help of Frederick's son (also called Robert). At this time too they opened an office nearby at 3 Rosary Road. The actual site of the works lay between the "King's Arms" and the "Evening Gun" public houses. The former still stands.

Before the foundry was in operation, the Tidman brothers undertook to erect the new or third bridge close to Thorpe Station, Norwich, and known, because of LeFevre's foundry near to the east side, as Foundry Bridge. For this structure the main girders were supplied by a Yorkshire firm and the parapet castings by Sabberton Brothers of Saint Martin at Palace Ironworks in the same city and close to the

Fig. 1 (overleaf) Tidmans Gallopers, Castle Hill, Norwich circa 1890.



cathedral. The tracing showing the design and method of erection of the bridge is dated December 23, 1884 and an important note thereon stipulates that the bridge is to be erected in halves, the upstream half to be finished first. Not only was the erection entrusted to Tidmans but also the preliminary machining of the panels and sections which were then temporarily built up in the works before being finally erected and bolted up together on the permanent site. This bridge is still one of the most important in the city of Norwich.

Probably, Robert Tidman & Sons became better known for their fairground machinery and for many years a machine of some sort was always in progress at Bishop Bridge. One of their earliest designs was a three-abreast set of galloping horses comprising 36—all dapple greys—and they were given a galloping motion by being suspended from cranks rotated by the motion of the top framing about the centre pole. These early machines at first had no platform, consequently fares could be collected only when the roundabout was stationary. To overcome this defect Tidmans added a platform as seen in the photograph Fig. 1, illustrating an early set erected one Christmas on Castle Hill, Norwich. There is some little doubt as to whether Tidman or F. Savage were the very first concern to add a platform. However, Robert Tidman covered the idea in his Patent No. 6244 of May 8, 1886 and this included also his two bevel trains operating the galloping mechanism. After Tidman's first machine appeared there was litigation between Tidman and Frederick Savage of Lynn. Savage alleged Tidman had infringed his idea of a platform or similar refinement applied to a roundabout. It was also alleged that Tidman had used the third tram principle on Savage's Patent (No. 15,778 of 1888), where a vehicle with four wheels acted in combination with three lines of rails, one of the wheels being caused to run on the intermediate tram or line. A writ was served on Tidman by J.H. Johnson, Son & Ellis of 47 Lincoln's Inn Fields on June 18, 1889.

Tidman counter-attacked alleging infringement by Savage of Tidman's

Patent No. 6244 of 1886, wherein they used the arrangement of the fixed bevel wheel, bevel pinions and cranks, i.e. "platforms and frames with simple revolving movements (including those fitted with rocking, reciprocating and like horses) and cars with movements of small amplitude".

Tidman's writ for hearing in the Chancery Division, dated October 8, 1889, was served by Storey & Cowland, 22 Theobald Road, Gray's Inn acting as agents for Tidman's solicitors, Samuel Linay, then practising at 6 Church Street, Norwich. The Statement of Claim was—The Plaintiff's Claim is for an Injunction to restrain the Infringement of the Defendant of Letters Patent granted to the Plaintiff dated the Eighth of May 1886 No. 6244 and for an account of profits or at the option of the Plaintiff's damages in respect of such infringement. The Plaintiffs were cited as Robert Tidman the Elder, Robert Tidman the Younger and Frederick Tidman.

Savage retaliated by submitting that the arrangement had been specified in their provisional specification No. 15,383 by William Reynolds and Charles Thomas King dated December 15, 1885. In actual fact Robert Tidman had completed and exhibited a roundabout using this feature before this date. Furthermore, Reynold & King's specification was not published until after the date of Tidman's patent. In addition, Tidman had issued the following advertisement in *The Era*—"Notice to Roundabout Proprietors. Whereas it has come to our notice that certain roundabouts have been and are still being fitted with platforms suspended from the Swifts or levers by means of hanging rods and cross bars under horses which is a direct infringement of our Patent right No. 6244. Any person using the same without our consent or license (other than those who have already paid Royalty) on or after February 2nd. 1889 will be proceeded against according to Law".

Savage admitted he had made two roundabouts, one for Harris and another for Twigdon in 1888, some little time after Tidman had produced his patent machine in 1885. Not being over sure of his ground, he wrote Tidman suggesting a meeting. Tidmans were quite agreeable and replied

on February 25, 1890 suggesting "Each of us to give the other an undertaking not to manufacture from the alleged patents except on a reasonable Royalty being paid and each party pay his own costs of present proceedings". Savage's reply was simply "We could not think of agreeing to such terms as you propose".

In answer to this, Tidman replied on March 6, 1890 stating "us to enter into an undertaking not to make any more machines with the third tram and to pay the taxed costs of the action in which we are defendants and you to enter into a similar undertaking as to our machine and to pay the costs incurred by us".

Here it is appropriate to mention the third tram referred to the third or inner track already noticed as used on the Switchback, not on the Gallopers.

This was still unacceptable to the maker in Lynn, who having consulted his legal advisers once again wrote to Tidman as follows: "With regard to the action which I am proceeding with against you, I should have no objection that this should be stayed on the terms you mention, with the exception that I should require you to submit to an injunction restraining you from further manufacturing or selling according to my Patent instead of a mere undertaking. As regards your action against me I certainly cannot think of giving you any undertaking whatever, or paying costs, as I am advised you have no claim whatever against me. My solicitors are preparing both cases for trial so that you should let me know at once, whether you will agree that both actions should be stayed, as regards the action brought by myself, on the terms mentioned above, and as regards the action brought by yourselves, by you discontinuing and paying costs, and undertaking to bring no further action." This more reasonableness arose from a report on various other patents besides Tidman's made by Dr. C. Hopkinson who gave his opinion that Savage's third tram had been infringed. But regarding Patent No. 15,778 of 1888, wherein the sixth claim is for the whole apparatus as an entire construction, he thought this to be the strongest claim under the patent, as all attributes there

may be of novelty and utility can be read into this claim, but it would of course only be *infringed by users of the whole combination*.

Tidman's, to be helpful, then mentioned they had only made three circular tracks, the value not exceeding £1200. This figure was low because the engines and frames were their ordinary type and in one case their client used his old traction engine and frame. Who this client was I have been unable to discover. At this date (1890) there was probably not one traction centre engine in existence having been made as one, although designs for such were to be found in Reynold & King's Patent No. 15,383 already referred to and in Frederick Burrell's Patent No. 21,403 of November 12, 1895. Burrell's patent covered a small and separate horizontal engine to drive the roundabout, the main engine being free therefore to work the generator. At this period Savage supplied a small horizontal engine to Charles Burrell & Sons Ltd, so it is quite possible this may have been for a secondhand engine Burrells were renovating and converting into a traction centre, the engine afterwards being sent to Norwich to have the roundabout gear fitted. Not being a new engine it would therefore not appear in Burrell's invoice book as a new machine.

To continue: Savage turned down Tidman's last offer stating the action was going to trial. Tidman replied "Will you be good enough to ascertain and let us know the probable amount of the expenses which you suggest we should pay? Do we understand it rightly that it is suggested that we are to give undertaking not to bring any fresh action against you and that you protect our Patent against other infringements, that is to say, keep it to yourselves and us?"

Savage replied "I cannot undertake to protect your patent from any other infringement, as all along my advice and investigation have shown me that your patent is invalid, but I will promise you that I would keep the matter quiet and not give publicity to anything I may have learned about it." On March 28, (1890) he again wrote to Norwich saying if Tidman

would pay him 100 guineas for all costs, etc., Savage would be willing for the action to be settled. He repeated, however, that in the action versus Savage, Tidman was to submit to an injunction to undertake not to further infringe Savage's patent and in Tidman versus Savage, Tidman was to discontinue it and undertake not to bring any further action against Savage. No doubt Savage appreciated the logic of the final paragraph of Dr. Hopkinson's report and began to have doubts whether his patent would be upheld. Savage's legal advisers advised him to opt for the 100 guineas and call the matter closed.

In principle the Tidmans agreed, but suggested 100 guineas was too much and offered 80. Savage would not accept at first and even wanted his Royalty Plate fixed on the three machines mentioned. Shortly afterwards the most sensible thing happened—the two rivals met in Messrs Linay's offices. Savage accepted 80 guineas, Tidman agreed to fix his Royalty Plates and Savage agreed not to infringe Tidman's method of platform fixing. Later Tidman allowed Savage to use the platform employing any suspension he liked. Needless to say, the owners of the three roundabouts speedily removed the plates and life ambled along serenely for nearly three years.

This serenity was abruptly shattered when on December 21, 1893 Frederick Savage again took exception to the

Norwich firm. Let us briefly examine the background. Savage obtained a Patent No. 1116 of January 21, 1891 for Improvements in Roundabouts covering his method of allowing the horses to swing outwards as shown in Fig. 2A. Here the horse-rod A was free to slide in the collar B. These collars pivot in the brackets C fixed to the slides D, free to slide horizontally between the upper and lower guides E & F forming part of the platform. They were kept an equal distance apart by the brackets C. The specification also covered the case where the collars B could slide in radial slots made to accommodate them.

Not to be outdone, Thomas W. Walker of Oldbury Works in the Borough of Tewkesbury had submitted a Patent Specification No. 10,732 of June 14, 1891 for Improvements in Roundabouts & Merry-go-rounds, wherein he tackled the same problem in the manner illustrated in Fig. 2B. The horse-rods A were free to slide in the spheres B. These spheres were also free to slide horizontally between the upper and lower framework of the platform, C & D, their travel being limited by the chocks E.

There is usually some way of getting round a patent and hence Robert and Frederick Tidman, together with John Barker of Bishop Bridge, Norwich aforesaid, Roundabout Proprietor, in their Patent No. 23,379 applied for on December 19, 1892 produced the most

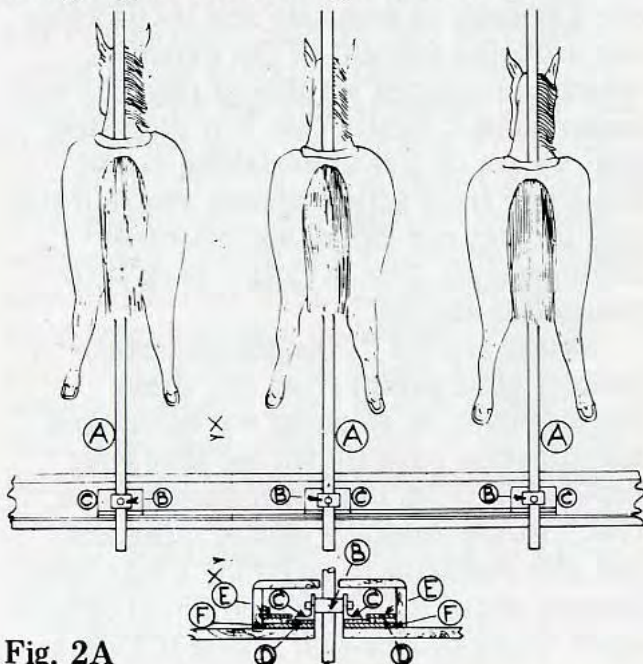


Fig. 2A

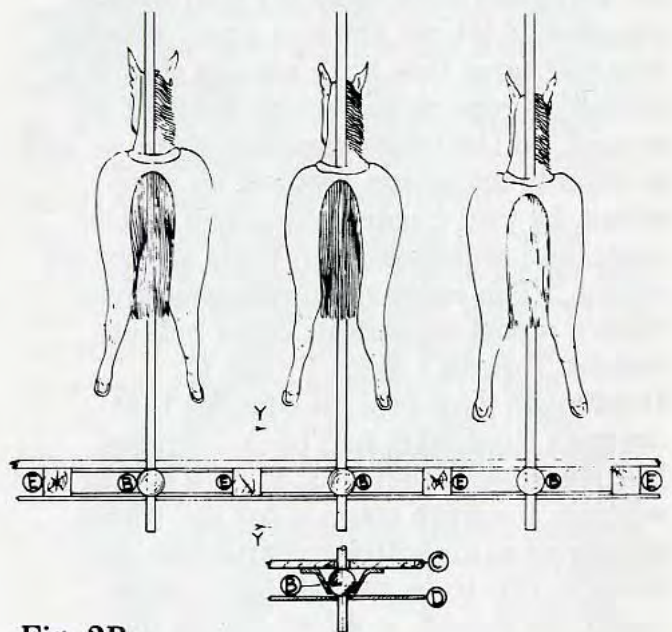


Fig. 2B

effective alternative seen in Fig. 1 and outlined in Fig. 3. Here the rods A are pin-jointed to a bottom link B, all at their lower ends fitted to a long cylindrical sleeve C free to slide along the fixed base rod D. The action is very simple, the vertical variation of the horse-rods A being taken care of by the accommodating angularity of B.

As one may guess, Savage was not amused and again threatened legal proceedings backed up by Thomas Walker, who thought "it should be opposed as if granted Tidman's people [sic] would be working on false ground, and. . . it would be to their benefit to stop the matter before they got too far but of course leave all matters to you". Savage's grounds were that Tidman's latest idea infringed his and Walker's patents, inasmuch that the effect was the same in all cases, i.e. the horses were kept equidistant from each other by some form of guide and slide. Then follows some legal correspondence between the partners, the result being that as Tidman used the application of the bottom link B which had not been covered by either of their competitors, and they invited those

parties to test their patents in court. Wisely these other parties desisted and things again became more or less serene.

I have recorded these facts in some detail as they are interesting in illustrating how at this period, firms seemed very ready to indulge in litigation.

Tidman's lawyers were well pleased with the result and later presented Frederick & Robert junior each with a silver-plated, metal bound, oak tobacco casket as a form of celebration gift. The caskets were beautiful examples and through the kindness of Robert Tidman I have been privileged to examine one for myself.

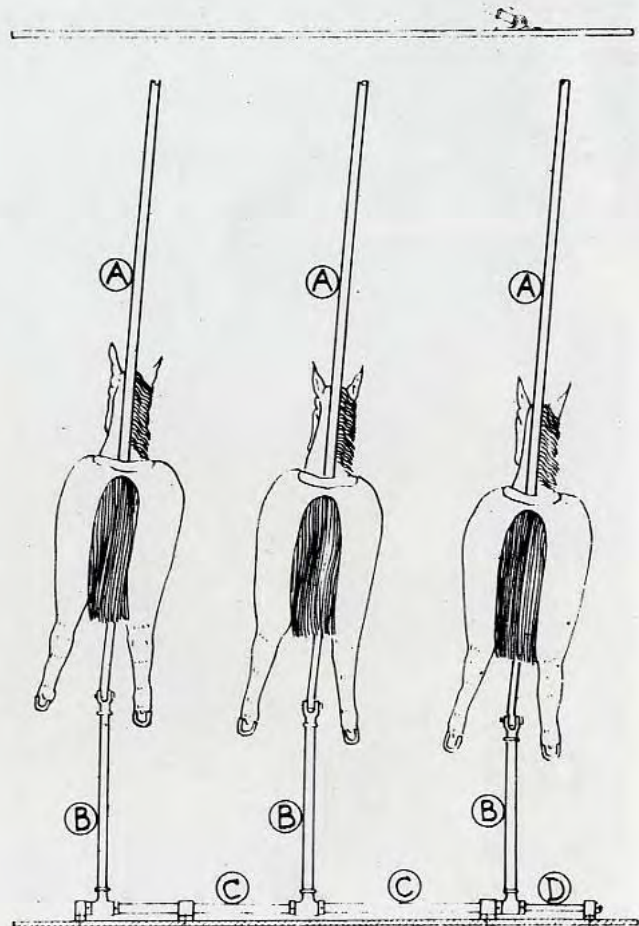
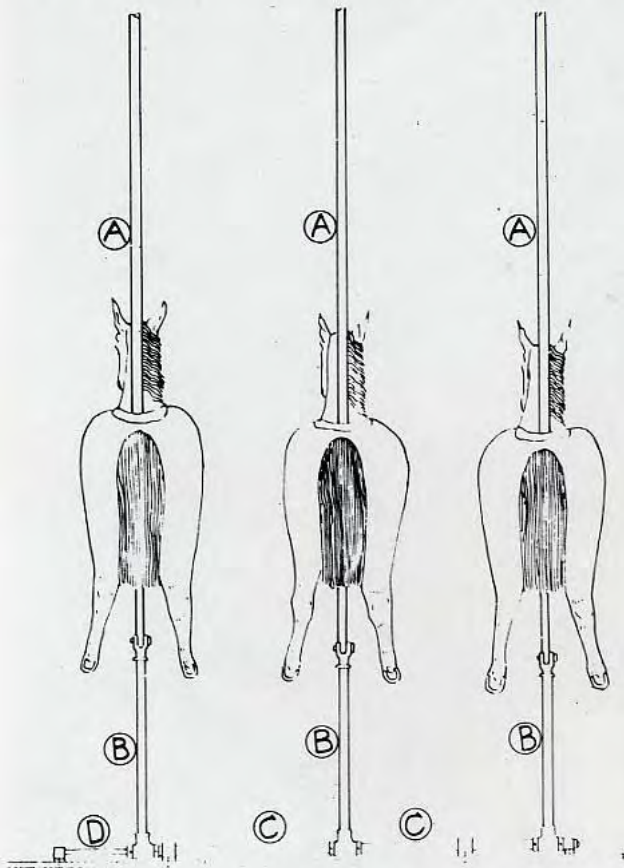
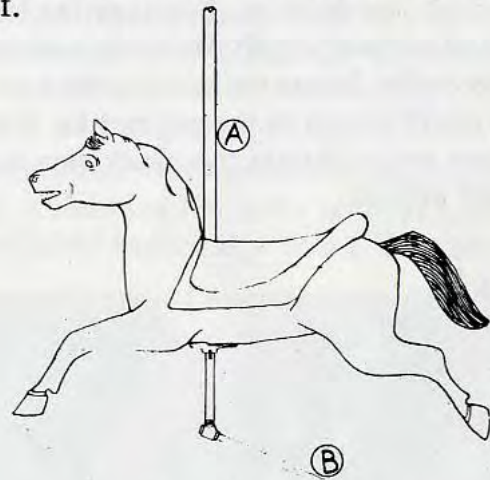


Fig. 3

Of course, the long-term outcome of the dispute was that both firms made platform gallopers as they pleased, and on Tidman's a small plate was six times repeated on the circumference of the platform bearing in relief the inscription R. TIDMAN & SONS ENGINEERS FOUNDERS NORWICH, their name appearing also on each valve chest cover on the centre engine.

Before the application of steam the early Tidman roundabouts were horse-operated, i.e. the animal walked round and round close to the centre at its normal gait, the increase in velocity of the riders being due to the greater circumference traced by the dobbies. Bearings for the cranked supporting shafts were mounted on the radial frame members called swifts, each crank throw being six inches. All Tidman roundabouts ran clockwise when viewed in plan.

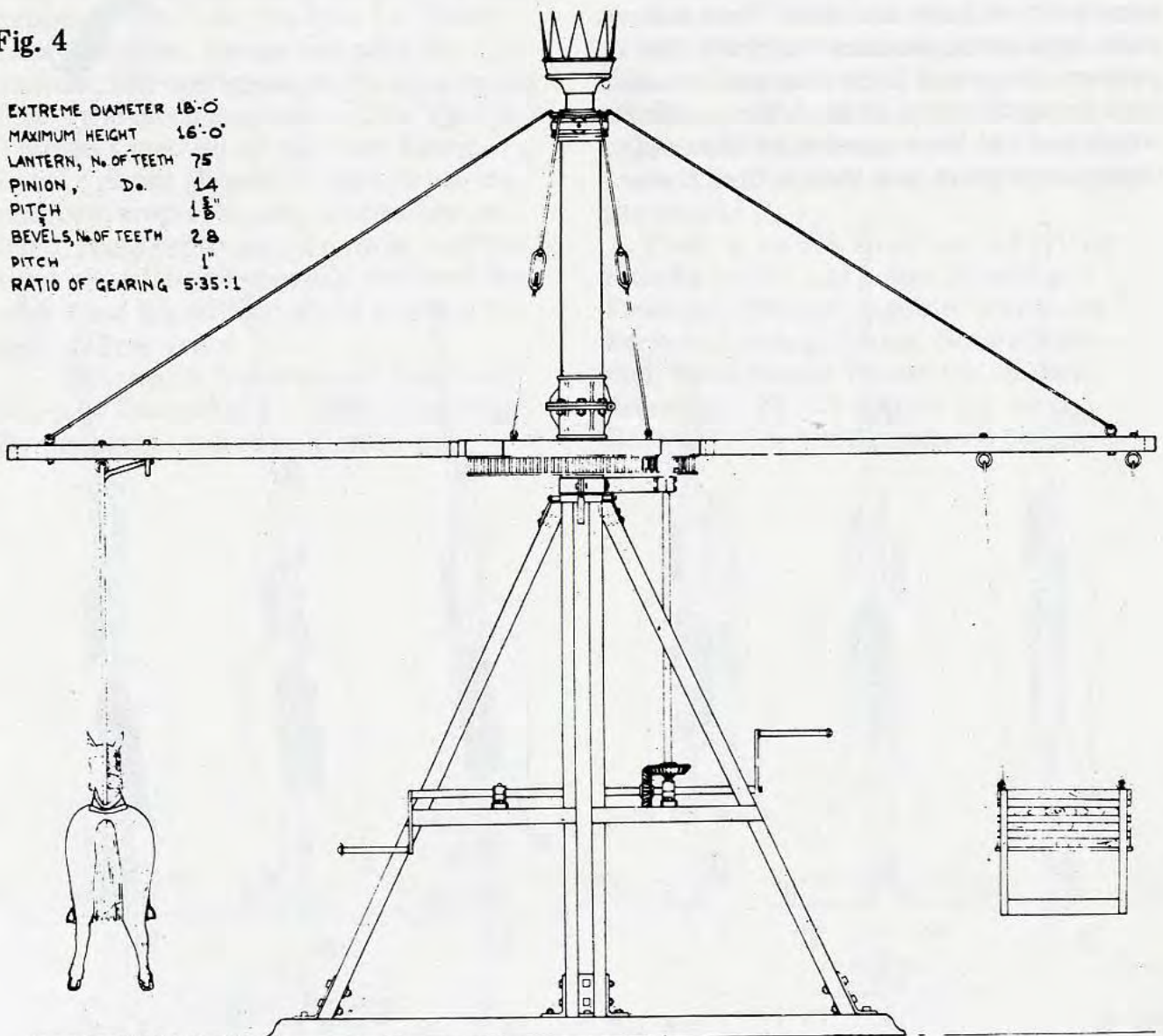
It must be remembered that Tidmans patented and used the two bevel trains to provide rotary movement of the radial crankshaft. Savages used only one. In Tidman's design there were two toothed tracks, an inner and an outer, each track having gearing into it six bevel pinions arranged alternately. The number of teeth in all wheels is the same, the inner bevel track and its pinions having obviously teeth of half the circular pitch of the outer. Thus the horses were given what was called galloping motion, each rider therefore describing a series of cycloids round a circular path.

It may of additional interest to note that sets of gallopers were made for Messrs Barker & Thurston, C. Crighton, Alfred Stocks and a number of other riding masters.

Here I think it is appropriate to

Fig. 4

EXTREME DIAMETER	18'-0"
MAXIMUM HEIGHT	16'-0"
LANTERN, No. OF TEETH	75
PINION, D.	14
PITCH	1 1/8"
BEVELS, No. OF TEETH	28
PITCH	1"
RATIO OF GEARING	5.35:1

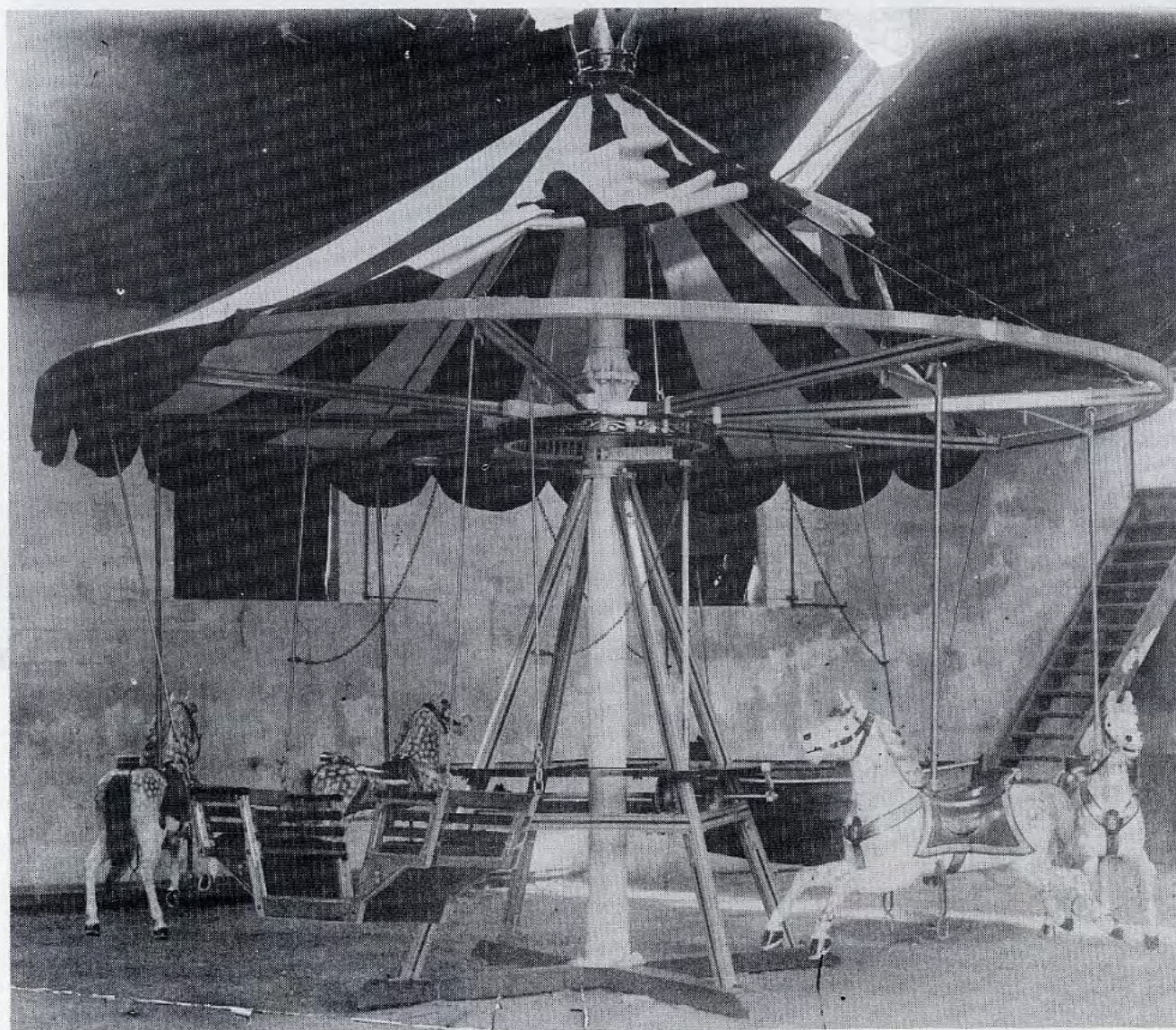


mention that the first recorded application of steam power to drive a roundabout was carried out by G.S. Soame of Marsham near Norwich who in 1865 made in his village works a small duplex cylindered engine on a locomotive type boiler arranged to drive a hand operated machine by a flat belt drive. This first worked in public at a fair in Aylsham nearby and having been seen there by Frederick Savage (his birthplace was at Hevingham the next village to Marsham), the latter later developed the idea in his larger works at Lynn.

In addition to making the first roundabout engine, Soame also designed and made the first small vertical engine to drive the hand operated organ attached to the main machine. This released an attendant turning the handle and after some years all roundabout makers in this Fig. 5

country included an organ engine in their products. Soame's original organ engine still exists and is preserved by the author.

However, small or juvenile merry-go-rounds worked by hand were made intermittently as required by the Tidmans and a good example is illustrated in Fig. 4 showing the general construction and in this particular machine the horses and boats are arranged alternately. The main and important feature was the centre pole stayed by the four diagonal struts about which the whole apparatus revolved. The extreme diameter was 18 feet, maximum height 16 feet, the lantern wheel had 75 and the pinion 14 teeth at $1\frac{5}{8}$ in circular pitch. The pair of bevels each had 28 teeth at 1 in circular pitch, the ratio of the gearing being 5.35:1. A photograph of this machine is reproduced in Fig. 5 showing the gaily coloured tilt and polished mahogany boats. This small



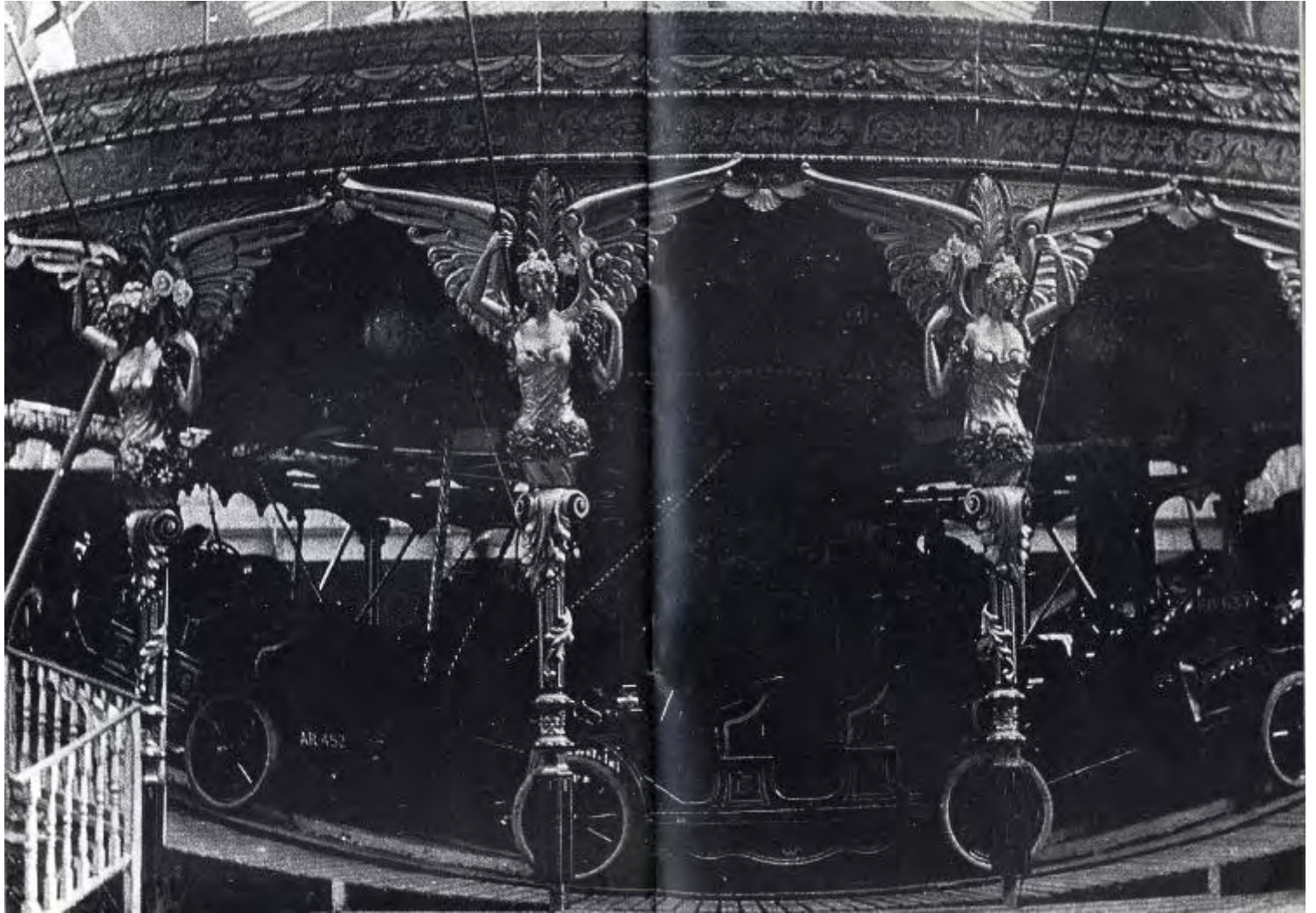


Fig. 6 (overleaf) Barker and Thurston's Motor Cars Switchback, Agricultural Hall, Norwich, (Fairground Society).

roundabout was exported to India to amuse the children of some interesting eastern potentate. Another, very similar, was also exported to the same area.

Besides the gallopers seen in Fig. 1 a favourite Tidman ride was their switchback which could have the vehicles made in the form of motor cars of the period or alternatively, like a Venetian gondola. Fig. 6 illustrates a set of motor cars complete with Gavioli organ opposite to the centre engine. The application of steam power to a machine originally laid out as in Figs. 1 and 6 required several major modifications to be made and a study of the drawing in Fig. 7 shows the centre pole remains but the centre engine itself takes the place of the four diagonal struts and supports the weight of the centre pole, gearing, and top revolving gear. The centre engine in turn is mounted on four road wheels for portability and when in use is run up on to two trams on a raised platform. Note the machine is permitted to revolve at the

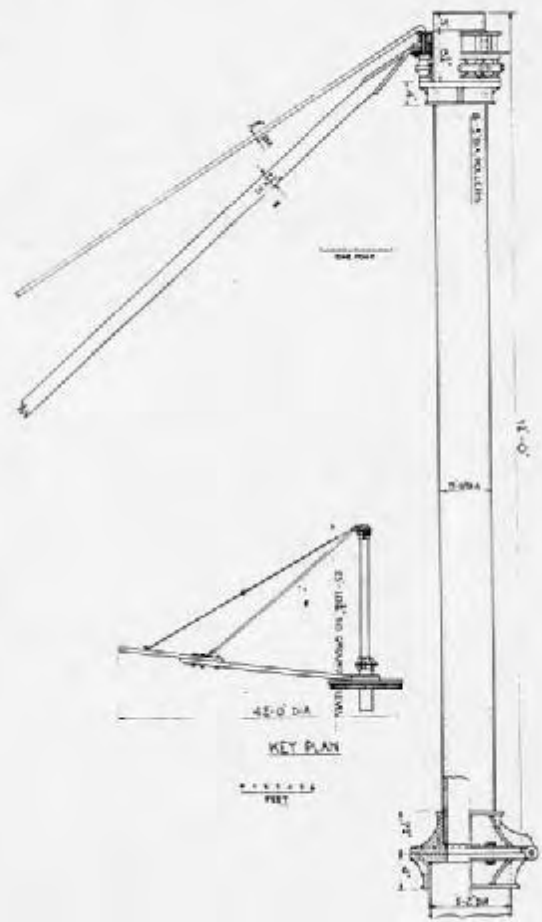
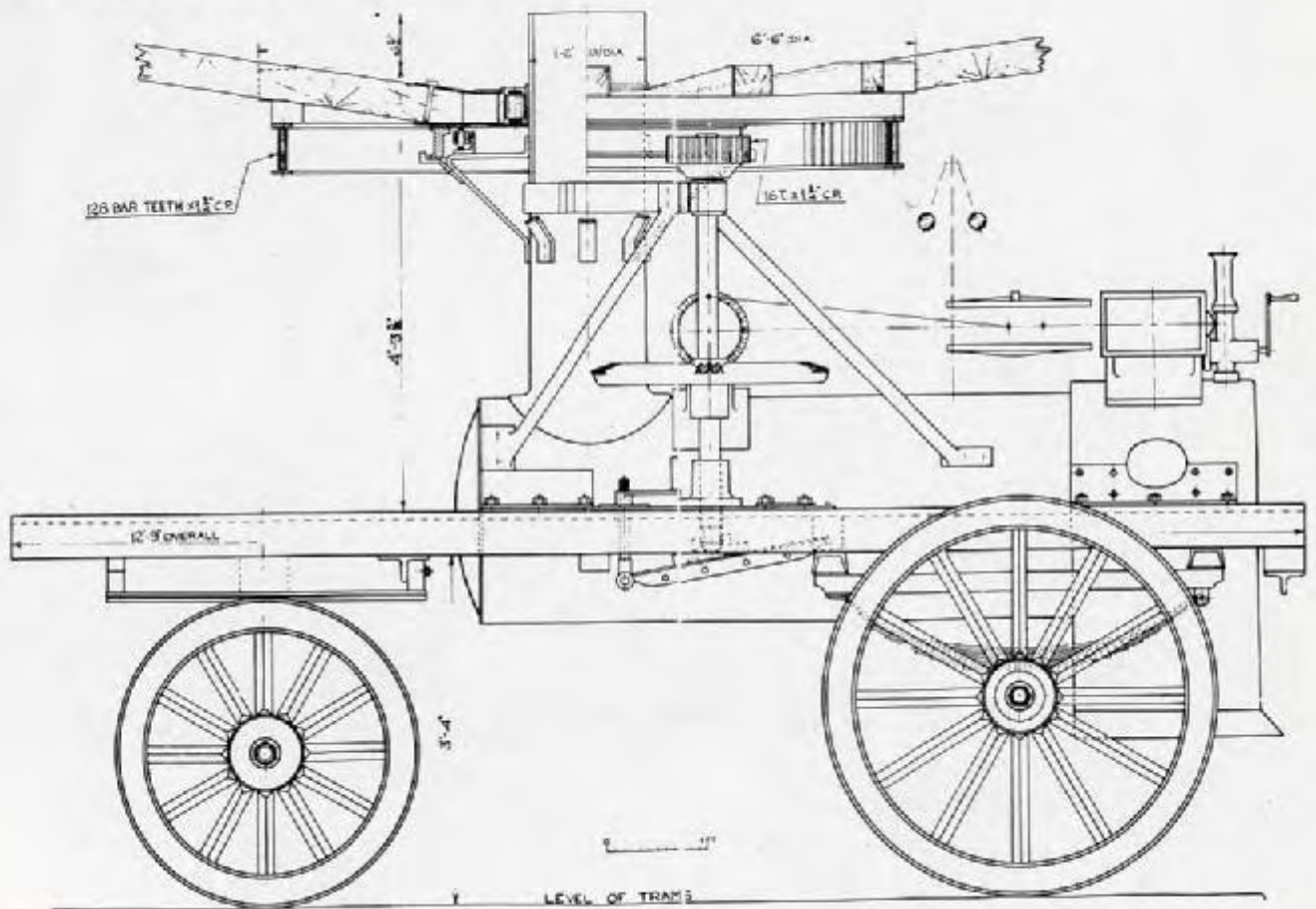
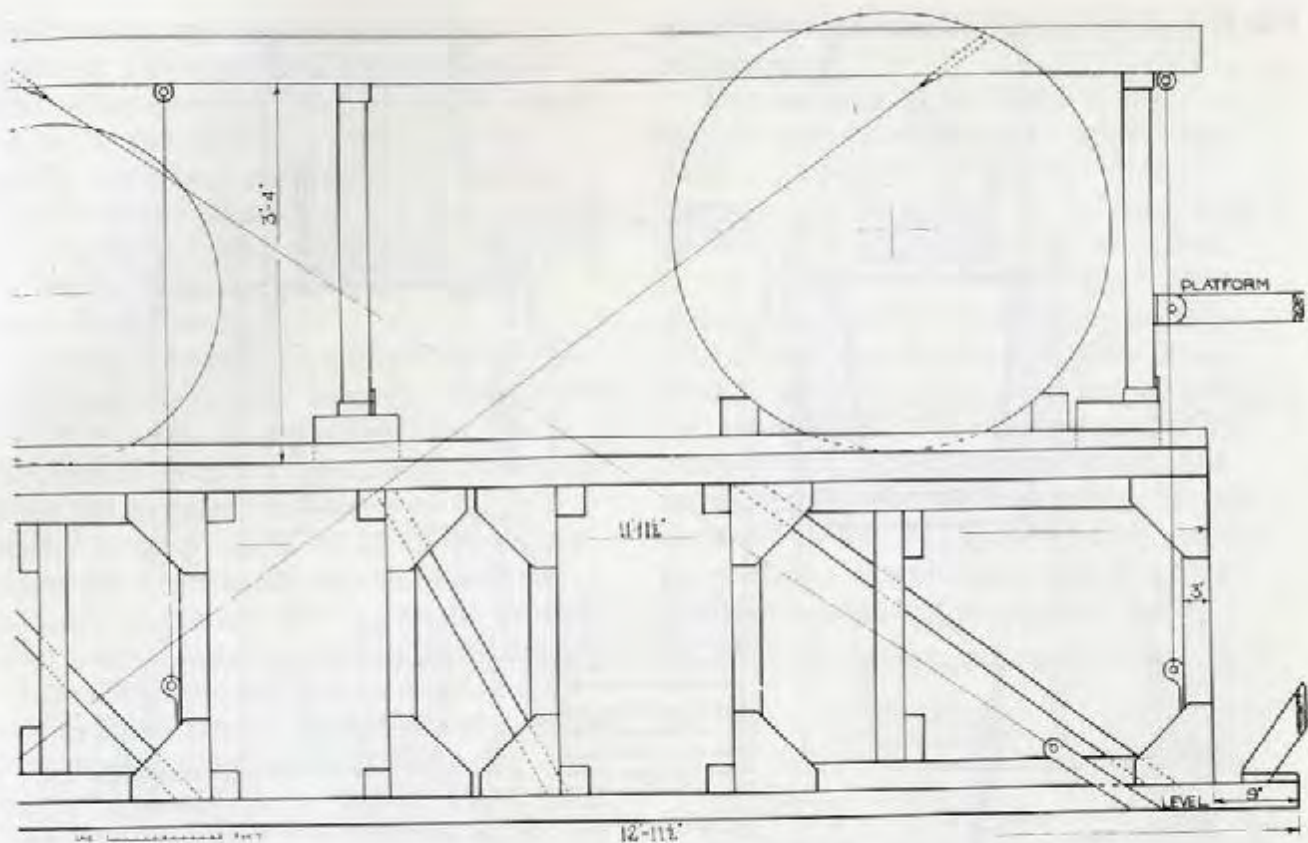


Fig. 7





centre pole by virtue of a set of heavy duty rollers in the top bearing to take lateral thrust and loads, a set of thinner rollers just below carrying the downwards load. From Fig. 7 the centre pole is also seen to be a hollow steel tube hinged at its lower end to the top of the centre engine chimney by a suitable pair of brackets and at the top carries another roller bearing to steady the spinning top gear. Ground level to the top of the pole was 23ft 10⁷/₈ in, the diameter over the swifts being 42 feet. The vertical drive shaft, bevel driven off the engine crankshaft runs in a hemispherical footstep bearing and a plain journal bearing at the top held parallel to the centre pole by a suitable bracket. Vertical adjustment is by the screw and lever on the drawing. It will be noted the drive to the vehicle does not need the twin bevel drives as there is no galloping motion required.

Probably everybody is familiar with the Big Wheel type of amusement machine but not so many may be cognisant with the Little Wheel or Overboats by the Tidmans. Basically it consisted of two pairs of braced and strutted A-frames each carrying its own cross-shaft at the apex as may be seen from the drawings

reproduced in Fig. 8. A portable engine was placed between the frames and drove a horizontal shaft and upon this shaft a separate pitch chain drove each end of the two sets. A brake gear was incorporated in each upper pulley by means of which the attendant could start or stop the motion, independantly of the engine. Each swing or boat could carry eight persons and the end view of Fig. 8 illustrates their elegant outline. I must point out that these were not swings in the true sense where on the Savage machines they actually swung as pendulums actuated by an engine whose motion was reciprocating only, not rotary.

Fig. 8

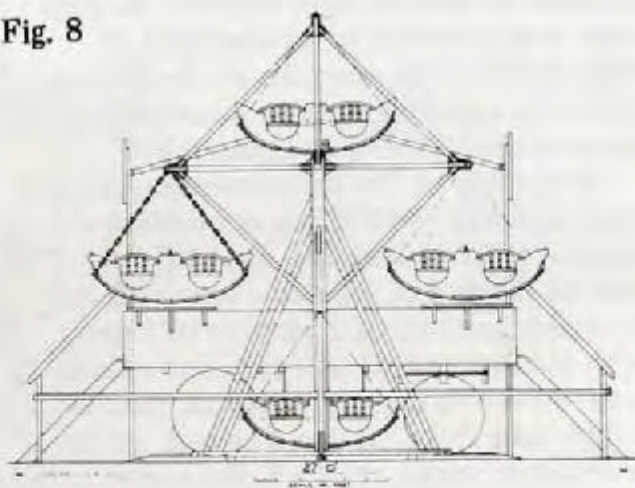
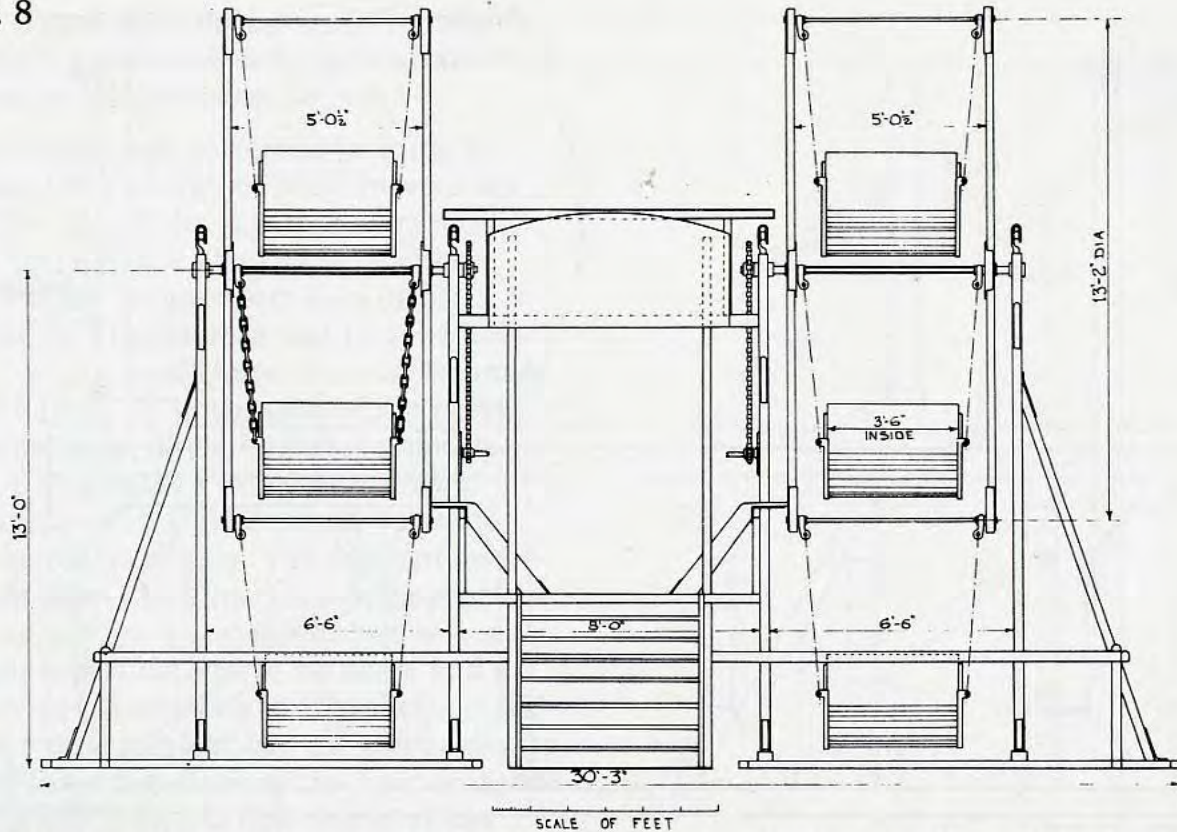


Fig. 8



At this period, 1905 or so. Tidmans were fully extended in carrying out other general engineering work. Two interesting items are worth recording. First was a wheel grinding machine for trueing the wheels of Norwich Corporation tramcars where the axle, wheels and gear were mounted between centres with the grinding wheel on a parallel shaft controlled by the necessary feeds. The whole was mounted on a common framing and all design and manufacture was carried out at Bishop Bridge Works.

Secondly the firm specialised in creosoting plant making the tank in the boiler shop. Vacuum and pressure pumps were belt driven off one of their own portable or electric light engines. As such plant was intended to be operated in conjunction with sawmills the boiler was naturally arranged to burn wood refuse which would otherwise accumulate.

Returning to the amusement machinery there was the Giant Glide consisting of a circular platform around a centre pole. The pole supported at the top a revolving hub to which were fixed a number of ropes with T-handles at their ends. For a small sum, each of a mass of energetic patrons could hang from the handles and swing themselves round at speed, the occasional

prod with the foot being all that was necessary although there was no limit to the amount of hard labour the paying patron could apply. It is not at all surprising one Giant Glide was supplied to a reformatory!

The Giant Glide relied for its success on the patron showing what he could do, its appeal may we say, being to his physical prowess. Another apparatus relying very much on the psychological element for its success was the Mystic Swing. A car holding sixteen persons was free to swing inside a canvas room decorated to form a replica of a standard "front room" of the period. The room was then made to rotate slowly at first and the effect was magical. Pockets were clutched to prevent the exit of money, hats were held and so on, the patron not realising he was stationary all the time. After a sickening few minutes the room reversed and then valiant attempts were made not to fall forward! The first example of this delightful contrivance was made for Mr. Charles Thurston and used at Christmas and Easter Fairs in Norwich Agricultural Hall in 1900.

John Barker, Mr. Thurston's partner conceived the attractive idea of a Pyramid Railway. A large cone of timber

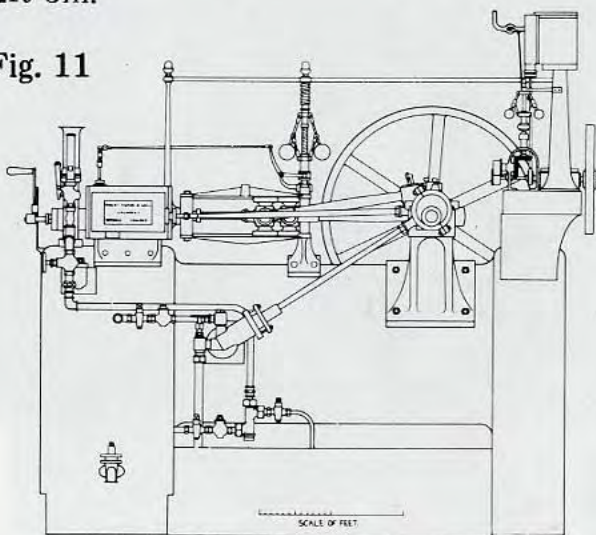
construction was canvas covered to represent a pyramid and a loaded car of eight or ten persons lifted up inside, shot out at the top and then descended by gravity. Although successful in a limited way the time taken to fill, lift and run down the car, made it uneconomic and only one was made. Nevertheless it was a good theoretical idea.

During the early days of power driven fairground machinery the usual illumination was by paraffin or naphtha flares. The later use of electricity and the arc lamp in other spheres soon extended to the fairground made possible by using a portable engine driving a small generator and all mounted on a four-wheeled truck. Several other makers used a single cylinder engine but the Tidmans preferred adapting their twin cylinder roundabout one and a general arrangement drawing illustrating the complete plant is to be seen in Fig. 9. The truck had turntable steering and shafts for two horses although for long distances the set was sent by train. Later when the road locomotive was applied to showman's road haulage it formed one of the items in the road train, albeit rather a heavy one. Overall length and width of the platform was 14ft 1in x 6 feet and its height above ground level 4ft 7in. For the generator Tidmans went to their near neighbours Laurence, Scott & Co. Ltd., of Gothic Works in the same city, and the fine old twin magnet machine supplied and outlined in Fig. 9 is very typical of the period. The voltage was 110, the engine speed being controlled by a spring loaded Watt governor. The whole of the truck was painted and gilded in true

showman's style with the boiler barrel in maroon.

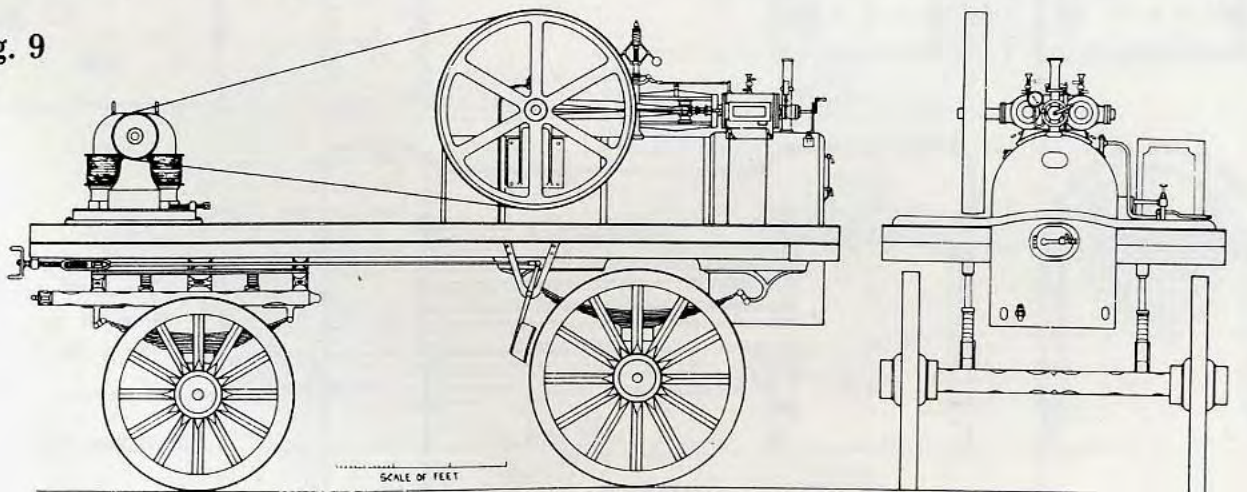
Coming now to the heart of the roundabout viz the centre engine which drove it, a general view of the Tidman engine is shown in Fig. 10. All brass and gunmetal fittings were highly polished as was all the motion work, wheel rims and so on. Usually the working pressure was 120 psi the duplex cylinders being 3¾in x 8in. A slightly larger engine having cylinders 4½in x 8in was designed and made in later years as roundabouts got larger and heavier and one of this type is depicted in Fig. 11. To give an idea of the proportions, the connecting rod centres bearing to bearing for example, being 2ft 3in.

Fig. 11



The boilers for such engines were of the locomotive type and full details of one of these interesting special varieties is included in Fig. 12. Most noticeable is the lack of any chimney but the smoke is conducted down to the bottom of the smokebox, then horizontally to the uptake

Fig. 9



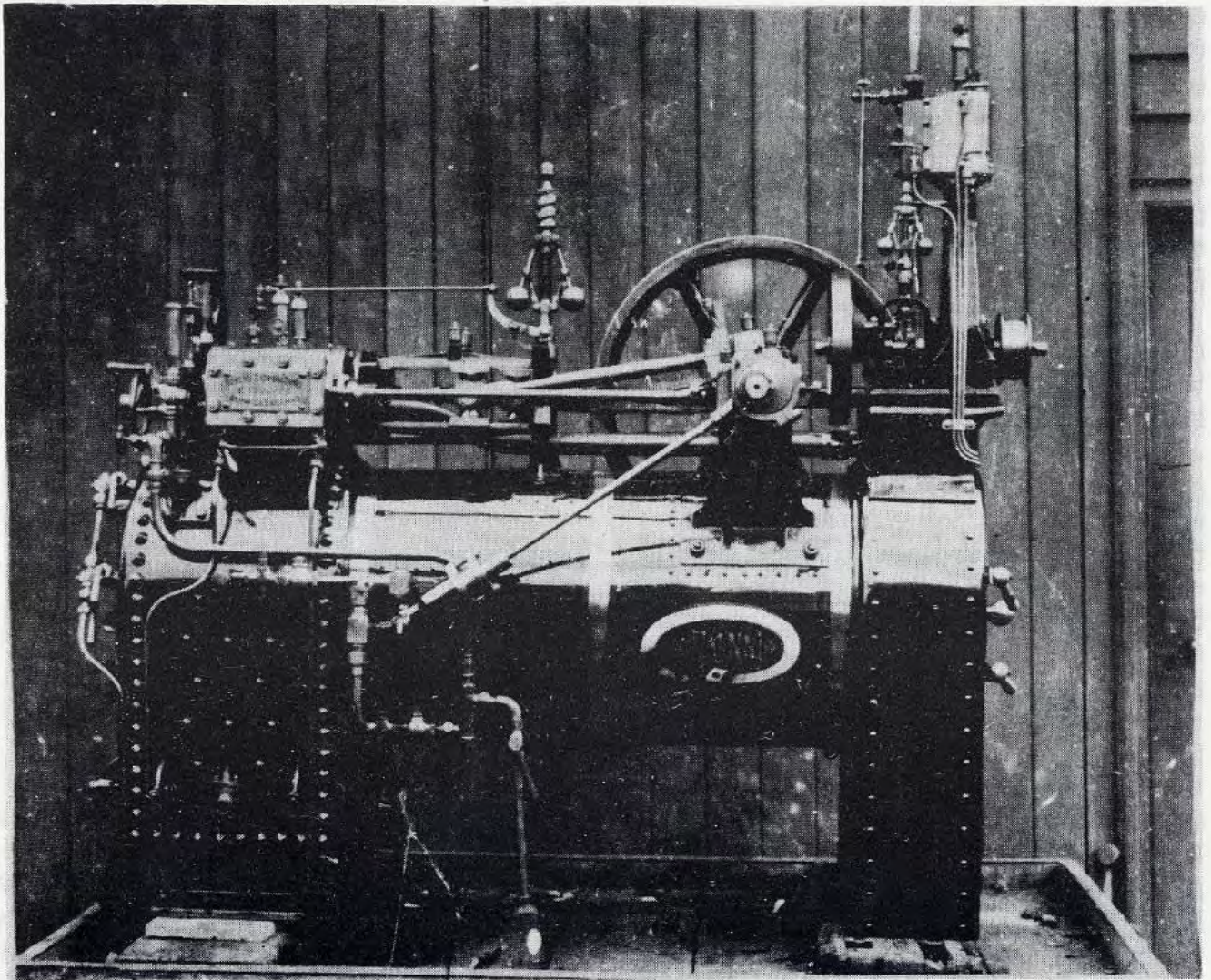
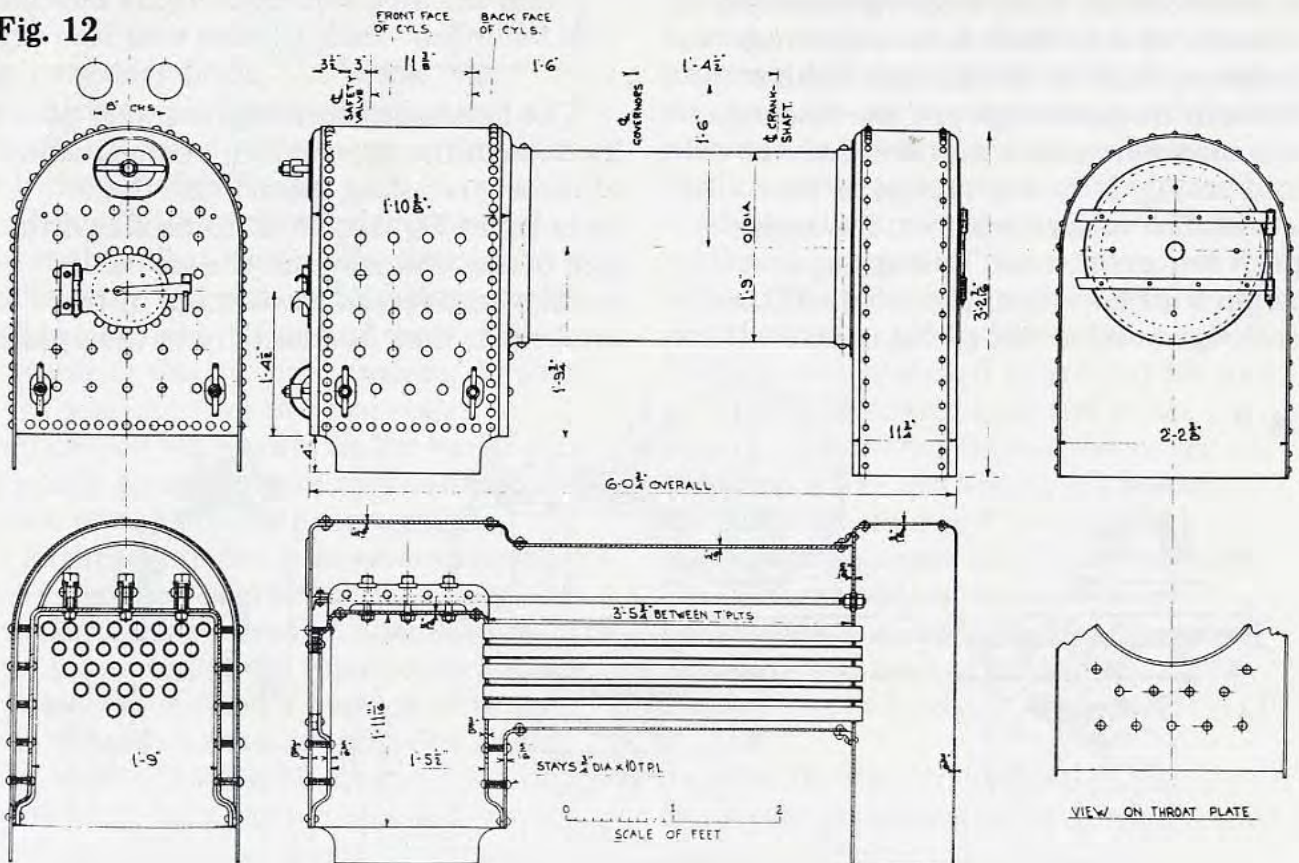


Fig. 10

Fig. 12



formed by the centre pole of the round-
about. The heating surface was made up of:

Tubes	41.15 sq.ft.
Firebox	12.84 "
Total	53.99 "
Grate area	2.55 "

There were a few small differences made from time to time and the boiler in Fig. 12 was manufactured for the Rowcroft Engineering Co. of West Hartlepool. Among others of similar dimensions was one made and supplied to Messrs. Gaymers Ltd., of Attleborough, the cider makers, for steaming purposes. Larger boilers were ordered out from firms specialising in the larger types but Tidmans were responsible for the installation, fittings and starting up.

Before leaving the centre engines I must point out that several of the larger examples were supplied as semi-portable or over-types for stationary work and an example of one of these is included in Fig. 13. Note the typical portable engine smokebox instead of the down-draught type used on the centre engine.

Organ engines as we have seen were of two types, horizontal and vertical. Usually the horizontal engines were combined with a small vertical boiler on a little truck and drove only a small organ attached to some side-show. A photograph of one of these complete power units is shown in Fig. 14 and this particular engine was supplied to the famous Sequai, a showman who at one time specialised in drawing teeth for a small sum. These delicate operations were performed whilst the organ accompaniment drowned all other sounds. These diminutive engines had a cylinder 2in x 3½in, flywheel

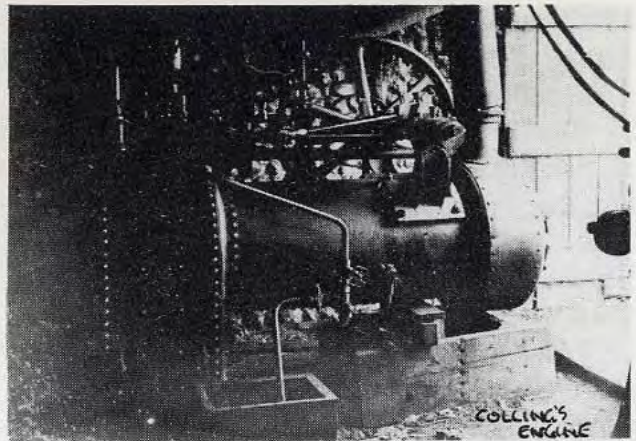


Fig. 13

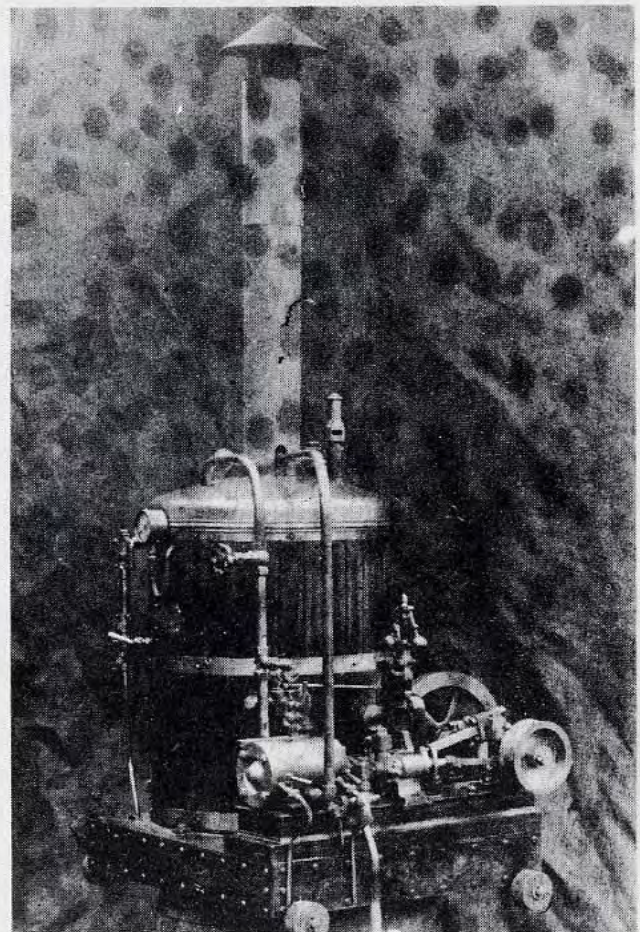
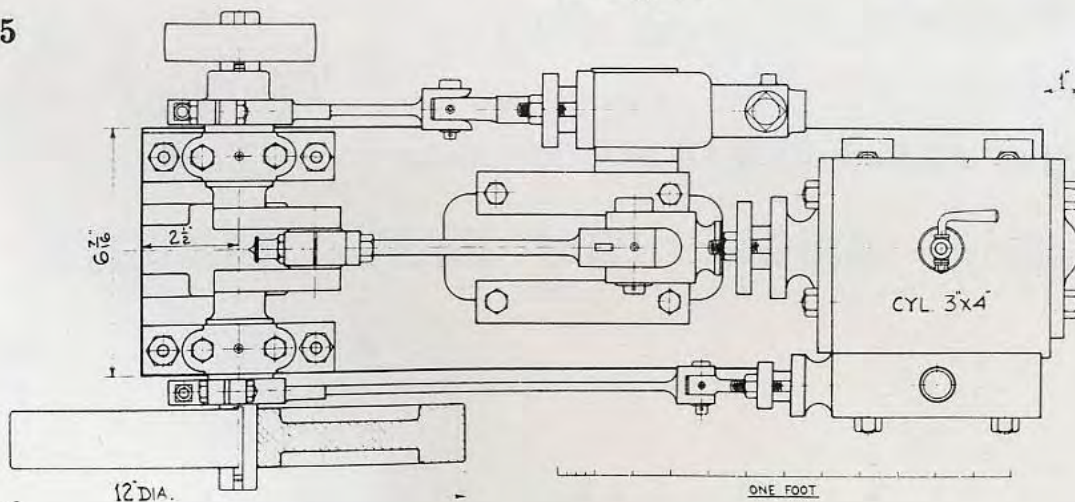


Fig. 14

Fig. 15



12in diameter and a boiler 1ft 5in outside diameter x 2 feet tall which was lagged with strip mahogany, highly polished and fixed by three equally polished brass bands. A plan of a larger 3in x 4in engine is shown in Fig. 15. Another of these sets named *King Edward* was supplied to Messrs. Plinston Brothers of Warrington and three spanners only were required to fit all nuts.

For the much larger organs by Gavioli, Marengi, Chiappa and so on fitted to the power driven riding machines the vertical organ engine was always used and examples of these have already been seen in Figs. 10 and 11. Unlike the smaller horizontal engines the verticals usually had a two-step driving pulley. Cylinders of both types were always lagged with wood and finished off with sheet brass cladding engraved with the maker's name and address. The high speed Watt type governor was spring loaded and governed very accurately. There are several

examples of these vertical engines preserved in private possession and at least one in a museum.

Inevitably after a lapse of over forty years records become scattered or lost and unfortunately none of Messrs. Tidman's order or despatch books have survived, although a few drawings have been discovered which have proved most helpful in composing this short history. I knew Robert Tidman the grandson very well and many facts I have set down were gleaned from interesting conversations I enjoyed with him. He reached an age in excess of eighty years and died as recently as 1969 in Downham Market where in later years he had resided with a married daughter. The firm never issued a catalogue as did their other competitors and therefore I feel it appropriate to include a reproduction of their early letter heading.

Ronald H. Clark

(BY ROYAL



LETTERS PATENT.)

MEMORANDUM.

FROM

Robert * Tidman * and * Sons, *

PATENTEES AND MANUFACTURERS

HAND AND STEAM POWER ROUNDABOUTS,
FITTED WITH OR WITHOUT OVERHEAD MOTION

OF ALL KINDS OF

For Galloping Horses and Suspended Platforms.

BISHOP BRIDGE IRON WORKS, NORWICH,

May 6th

1890



John Downs' Tidman set of Gallopers, Cambridge Midsummer Fair 1981

STOP PRESS!

Saturday 3 October. Nottingham Goose Fair

Once again we have booked the Hyson Green Community Centre (2 minutes walk from the Forest) for the afternoon. All members, friends and enthusiasts welcome. Have a chat and a cuppa in comfort. Further details from Bernard Mitchell, telephone Nottingham 259680.

Saturday and Sunday, 3 and 4 October.

The Great Hollycombe Steam Fair, Liphook, Hants.

In conjunction with the World's Fair we hope to be represented at this one-off event. Volunteers needed to help man the Association stand/marquee. Could be a big one.... Offers of help to the Chairman, telephone Frome 66335.

Sunday 18 October. The Midland Mops Social and Film Evening.

Organised in association with the Midland Section of the Guild. To be held at Warwick - venue to be finalised, but probably the Globe Inn, near the market place. Details from Rod Spooner, telephone Studley 3869.

Fairground Art by Geoff Weedon and Richard Ward due for publication by September 17. Full-colour review to appear in Sunday Times colour magazine early September. Published by White Mouse Edtns in assoc. with New Cavendish Bks, size 10½" x 13", 312 pages containing over 1000 pics., 700 in full colour. Price £39.50. This book will be available to F.A.G.B. members at a discount. Details to follow.