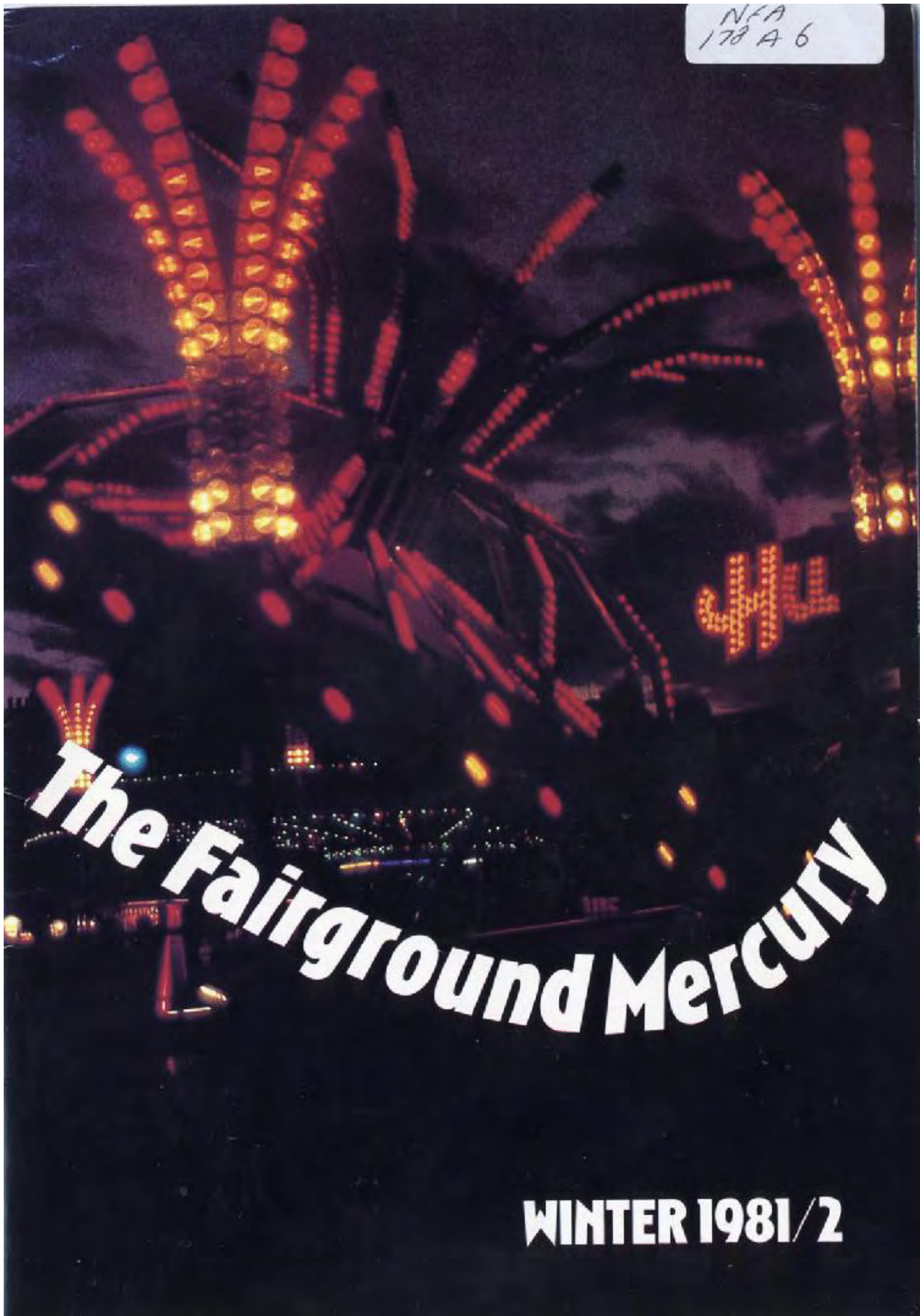


NFA
178 A 6



The Fairground Mercury

WINTER 1981/2

Editorial

The Fairground Mercury Winter 1981/82 The Journal of the Fairground Association Vol. 4 No. 4

If the 1981 season wasn't exactly brilliant as far as business was concerned, with a combination of the continuing recession and bad weather during the spring and autumn making life difficult for the showman, it was, nevertheless, another good year for innovation on the tober.

Continuing the pattern set in 1980, many showmen thought fit to chance their arm by investing in new equipment. Many of the new rides to be seen on the grounds were of foreign manufacture—largely as a result of the growing trade in American imports. The home-based manufacturers were not found wanting, however, and it was gratifying to note the high quality of the new British rides; the Pollard-built Coasters and the A.R.M. (U.K.) Trabants being particularly impressive.

Nowhere was the new generation of amusements more evident than at the big back-end fairs. In the annual contest between those two heavyweights, Nottingham Goose Fair and Hull Fair, the Yorkshire champion clearly outshone its East Midlands rival with a display of novelties that made it the outright winner in the 'Fair of the Year' stakes.

The sight at Hull of that swinging leviathan, Pat Collins' Pirat, facing that other monster of a ride, Joe Stevens' Super Loops, was for many—enthusiasts and punters alike—one of the most awesome prospects of the season.

The success of these, and other new rides such as the Matterhorn, convincingly demonstrated the public's appetite for novelty—even when times are hard. Their appearance at certain fairs, due either to sub-letting or floating positions, strengthened the argument in favour of a policy of deliberate change at some of the more predictable-looking events.

Whatever the new year will bring, and the portents are not too good, we wish our showfolk colleagues a better season than last. Their traditional capacity to surprise and amaze will undoubtedly prove to be the best protection against the current economic storm.

As far as the Association's future is concerned, we already have several new projects for 1982. The first in what we hope will be a continuing booklets on fairground subjects should be published in the coming months, with a second already envisaged.

And for all those who fancy fairgoing a little further afield than usual it has been suggested that we organise a trip next November to the Hamburg Dom Fair. At the time of writing no firm details

have been arranged but it is likely to be a four-day visit, travelling by air with the complete party staying in the same hotel. It is difficult to speculate about cost, but it is likely to be around £150 per person. Start saving now!

A.G.M.

The annual general meeting of the Association will take place on Saturday 30 January at the New Imperial Hotel, Temple Street, Birmingham. The meeting will commence business at 2.30 p.m. After a break a buffet and an evening social/film show will be held. This latter part of the programme will be open to all and it is hoped that members will invite their families and friends to join us.

Subs

Subscriptions to the Association is still at a bargain level* and likely to remain so during the coming year. Please help us to keep our admin. costs down by checking your renewal date and sending off your sub. post haste to the Treasurer, John Ray, 57 West Way, Stafford. With an ever growing membership list it is essential that we reduce the chasing that has had to be done in the past. When you receive your reminder please pay promptly—remember, no sub, no mag!

*Adults £3.00; under 16s and OAPs £1.00; family £3.50.

Cover: Arthur Stevens' A.R.M. Hully-Gully dips and whirls at the 1981 Stratford Mop.

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

All items in this journal remain the copyright of the contributor and/or the F.A.G.B. All possible care has been taken to credit photographs correctly, but should errors have occurred please accept our apologies.

Published by the Fairground Association of Great Britain. Printed by the Kingston Press, Bath.

ROUNDAABOUTS

With the official 1981 season now over I have less to report this time in the way of new rides and changes. No doubt the buying and selling which takes place during the winter will be as considerable as in previous years, and as Easter 1982 approaches there will be plenty to report.

Starting as customary with letters received, Steve Smith comes up trumps once again, especially with further news of Ling's. Following the sale of Joe Ling's 'Flowerpot' Waltzer to Cox's (as reported in the last issue), Steve advises that Joseph and Victoria Ling are settling in South Yorkshire. This means that the very handsome Lang Wheels Dodgem has been sold. Richard Shufflebottom is taking over the track and its run of fairs in 1982. It has recently received a set of Reverchon 'Jubilee' cars and the rounding boards have been repainted with racing and rally cars. This is certainly good news indeed. We would be forgiven for thinking that painted rounding boards on Dodgems had gone out of fashion. It is true that only a small minority of tracks have them. Most of them have either no roundings at all or just tawdry bits of moulded fibreglass, hardly an adequate

substitute. By any reckoning, less than twenty of the Dodgem tracks that travel have painted rounding boards.

Last time I mentioned the two very similar 20-section Lakin Waltzers of A. Toogood and W. Clark. Steve has furnished some historical background to these. Toogood's (now Keith Turner's) was new to W. Starr in 1937 and so was, 'unofficially', a Coronation Ark. Toogoods bought it in the 1940s and soon converted it to a Waltzer, though still retaining its deep boards and front for some time.

Bill Clark's travelling Waltzer (he also has the big Lakin one in Spanish City, Whitley Bay) was new in 1939 to Luke Jobson—Clark's father-in-law, I believe—from Lakins. It became the 'Victory Ark' in 1945 and was converted to a Waltzer later. In the 1960s both it and the Toogood machine were 'Maxwellized' and made to look very smart.

Keith Hamilton of Cambridge has written to say that Ron Harris' set of Gallopers (ex Rose Bros.) has been sold again, to preservationist Jack King of Stotfold, Bedfordshire. Mr King is reputed to have plans to convert the machine

W.H. Summers' Wisdom Magic Carpet, Walton Street, Hull Fair 1981 (Malcolm Slater).



back to steam drive, for use at rallies no doubt.

Another set of Gallopers to change hands is the delightful Savage machine travelled for the last ten years by our Cullompton member, Alf Whitelegg. Alf, who now owns a Dodgem (ex Billy Davis), has sold the ride to Notts and Derby showman George Furborough. Delivery took place early November.

Les Ashbolt writes to confirm his final score of rides travelling during 1981. He has managed to account for no fewer than 871 machines on the road with the possibility of a further 20 to add to the list. According to Les, it would appear that 15 rides that were travelled in 1980 have been kept in store during 1981.

In writing, Les records the purchase of a Twist by Stonehouse-based showman John Coneley (ex Butlins?) and the acquisition by Arthur Peake, who travels the Wall circuit, of a Big Wheel.

A Wisdom 'Magic Carpet' has been supplied to W.H. Summers of Big Wheel fame. It looks a bit like a miniature Mont Blanc. The cars are uncannily similar.

In October a fresh Cadoxton Meteorite passed from Pat Evans to Keith Emmett.

A fresh Paratrooper has been acquired by Nipper Appleton with a Micholetti Scammell prime mover.

Glen Gray acquired a set of Skylift Jets in October. I imagine this may be the set previously owned by J. Peters.

At Hull Fair Pat Collins presented Jimmy Booth's Reverchon Matterhorn. This is, of course, a modern Mont Blanc with the usual Continental back scenery and no top. Another Jimmy Booth novelty ride also to be seen at Hull was his Hurricano, an American cross between a Ramba Zampa and a set of Jets, being presented by Matt Taylor.

A second 'Spyro Gyro'—which turns out to be rather like a small Satellite which ascends its centrepole—will be seen on the road next season.

Previously operated at Margate, this second machine, has been purchased by well-known novelty showman Claude Margetts, Jnr. The ride, likely to be renamed 'The Hustler', was built by Fairplace of Beeston, Notts.

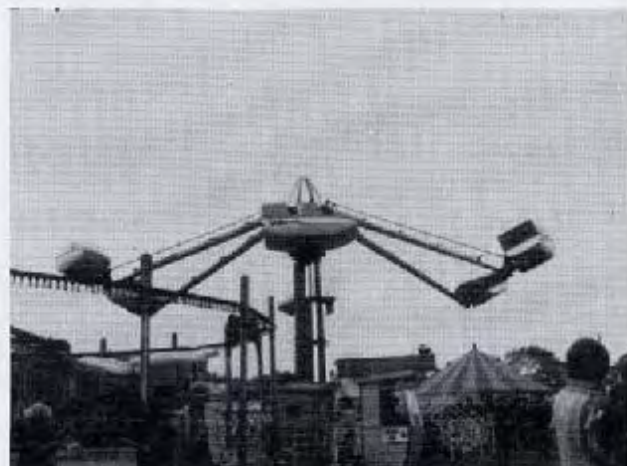
Late November saw the departure of Billy Danter & Sons' Moonbuggy Coaster to its new home, South-Western traveller Maurice Rowland. The Danter firm anticipates delivery of a brand-new Pollard Coaster early in 1981.

Finally, I wish to add my own accolade to the new book 'Fairground Art', by Geoff Weedon and Richard Ward. I was privileged to be involved in the source material for part of it, and have been glad to watch this whole project come to fruition. It really is a magnificent achievement by Geoff and Richard. I would say it is an **ESSENTIAL PURCHASE** for every serious fairground enthusiast. I know it costs £39.50 but it is worth every penny. I cannot believe that it is beyond the funds of certainly those of you who I meet on the grounds carrying great loads of expensive photographic equipment around. £39.50 spent on this book will, I suggest, give you more real satisfaction than a similar amount on yet another lens to add to your vast armoury of camera gear!

Mike Hanna

Don't forget you too can be one of the many pairs of eyes and ears that seek information for this column. If you know of any recent changes in ownership/fresh acquisitions, please drop a line to Mike Hanna at 3 Powell Road, Newick, Sussex.

Jimmy Booth's two rides on tour: (left) Matterhorn and (right) Hurricane, both at Hull Fair (William Downie).



DEBATE

The sale last October of the Liphook collection—and the threat of its subsequent dispersal—has emphasised the need for the conservation of our Fairground heritage. Alan Body and Alastair Arnott add their voices to the debate on the subject.

The publication 'Fairground Art' represents a tremendous achievement for the co-authors Geoff Weedon and Richard Ward, a work that will no doubt generate considerable interest towards the fairground—the book having so prestigiously portrayed its history and art, giving dimension and importance to a subject that is invariably made light of.

Cause for celebration though there is in the very fine achievements of the book, it cannot detract from the short-comings that abound when considering the security of our fairground heritage. The policies and politics of preservation have seemingly made little progress since the departure from this country several years ago of the Rodeo Switch-back and Steam Gallopers, lamented at the time as a major loss to our heritage. In 1981 we face the prospect of a further serious eroding of this heritage with the dispersal of the Liphook steam collection.

The intervening years between these occurrences have seen a steadfast reluctance by both the Showmen's Guild and the fairground supportive fraternities like to hold forth with opinions on this subject or indeed take any action in the creation of a lobby to rally support for the preservation of the important examples of historic fairground rides. Instead a *laissez-faire* attitude has prevailed, it being left to individuals who may have the necessary finance and enthusiasm to save an historic ride—however rare a being he or she may be. In short there has been no coherent policy toward fairground preservation when there could and should be.

Consider the large amounts of public money being used to aid many wide ranging activities to which the fairground could legitimately seek affiliation. Within the spectrum of the arts we should remember that the 1981/82 funding to the Arts Council totalled over £70 million. Whilst it is acknowledged that a large percentage of the Arts Council budget is directed towards the institutional arts, such as the Opera, the Ballet and the Theatre, it also finances activities which ensure a wider application of Arts Council funds, be it through regional or more obscure undertakings—given that its constitution is framed "to increase the accessibility of the

arts to the public throughout Great Britain..'

A recently established project has seen an allocation of funds in excess of £100,000 from which contributions are made in the commissioning of murals and sculptures to enhance the appearance of buildings and public areas. In another instance of involvement the Notting Hill Carnival has received support from the Arts Council each year since 1974, and in 1981 grants totalling over £16,000 were made for this event.

A further source of public funding is found in the National Heritage Memorial Fund, constituted in 1980 with £12 million to "preserve objects or structures of importance to the national heritage". Already £4.3 million has been spent or committed in aid—to cite just two examples, £125,000 has been committed in a venture to preserve 'HMS Alliance'—a submarine built in 1945, whilst £115,000 has been allocated to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum to conserve its furnace there.

To take one further example of the void when considering fairground representation—although the vintage fairground ride has been incorporated in a few private museum collections, there are no such exhibits in any of our national museums. Even the Science Museum, which houses artifacts from so many strands of our industrial heritage, completely ignores the fairground ride.

It would seem that until a concerted approach is made to bodies such as these, the fairground will continue to be denied even consideration for any form of financial support. Whilst enlightenment towards the surviving examples of fairground subjects dating from the 19th and early 20th century, that carry with them an invaluable historic and artistic legacy, will continue to be passed over. Surely the various fairground affiliates must now collectively begin to formulate a policy directed at our fairground heritage to ensure that the important examples of vintage rides remaining are afforded some ordered protection once their commercial lives come to an end, so that others may enjoy intact, their unique qualities. This they will seek to do if they care for this heritage and seriously wish to see it preserved. The recently announced project to establish a fairground museum is an encouraging step towards such a goal.

Alan Body

Debate

It would seem that the time has come, if it has not already gone, to establish a National Fairground Museum on the lines of the National Motor Museum. Some people have misgivings about the use of the term 'national', but it should try to be representative of all aspects of the industry, country-wide. The first question to ask is, would it be more advisable to start our own museum or to throw in our lot with an already established museum? The scarcity of material may determine this. The second question is, if it is decided to go it alone, where should this centre be? Consideration has to be given to car parking and open air events, but research has shown that even large institutions draw most of their support, finance and visitors from their immediate area, hence proximity to a large centre of population would be desirable.

I do not want to be thought of as a dreamer, nor do I want to trample on anyones toes, but let me explore the financial implications a little more. A private museum has to pay for itself, and incidentally, I believe, provide the public with entertainment, education and inspiration. There are many advantages, and few disadvantages, to be had by it becoming a non-profit making company limited by guarantee and registered with the Charity Commissioners (a company limited by guarantee with no share capital, registered as a charity): the financial liability of those involved is minimal, there are tax concessions to be had, protection in provided against disposal or sale of collections, the industry, manufacturers and other useful people can be incorporated in the board of trustees, and fund raising is enhanced. Only by this means can an independent museum take advantage of purchase grants from the Science Museum, and grants and expert assistance from the appropriate Area Museum Council. Manpower Services Commission funds and labour can be channelled into restoration work and Arts Council funds applied perhaps to the completion of subsequent decoration schemes. Funds from industry would be more forthcoming too.

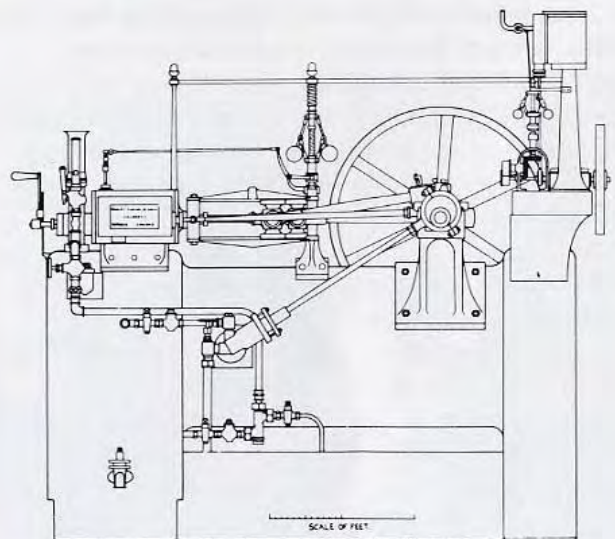
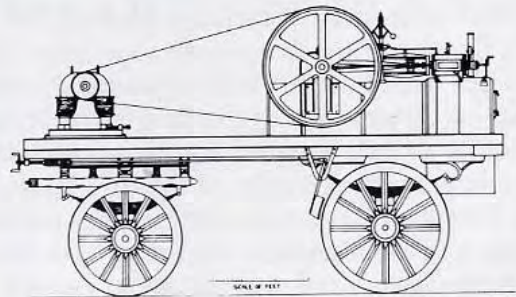
Local authorities and county councils may well also contribute under these circumstances; and if a fairground museum was established in this way, no doubt the Savage pattern collection could be transferred on indefinite loan (and a comprehensive catalogue could then be drawn up, using Job Creation labour). An independent museum constituted on the lines I have advocated has recently been awarded a grant of over £100,000 by the E.E.C., but if all other sources

fail, the Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund exist to purchase material of importance to the national heritage. There is no limit to the amount of assistance which may be given either in terms of cash figure or percentage of the total required. The assistance is discretionary, but the Trustees can take temporary custody of appropriate material themselves.

Finally, I would say that, financially, now is the time to act. Local authorities will grasp at any scheme that promises to bring jobs and prosperity to their area and I think that, if properly considered plans were drawn up, there would be little difficulty in obtaining property or planning permission. In fact, I know of one local authority which is actively seeking to establish another museum. Unfortunately the building which they propose is not suitable to our purposes. Fortunately for us, the Association of Independent Museums has been established to cater for our needs (its Secretary is Patrick Greene, Norton Priory Museum Trust, near Astmoor, Runcorn, Cheshire) and it produces authoritative booklets on *Setting up and Running a New Museum* and *Charitable Status for Museums* for example.

Alastair Arnott

Alastair Arnott is the Keeper of Technology of the Swansea Maritime and Industrial Museum.



MEANDERINGS

Hello, having suffered two episodes of my meanderings back to those good old bad old days I imagine you must have read them with mixed feelings and some doubts. I find if one writes something fictitious people will say 'Ah yes, umm that's possible', whereas truth being stranger than fiction people are inclined to comment 'That never happened', or 'Surely it wasn't like that?'

So now then friends, what do you think of these days of recession, etc., etc.? Answer on a postage stamp please.

There are still a number of people around who talk with reverence of Bostock and Wombwell. I would echo the statement 'A show superlative'. As a schoolboy I remember this world-famed menagerie coming to Clay Cross. If you have ever visited Clay Cross or perhaps driven through you could be forgiven for saying 'Surely such a mammoth attraction never played there?' But, in its hey day, the B and W visited nearly every conceivable site in Great Britain. Big, small, medium.

As I said earlier I was at school when the show made its last visit in the very early twenties and the one day stand was on the Wednesday. Tuesday was the day when the advance men brought the straw and hay bales, already the shop windows displayed loudly the name 'Bostock and Wombwell'. On every hoarding around every corner you came face to face with snarling beasts, the King of the jungle, elephants, monkeys. 'One day only two performances 4.15 and 7.45'.

On the morning of the show I'm all of a tingle. Do you get a tingle? I wonder is there such a thing nowadays. I know a chap who won the pools he didn't get a tingle.

On this particular morning our sports master Mr. Radford who tried to teach us to play the game spoke thus: 'Now boys this morning we are to have a visit from a gentleman who is, er, a chap from the wild beast show and I want you to give him your best attention'. Meanwhile outside the school we could hear the chatter and excitement from the boys who had left school and hand't yet found jobs—they were watching the big parade. And what a parade! A real band waggon (not the one that people are accused of jumping on to-day), live musicians in uniform looking very dignified—after all we were a poor but dignified race. Whats that you say? It's beginning to look that way again, oh dear. Certain animals were on view to the watching public including horses, ponies, camels a few monekys but *not* the wild beasts. No! In fairness to these

past great showmen and in keeping with the tradition of showmanship, these were what you *paid* to see.

A few members of wriggling backsides and shuffling feet and the gentleman from the menagerie arrived dressed in the splendid regalia of the Bostock era with a small whip, which confused our teacher who introduced him as a Lion Tamer—even today story writers still call them Lion Tamers. Briefly he told us of the man great animals, etc., to be found under the big tilt of the show. He gave a special invitation to the children's matinee plus a number of complimentary and left us to spend one of the longest schooldays I can remember in anticipation of the big event. Four o'clock, dismiss a boiled egg and a breathless run to the fairground. Up those carved steps to the paybox, past the man in the evening suit, through the curtains and into the portable jungle alive and peering through the bars all the beasts of the forests, plains and jungles of the world right before our very eyes. Only a rope ring around the arena separated you from the claws and jaws of these powerful animals. Ah here he comes the keeper, why its the chap who came to our school this morning. 'Ladies and gentlemen, will you please stand well clear of the cages. In a few minutes time you will see and hear the animals being fed. Thank you.'

There was very little wrong with the appetites of the Bostock and Wombwell pets. They devoured those hunks of meat quicker than our children can take care of a packet of Walkers crisps. Perhaps today our kids would take all this in their stride without getting over excited but we had seen only a few silent films from the early Hollywood studios featuring lions, tigers and of course Tarzan (No. 1). Above all this though there was this parrot, a magnificent bird, a real eye catcher. I don't know much about feathered birds, it may not even have been a parrot but I fell for it and couldn't tear myself away from it. It could say 'Hello' better than a busy bookie on a telephone. I read in a booklet once issued by the RSPCA that we humans should pity these creatures. Maybe—but I'm convinced that the look which Bostock's parrot gave me was a look of pity. Later in the evening in all my simple innocence I asked my old dad if I could have a parrot. 'Son', he replied, 'times are very hard but if you ever grow up I think you'll be one.'

Who was it who said truth is stranger than fiction?

A strange introduction and worthy of an

explanation. It was during the August Bank Holiday of 1936 that I met the late gypsy Petulengro. During the deep winter of 35/36 I had been working in the coal pits and contacted this nasty eczema now commonly known as dermatitis. The event was the Sheffield telegraph and star fun fair and gala held at the Abbeydale Park, Sheffield. A flashback to the bill of fare included Hibble and Mellors Amusements, Nottingham, Ashley Bros., clowns, jugglers, non stop variety and fireworks all for 1/-. Ok, 5 new pence.

I had gone along to the park to earn myself a few bob and toward tea-time a slight drizzle brought a lull to the fairground so I decided to have a walk round the site grab a cuppa and a sandwich. A short distance from the fringe of the fair I noticed a small crowd so I edged myself behind this semi circle to listen to the spiel. A small table containing bottles and packages and behind it the man himself, gypsy Petulengro, true Romany dressed in Romany garb with sash golden earrings and a very valuable money belt. The belt, woven by himself, was unique with notes and coins cleverly fastened together, a design which I doubt very few could have copied.

'If', he told the bystanders, 'I fail to bring you some relief no matter what your ailment maybe with the herbs I offer to you—and ladies and gentlemen I'm here in Sheffield until Saturday—I don't say I can cure you instantly but if you come back and say that you don't feel better within 48 hours I will give any man or woman £100 from my money belt.' When the crowd dispersed I stood awhile and he looked up from his table stand. 'Can I help you young man', he asked, coming towards me. 'Oh yes, I know your trouble', and he named it. He had detected the blotches and scars which were still prominent on my face—'By the way are you one of us'—'Well', I replied, 'in a way, yes'. 'Nothing to be ashamed of lad', he added, 'come with me to my wagon I'm ready for a drink'. Seated in the comfort of his house on wheels we talked for a little then suddenly he said, 'Would you like a drink of my coffee'. 'Please, if its no trouble.' Then he smiled and handed me this cup. Whow! I'm being poisoned. 'What a bitter cup, what is it?' 'That my little friend is Dandelion coffee my own special brew. Try to drink it and then we'll have a cup of tea.'

'You know', he said, 'the medical people call me a quack but I persevere with my herbs and very soon you will throw away those smeary ointments and messy bandages.' He gave me quite a good supply of his herbs—wouldn't take a penny. From his home in Purewell, Hants, he sent me a booklet containing the making and uses of herb medicines. By September my skin took on a new look. I was still ugly but had a

complexion equal to the girl on the TV commercials. Considering the discomfort I felt before that day I think that was one of the nicest experiences of my younger days. I never met the gentleman again but the name PETULENGRO is still to be found in those little fortune telling chats at various amusement centres.

I suppose I have in common with most a certain respect for the church and its religious practices and like to abide when possible with the good book. During the middle sixties I was working for a certain machine proprietor who had applied for a Sunday opening and was granted permission to do so.

Very warm and humid, we had reefed the dodgem tilt to allow some air in during the early evening. However it began to rain, with a background of thunder. Derby ALF, an old friend and a real grafter, and myself are up on the top frame pulling back and lacing the tilt. I had previously noticed a small band of people with leaflets and umbrellas on the ground (they must have known we were in for a storm). You will appreciate my mate and I are getting soaked and by this time we have lightning darting above us, not really a very nice situation.

Following a first class roll of thunder I hear a voice 'Hey there. Hey, can you hear me?' 'Whaddya want?' I shout back, trying to remember its Sunday. This chap has a large umbrella and a book. 'Listen to my word', he's yelling. 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Beware lest you incur the wrath of God.' 'He's not doing so badly at the moment!' I yelled back, not, I'm afraid as politely as written here.

Fact was I learned later, this chap was a religious maniac from Mansfield. I understand this poor fellow walked miles just preaching to nobody in particular. Well I often think about him on a wet Sunday.

In any case the gaff in question was no good so who knows perhaps that day the Lord was on his side.

Walter Shore

LONG TIME AGO

It was all a long time ago, people say nowadays. Maybe it was, but it doesn't always seem so to those old enough to have known the whine and then the sickening thud and rumble of a high-explosive bomb, the destruction wrought by magnesium incendiaries, the sweet sorrow of wartime parting, and the far-from-sweet sorrow of sudden bereavement. World War II was total war.

To tell the tale of the London & Home Counties fairgrounds at that time, it seems logical to try to set the scene as it was from September 1938 to September 1939 (from the Munich Agreement until the outbreak of the War); then to deal with the war years; and finally to say something about the efforts to get back to normal—to overcome what came to be called “the problems of the peace”.

Details of fairs, machines, transport, etc. in what follows are based on the writer's contemporary notes; there has been no reliance on memory and in that context this introduction ought to make reference to the extraordinary correspondence in “World's Fair” in comparatively recent years on the subject of showmen's engines used in London for the demolition of air-raid damaged buildings. Starting with a picture of a quite unmistakable Fowler thus engaged, captioned as a Burrell, the eventual conclusion was that the number so employed was very small! In the autumn of 1941 the writer saw twenty at work.

Date references to “World's Fair” and other press features are given, for the benefit of those having access to a newspaper library.

The Pre-War Scene

Pursuit of our hobby in the London area forty-odd years ago was easier and pleasanter than nowadays in some ways, but decidedly less so in others. Streets were mostly uncluttered, and frequent bus, tram and trolleybus services meant that, for instance, nine scattered London fairs were seen in comfort in as many hours on Good Friday of 1939. All-day rover tickets were extremely cheap and the financial problem in those days was film, not travel. 35mm photography was only for the very wealthy; ordinary mortals paid a shilling for eight frames of a roll film totally blind to red. That capable of distinguishing between the red of an engine's boiler and the black of its smokebox cost half as much again: in present-day worth of money, perhaps the equivalent of 25p per negative. Another difficulty was public curiosity and

suspicion. Although amateur snap-shotting was well established, having arrived in the early 'twenties, it was normally practiced only on people and their pets. Any departure from that convention was noticed; the amiable eccentric was less tolerated then than now, and showmen's engine pictures were most certainly not then to be found among the kittens and red roses so beloved of greeting card publishers.

On the other hand, getting an acceptable camera in the face of financial stringency was no real problem. In London in the 'thirties there were innumerable “Uncles”, vulgarly referred to as supermen, by virtue of the sign displayed outside their premises above a door discreetly marked “Pledge Department”. But there were displayed for sale in the main part of the shop such of the pledges as had remained unredeemed, and that seemed to be the majority. Why these Uncles didn't have what would nowadays be called a cash flow problem is a mystery; equally puzzling is why many of them, although knowing to the penny what Sunday suits and canteens of cutlery were worth, were defeated by anything remotely scientific—and didn't seek specialist advice. It did mean, though, that the writer had acquired a reasonable camera (as well as binoculars, slide rule and drawing instruments) at an early age and at quite small expense.

The Munich Agreement of 1938 left no real doubt as to what was coming: the unknown quantity was when. Even Chamberlain's severest critics would concede that he had gained (at a price) some much-needed time. Most people preferred to pretend that it might be averted. That wasn't an easy exercise in self-delusion, with conscription coming in with the following Spring, and George Formby singing and strumming something like “Keep fit, Keep fit—to do your bit”. The moods of those times were summed up adequately and eloquently by James R. Styles, a leading novelty showman of those days, in his articles “Reaction” (to Munich. “World's Fair”, 8-10-38), and “Somewhere in England” (“World's Fair”, 16-9-39; written after the outbreak).

The pre-war run of London fairs, then as now, derived from the three Bank Holiday weekends, and calendar changes in those fairs since have been surprisingly few. Thrice annually there were the three grounds at Hampstead, plus Wormwood Scrubs, Blackheath, Lea Bridge (Leyton), Wanstead Flats, Hampton Court Green, Richmond, Hounslow Heath, Ealing Common, and Alexandra Palace. Also, tried for the first

time at Whitsun 1939, there was Mitcham Common. Another parallel with today was the quantity of "foreign stuff" journeying to London for Bank Holidays; predominantly (but not exclusively) at Easter; and predominantly (but not exclusively) to Wanstead Flats.

At most of these places, the number of machines was fewer than today, but the Vale of Health at Hampstead, seen at Easter 1939 in old Fred Gray Snr. had squeezed in six of his machines; Lakin Ben Hur (in immediate foreground), Gallopers (the set still stored there); exceptionally big (54 seater) chairs; Savage motor scenic; dodgem (tilt just visible), and a unique Lang Wheels tower slip, from which this shot was taken. Three engines were in steam at the back of the yard, and there was also some fixed motor-generator plant in wooden sheds. His Loch Ness Monster (mentioned in the Spring 1981 "Mercury") was concurrently open at Lea Bridge Road.

Hampstead "top heath" fairground had a different and more undulating, topographically in those days. Wartime removal of a vast tonnage of sand (for sandbags) subsequently levelled it considerably, but only two adult machines could be accommodated pre-war. Those, at Easter 1939, were R. Edwards' Ark and very unusual Orton-built Monte Carlo Rally track, accompanied by Scammell & Armstrong Saurer units. The lower heath at Hampstead had a pre-war layout in the form of a capital "L", the angle being formed at about Joseph

The Vale of Health, Hampstead, Easter 1939.

Cogger's present-day waltzer position, then occupied by the handsome four-abreast gallopers of Harvey Gray Snr. (Fred Gray Snr's eldest son). The last four-abreast built, and with the celebrated "Black Boy" organ, this was a beautiful turnout, as, along the longer arm of the "L", were his fully-built Lakin Coronation Ben Hur; 26 section dodgem track of the same make, and his "own" yachts (i.e. the set new to the Gray family; not the ex Silcock set). On the shorter arm was Harry Gray's swirl. This layout shows up admirably in an aerial photograph published in "Daily Express" in mid-May 1937. The working Harry Gray engine fleet was by 1939 down from six to two; Armstrong Saurers and various other diesel and petrol heavies had that year displaced the rest.

The general changeover from steam traction was by 1939 virtually complete as regards "small stuff", but otherwise showmen's ideas varies widely. A number, including some quite youthful machine men, were sticking to steam. Others, not all of the younger generation, had dropped it completely. Many were running engines and oilers side by side.

Topographically, the most dramatic case of a change concerning a London holiday ground must surely be Blackheath. The site occupied pre-war, viewed in plan, was virtually the dead-level one of today, but the whole of that area was then considerably sunken, being approached by a slope at the corner nearest Greenwich Park gates.



Presumably it had at some past date been a gravel pit or the like: nobody seems to know. But it is a fact that Forrests' gallopers stood pre-war on approximately its present Blackheath position, but with its chimney at about the level of its platform nowadays.

The variety of adult machines was rather limited in the immediate pre-war period. Several of the old-time novelties had by then become obsolete as travelling propositions; among them the mystic swing; Wiggle Woggle (semi-twister), and Jolly Tubes. It is perhaps worth mentioning that about 42 years on, a recent (August 1981) London fair, having no defined "old-time" bias, included an up-dated example of each of those three, in modern guises, side-by-side in a row!

To conclude this pre-war scene-setting it may be worth looking at Wanstead Flats at Easter 1939, because then, as now, it was the largest London Easter fair, although (again as now) not at all well-known outside its own locality. There were 26 adult machines, not "greatly less" than the present-day average of about 34. The 26 included two moon rockets, Ling's & Proctor's (almost certainly the only time two of these ever appeared simultaneously on any one London ground); Green's caterpillar; Jack Proctor's Airways; two sets of chairs, and cakewalk, an American fun house, a ghost train (Ling's), a tower slip, a 3 abreast galloper of Mannings, and three car tracks; two electric and one petrol: the latter open-topped. The remaining dozen consisted of the staple diet of those days; arks (5); dodgems (4) and swirls (3). Not a solitary waltzer, although introduced five years earlier; but it is worth noting that the numbers of what would then (and now) be regarded as veteran rides (gallopers (1); cakewalk (1); chairs (2) and slip (1)) were the same as on Wanstead Flats at most recent Easters.

The War Years

Immediately following the declaration of war on 3rd September 1939; everything savouring of entertainment (i.e. involving "assemblage of persons") was closed down, under sweeping emergency powers. There was also a drastic and to Londoners a cruelly harsh, cut in travel facilities. We know now, but of course weren't told at the time, that heavy aerial bombardment, probably with the use of gas, had been expected at the very outset; hence these measures. However, the constraints were quickly eased; and as early as 15th September, there having been few if any "incidents", it was announced that fairs, markets, cinemas, etc. could open until 10 pm, subject of course to black-out restrictions. There had inevitably been those who never closed, and not only the Windmill Theatre. "World's Fair" of 23.9.39 reported that Bob

Wilson had opened his Brooklands speedway track (his first adult-machine, new to him from Lang Wheels the previous year) at Bridge Street, Abingdon, every evening since the outbreak of War. A fortnight later, (7.10.39), "World's Fair" published interesting correspondence between the Guild and the then London County Council on the question of holding Bank Holiday fairs in 1940.

"Black-out fairs" were staged in some parts of the country during the autumn, and attempts were even made to hold some of the back-end charter events. Stratford Mop had one juvenile ride, one show and a few stalls; Salisbury managed two big rides, Heal's dodgems and Jenning's ark, but failing light closed these events at 6 pm. There was little activity in London until Easter 1940. By then we were well and truly in the "Phoney War" period, as it was (with the advantage of hindsight) later called. No bombing to speak of, and the British troops over in Northern France were separated from the enemy by neutral Belgium. Once again wishful thinking became fashionable; peace by Christmas was freely talked about. Certainly the 1940 London Easter fairs were a credit to the showmen concerned, and the predominantly daytime trade meant that closure at black-out time was no great disadvantage.

Hampstead top heath had no fair, because of the sandbagging performance aforementioned; and the lower heath lacked Harry Gray's four-abreast and yachts, he among others was already feeling the labour shortage. Sadly, perhaps, his remaining engines did not appear, either. Wanstead Flats was down to six machines, partly because of the absence of most of the "foreigners", but many of the other London grounds were near normal. Blackheath certainly was lacking only its "foreign" machines (Jervis' twin yachts and Jack & Jill slide). There were however visiting machines elsewhere; Wormwood Scrubs included Edward's dodgem and ark from Swindon, while Jacob Studt Jnr. managed to bring two of his four machines to occupy their usual ground at Hampton Court. As with Harry Gray, though, it transpired that 1939 had been the last year of steam for him.

The false calm of the Phoney War was very suddenly shattered a few weeks later, with the successful German invasions of Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg and Holland; followed by Dunkirk and the fall of France. Officially there was no Whitsun Bank Holiday on Monday May 13th, it was understandably cancelled at short notice on Friday, 10th; the day Belgium and Holland were invaded. However, the fairs opened on the Saturday, in general resembling those at Easter, but without the "visiting" machines. The Jacon Studt positions at

Hampton Court were occupied by Traylen's dodgems and Ben Hur; the ground thus vacated at Richmond was to see Flanagan's dodgems and autodrome for the first (and almost certainly last) time. Another interesting "once only" was at Hampstead top heath, where the customary machine positions "on the sand" were still unavailable. On an alternative site slightly to the east, two Monte Carlo Rally tracks were accommodated close together side-by-side; those of George Irvin Snr. and Pettigrove Bros. (They were of course of pre-war manufacture, and the predecessors of the like machines which these families have operated in recent years.) As far as is known, that site was never used again.

The major events of that unforgettable weekend naturally overshadowed the minor ones, but a paragraph in "World's Fairs" of 11th May 1940 gave food for thought. It was the news that the Aspland Venetian Gondola machine, un-used for years, had been sold to the Cole family, but was remaining in store at Boston for the time being, owing to transport difficulties. Concurrently, people were whispering that Billy Smart, always a front-runner with the latest, was buying, of all things, a set of gallopers. There was a long War ahead of us, (Churchill was making no bones about that), and besides, perfectly sound galloper sets had in the immediate pre-War period been burnt to save storage, or sold for the worth of their trucks and tilt (if suitable for an ark). The answer to this became clear a little later on, as will be seen.

Reaction to the grave events of mid-May was mixed, but sufficiently stunning not to be

ignored by anyone; with, perhaps, in the writer's observation, one seeming showman exception. On the Wednesday after Whitsun (May 15th), the one-day street fair at Pinner managed to materialise, albeit with only two adult machines against the usual pre-War six. The day before, the Dutch had given in, and on the day before that, German tanks had crossed the Meuse and driven deep into France. In that extremely serious situation, our friend was playing "Hang out the washing on the Siegfried line" on the paratrope. Pinner thought that was a pretty sick joke, and said so.

The black-out, which continued for the whole duration of the War in Europe, was total as far as the U.K. was concerned; and strictly enforced. The photograph taken at Wealdstone, near Harrow, in 1940, shows one solution as applied to Billy Smart's Lang Wheels Coronation Ark. The atmosphere inside, illuminated only by three or four "half-watts" in cardboard shades could best be described as cosy. Some travellers, Smart included, elaborated on this theme by the use of circus big top canvas or the like to erect a completely enclosed fair; anything not amenable to blacking out, such as chairplanes, being built outside. Such "external additions" were in theory limited to daylight operation, but after a few months of War many people had developed cat-sight to a remarkable degree, possibly through heeding the then Ministry of Food's advice to eat plenty of carrots. Short-term fairs which did not justify the erection of a "black-out usually managed to get by. For instance, "World's Fair" of 11.5.40 reported that at Heston May Fair "... all the rides with the

Under wraps: Billy Smart's blacked-out Ark at Wealdstone, 1940.



exceptions of Irvin's track and Traylen's dodgems rode the people in almost total darkness until nearly ten o'clock."

August and September 1940 saw The Battle of Britain", bravely and successfully fought by "The Few", largely in daylight; accompanied by the start of high-explosive bombing of London and other cities and towns. Later in the year the Luftwaffe changed to night bombing, and until the middle of 1941 made heavy high-explosive and incendiary raids on population centres and industrial and port areas all over the country, London certainly not excepted. Even so, there were some Easter fairs for Londoners to go to, in one case, Blackheath, on a fresh site. Mention has been made earlier of Blackheath "pit", and by Easter 1941 this had been requisitioned for the disposal of rubble from London's bombed sites. Arrangements were made for the Easter fair to occupy a nearby part of the Heath, closer to Greenwich Park gates, where there were built H.P. Studt's Monte Carlo Rally and Autodrome (a 1938/39 conversion of his Loch Ness Monster); Forrest's earlier (Lakin) dodgem; V.R. Bailey's Orton Ark (which, considerably rebuilt and now a waltzer, is still travelled).

Hampstead that noisy Easter was small; three machines in The Vale and none elsewhere, but Wormwood Scrubs was of peacetime size. Mitcham Common saw the emergence of Harry Gray's four-abreast, but like Hampton Court, the fair was a shadow of the pre-war set-out. Wanstead Flats and Lea Bridge Road didn't materialise. By Whitsun, the bombing had eased off somewhat, but the London Holiday Fairs were much as at Easter, save in that Woolls Bros.' gallopers were brought out of storage at Erith to appear at Hampton Court, while Wanstead Flats saw a tiny collection of stalls and one juvenile.

In October 1941, the "blitz demolition" operation in the City and adjoining areas were well under way; showmen's engines playing a considerable part in the formidable task of demolishing the dangerous shells of numerous buildings which had been gutted in fire raids. Heavy steam road locomotives admirably fulfilled the pressing need for powerful self-moving machines, but having by then been displaced from most of their strongholds except the fairground, it followed that most of the examples used were "showmen". A detailed account of the engines used, some of which remained in the job through much of 1942, was subsequently prepared by the writer, and published in the Road Locomotive Society's Journal dated August 1965. This recorded, *inter alia*, that the known total of steam engines employed, showmen's and otherwise, was 25;

nineteen of them supplied by London showmen. In the event, eleven of those nineteen saw further fairground service afterwards. The greatest number of engines personally seen by the writer on any one day had been sixteen; on 18th October 1941. So at the period of the year when Nottingham, Hull and other famous fairs would normally have been taking place, there was instead the unforgettable sight, in the midst of appalling devastation, of a greater number of showmen's engines than had been assembled on any fairground for years past.

In the years 1942 and 1943 and in the first six months of 1944, London was relatively free from air raids, the German air force being by then largely "otherwise engaged"—in Russia. The War was being vigorously waged on many fronts in far-away places, and the U.K. became primarily a production machine as efficient as people like Churchill, Bevin and (importantly in the background) J.M. Keynes, could make it. Their strategy worked and there was none of the run-away inflation experienced in earlier Wars. Taxation was pitched high enough to prevent the public bidding against the Government for scarce resources; nevertheless the unavailability of non-essential consumables and durables meant a certain amount of surplus purchasing power, even after the introduction of P.A.Y.E. in 1943.

Something else which the hard-working "home front" citizen couldn't buy was a seaside holiday. Even if his favourite resort wasn't in a forbidden "defence area", the coils of barbed wire on the beach would spoil things. Recognising the need to keep the production workforce both fit and happy, the Government in 1942 started a "Holidays-at-Home" campaign in which local authorities were required to co-operate fully. The result was a series of very successful Holidays-at-Home events in which travelling showmen played an important part. In London, these fairs really "got going" in midsummer 1942; one held by Billy Smart on Ealing Common opened on 25th June and was perhaps the first. There followed others, including Ponders End (by the Hampstead Gray family), Bromley, Wimbledon Common and Slough. In August there were staged the first Holidays-at-Homes under the London County Council; beginning with Clapham Common, at which Bert Searle, George Irvin, Tom Benson and Wm. Wilson (Peckham Rye) supplied between them six machines. There followed L.C.C. fairs in Victoria Park, Hackney, and then Hackney Downs. In later war years the L.C.C. additionally opened up Tooting Bec Common and Wandsworth Common, and these places continued as fairgrounds after the war, and until today. In the war years, though,

the Victoria Park fairs were sited near the Bethnal Green end of the Park, not at the Old Ford end as nowadays.

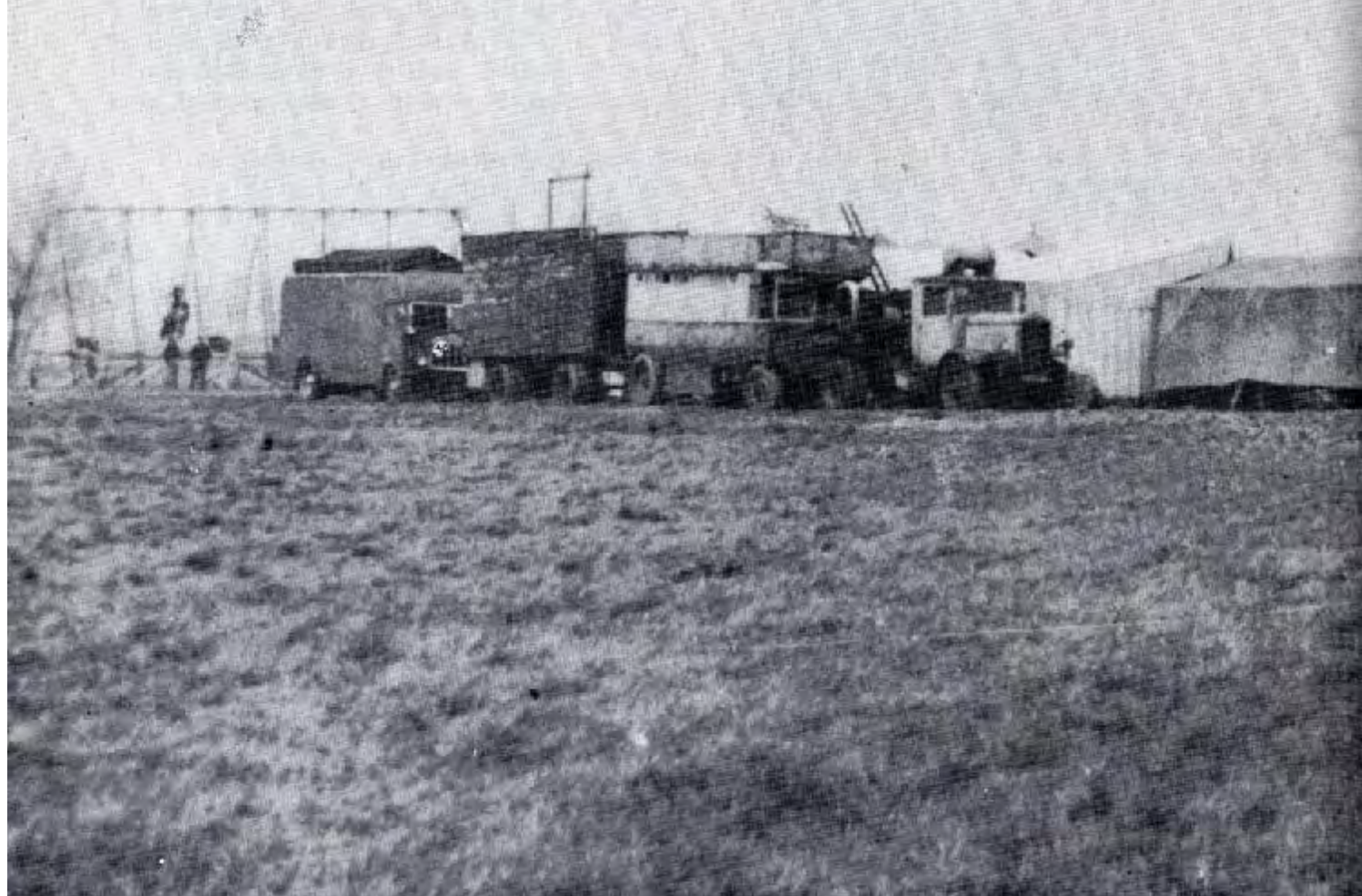
Meanwhile, the 1942 Bank Holiday fairs continued to improve. Ealing Common was revived, others grew and Harry Gray made a welcome re-appearance on Hampstead bottom heath. Wanstead Flats, though, was still struggling for survival. The photograph shows the whole of the 1942 Easter fair there, with just Ive's chairs, two sets of boats, and a few stalls. The Whitsun event was a shade bigger; an ark (Patsy North's) came as well.

1943 showed continued growth and the machine situation had by then become very, very interesting to the enthusiast. "Holidays-at-Home" demanded machines suitable for the family trade, and the impossibility of obtaining new meant that numerous old devices were brought out of retirement and refurbished for further use, often in a fresh ownership. Examples in the London area included Billy Smart's 3 abreast gallopers (ex. A. Johnson: Wakefield), and Scenic dolphins and neptunes (ex. F. Cox); C. Groom's Allen 3 abreast (ex. Wm. Wilson); J. Manning's Swans and Dragons Switchback (ex. John Thurston); Beach's tunnel railway (ex. Woolls Bros.),

Wm. Barber's Scenic dolphins (ex. Jb. Studt Jnr.), J. Mayne's Yachts (ex. H. Gray; ex. Silcock Bros.), J. Symonds' Semi-Twister and several more. The next photograph admittedly taken not in the London area but at Bath, is included as a striking illustration of this phenomenon. It shows a Holidays-at-Home event in the summer of 1942, and includes Sam Smart's fourabreast and adult boats; and P. Cole's gondolas and overboats. Apart from people's dress, and the presence of round stalls, it could have been taken a great many years earlier, since the switchback (then in only its second year with Coles, and not yet reduced in height) masks the ark and dodgem (Hardiman & Strong's) which were also present.

In the mid-war years a few fresh machines appeared at fairs through an alternative process to this recommissioning of old-timers. Certain machines from closed seaside amusement parks were adapted for travelling and it was by that means that the London grounds first saw a W.F. Mangel's (U.S.A.) Whip; initially, as far as records go, at Lea Bridge, Leyton, at Whitsun 1943. A year later at Wembley in June 1944, the writer saw for the first time at any U.K. travelling fair an Eli Bridge Wheel. Before then there had been one travelling Whip in the U.K.

Wanstead Flats, Easter 1942.



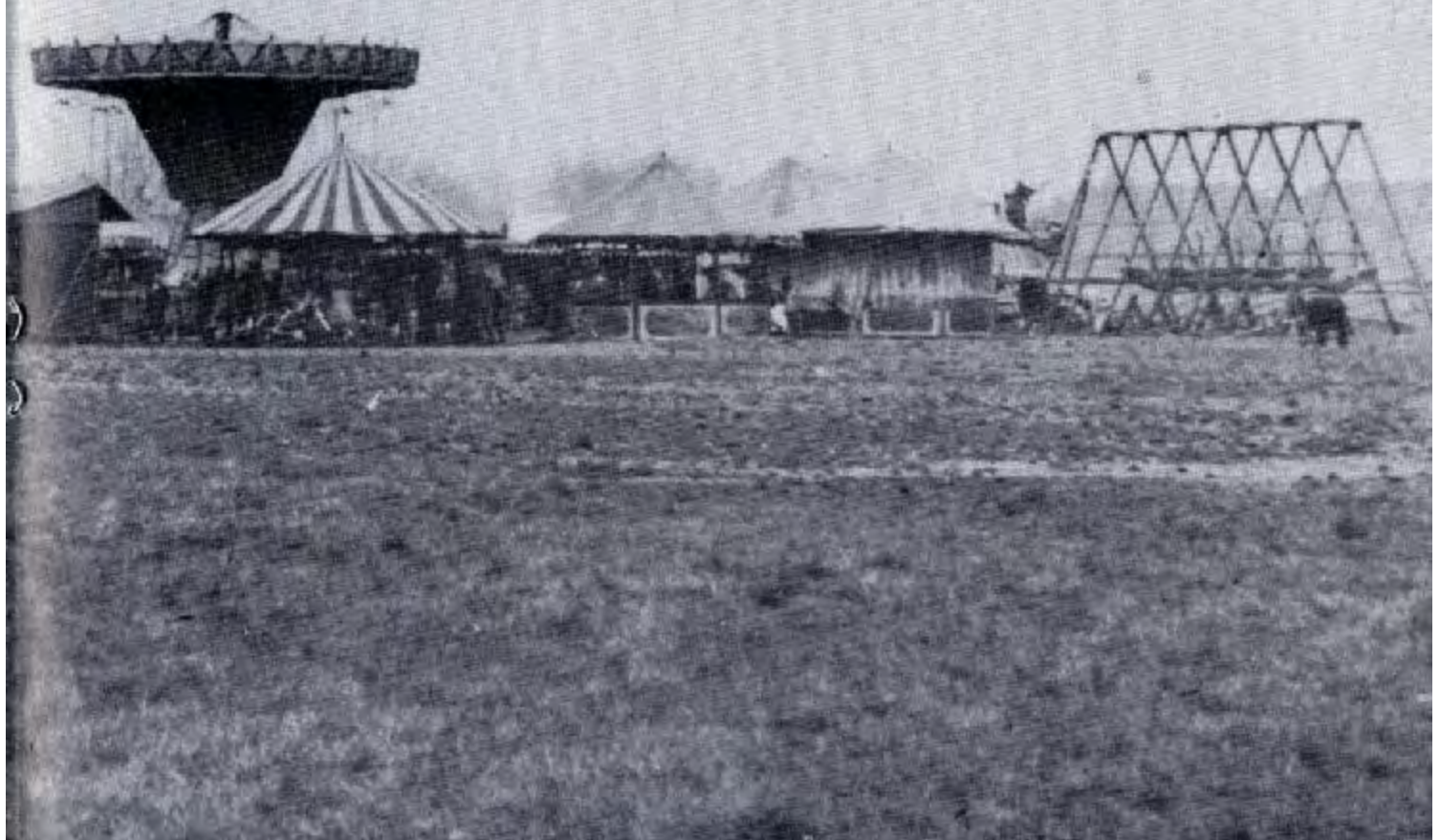
(Irvin's, in Scotland), but it is believed that until 1944 the Eli type of Big Wheel was totally unknown as a travelling proposition in this country.

By 1944, the Upper heath at Hampstead had been revived, and a number of the Easter events were of nearly pre-war size. But hardly had the long-awaited initial Normandy landings been effected (June 6th) than the flying bomb attacks on the London area began. About 2,000 of these "Doodlebugs" had fallen in greater London by the end of August, adding about 6,000 to the civilian death roll through bombing. They were followed in September by a thousand or so giant rockets which fell at about 2,500 m.p.h. and so could not be intercepted; again causing extensive damage and heavy casualties. There was of course a pretty general exodus of showmen to safer areas to the West of the metropolis at that time. Such places as Abingdon, High Wycombe, Watlington, Thame and Aylesbury fared better for fairs than they had done for a long time. It has been stated in print that London was completely without fair-ground amusements that August Bank Holiday (August 7th, 1944), but that was not the case. The Gray family were seen by the writer open in the Vale at Hampstead, albeit with only two

adult machines (gallopers and motor scenic), plus the monorail which Frederick Gray still uses, and about eight stalls. Also, the late Job Martin definitely opened with his gallopers and supporting attractions at Erith and it is believed (but was not confirmed "first-hand" at the time) that the late George Beach's gallopers and dodgems, built up permanently at Kew Bridge, both opened on that unforgettable Bank Holiday. The doodlebugs travelled quite slowly (about 350 m.p.h.) and very noisily, until the jet engine cut out prior to the dive, followed by the explosion on impact of the one-ton warhead. They were nerve-racking devices, and nobody blamed the showmen (or anyone else mobile) for getting out of their way.

However, these rocket attacks were over by December; news from most of the war fronts was encouraging, and 1945 started on an all-round note of general optimism. The showmen, back in London, presented splendid Easter fairs, most of them (except Wanstead Flats) approaching pre-war size in the matter of machines, although not of small stuff, if only because of the severe shortage of just about everything "off the ration" that was suitable for swag.

Then things happened fast. Soon after Easter, Hitler committed suicide, and then on 8th May



came Germany's surrender and the end of the War in Europe. Three months later, following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and three days later of Nagasaki, it was all over.

The Initial Post-War Period

It would have been pleasant to be able to record that peace saw a quick return to normality, but sadly that could not be. Wartime shortages, controls, rationing, maximum allocations and the like necessarily continued for some long time, and relief from one wartime imposition, the black-out, was only partial at first, because of the fuel situation resulting in restrictions on decorative lighting. The earliest known picture of a "lit-up" post-war fair appeared in the "News Chronicle" of Tuesday, 29.8.45: and showed Smart's Lang Wheels Ark at a fair then lately held at Putney Heath (not the Lower Common nowadays used for fairs), with a "V" of lights on its huge front.

The first fair of any great importance to be cancelled after the outbreak of War had been St. Giles, Oxford. Chamberlain's declaration was on Sunday, 3.9.39; that was the Feast of St. Giles and the fair would have been held on 4th and 5th. To the credit of all concerned, there was a full-scale St. Giles' Fair in 1945,

on September 3rd and 4th, only about four weeks after the dropping of the atomic bombs in Japan. In a sense it was an interesting flashback, for with few exceptions the machines were those which would have been at the 1939 event. The aforementioned staple diet was still of dodgems and arks, and there was no adult machine which nowadays (or at that time) would be classed as "old time". Northwards from the Martyrs Memorial, there were W. Nichols' ark, swirl and dodgem; Jack Proctor's dodgem; F. Wilson's dodgem; Richard Studt with the late Jacon Studt Jnr's ark; H. Richards' Fun House, John Thurston's dodgem, ark and autodrome; John Flanagan's autodrome and F. Wilson's ark. Traylen's earlier (wooden) lighthouse slip stood at the fork of the Banbury and Woodstock Roads, and on the opposite side were Billy William's Wheel and H.P. Studt's autodrome. The power units were largely Armstrong Saurers, engines were down to four (Thurston's "Unity" and "Alexandra", and Wilson's "King George V" and "Queen Mary"—all Burrells).

Following Oxford, and almost concurrently, Barnet; the usual run of back-end fairs was resumed more-or-less exactly, both in the Home Counties and elsewhere. Goose Fair had

1942 Holiday-at-Home Fair, Bath.





George Irvin's gallopers centre being raised, Pinner, 15.6.43.

Billy Smart's Foden diesel tractor and dodgem loads leaving Ealing Common 16.4.44. Note the war-time emergency water tank on the right.



37 adult machines, and Hull 33; and these are believed to have been about the pre-war numbers.

The start of the 1946 season saw the first of a trickle of new riding machines, produced under considerable difficulties of labour and materials shortages. At the end of March, all eyes were on Billy Smart's pre-Easter fair in Southall Park; not least because a supporting attraction was to be a circus presented by him. The gala premiere took place on 5th April; a prestigious occasion involving among others Tommy Handley and many of the "I.T.M.A." company; but Smart had about eight adult machines at that time, and few people would then have predicted either the extent of the future growth of the circus or the way in which the tail would soon be wagging the dog. However, Southall Park also saw the debut of a quartet of new machines acquired by Billy Smart; namely an Eli Wheel, a dodgem track, and two devices whose like the writer had never seen before, and which were believed to be entirely novel as far as travelling fairs in the U.K. were concerned: namely an octopus and a dive bomber.

The dodgem track, built by Lang Wheels, largely followed the established "round-ended" layout, but differed considerably in superstructure construction. Uprights, handrails, top gates, principals, net frames, and even the roundings were made of steel. Only the ground

plates and trimmers were of timber. Another brand-new device seen at Smart's fairs at that time was Joe Stevens' Lang Wheels juvenile autodrome; likewise employing steel in its construction wherever the use of desperately scarce timber could be avoided.

New dodgem tracks of similar construction to Smart's, essentially differing only in length, were supplied at the same time, or soon after, to Harry Gray; Tommy Holland; S. Forrest and R. Keeble. It was not until the following year that the revolutionary Supercar alloy structure first appeared.

The first post-war adult round ride seen by the writer was a Lang Wheels autodrome, in Olympia at Christmas 1946. It resembled their 1939 autodrome design in basic layout and had the same odd number of cars (eleven), but the shutters, uprights, handrails, etc. were of metal, somewhat resembling those of the contemporary dodgem referred to above. The extension front had a skyscraper design executed in part-relief.

1946 also saw the beginning of post-war transport changes. Sidney Harrison exhibited the first Scammell "Showtrac" at St. Giles' Fair, Oxford, in the September; it was demonstrated driving John Thurston's Ben Hur. Coincidentally, it was with that firm of caterers, *and* at that fair, that the writer first saw any kind of World War II military vehicle working with a showman. John Thurston had three heavy Diamond T tank

Blackheath, Easter 1940: the last year of the pit and the last season for Billy Nichols' Burrell No. 1887 (23.3.40).



transporter tractors in service by then (his fourth was commissioned later). Very shortly afterwards, H.P. Studt acquired and put to work a Scammell "tea pot" tank transporter tractor. These were followed in the later 'forties by a flood of military vehicles; mostly medium artillery tractors (A.E.C. Matadors and F.W.D. Succoes), but there were many Scammells and Macks, as well as a few Diamond Ts and a handful of other makes. Many of these vehicles were in "as new" condition, built to exacting war office specifications, and well suited to the showman's needs. They certainly struck a blow at the survival of the showman's steam road engine. A count of the "steamers" reliably reported in service with showmen during 1946 (not necessarily all that season) had totalled 84 for and Home Counties area accounted for 20. But equivalent totals for 1947 were only about half these figures, and there was a further drastic reduction in 1948.

Finally, a further note about Blackheath. Mention has been made earlier of the pre-war "pit" being filled with rubble from bombed sites,

the fairs being accommodated on nearby land as from Easter 1941. That alternative served until August 1947 inclusive; the filled-in pit was considered by then to be satisfactorily consolidated, and as from Easter 1948 the fair returned to its traditional site. There was criticism of that decision at the time, on the grounds that the fill had been bombed-site debris and rubble. South-east London knew very well that every major bombing incident had presented mortuary staffs with grim jigsaw puzzles incapable of complete solution.

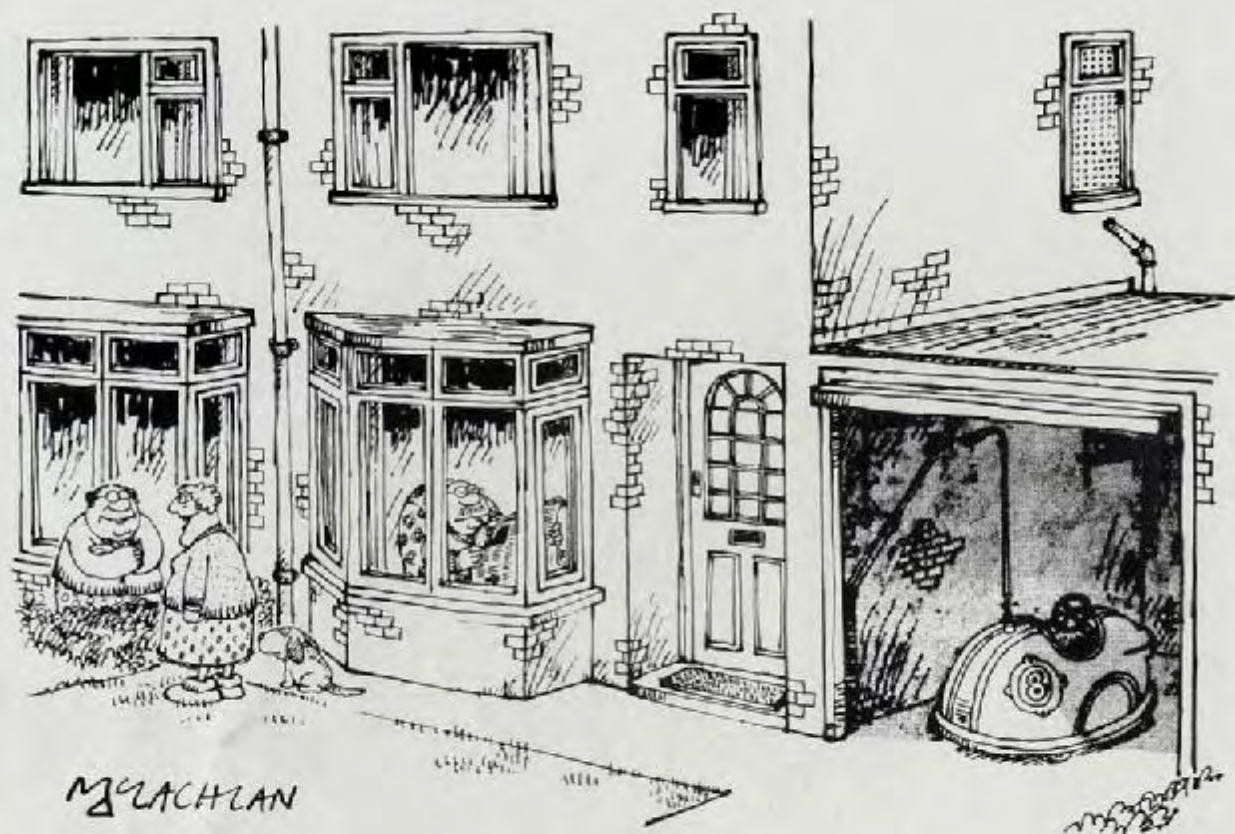
Those late mid-forties were austere years indeed. Restrictions, controls and rationing were still very much part of living, in fact for a while bread was rationed; something that had never happened in this country before; in times of war, let alone of peace.

Far worse, roll film on which to try to record fairground developments seemed to become even scarcer than during hostilities.

But the War was over, and it was all a long time ago.

Philip W. Bradley

Reproduced by kind permission of Private Eye.



"Arthur loves his new job with the fairground – gets a company car as well"



Nottingham 1981 (Bernard Mitchell).

TRANSPORT

Delightful

South Yorkshire's claim to fame is perhaps its coal resources, with coal mines and pit shafts prominent in the landscape. It was between two such coal shafts that I found what can only be described as a fairground enthusiast's delight.

The story started with my own desire to own and preserve a vintage vehicle. I had been told of a South Yorkshire vehicle breaker who had an Albion lorry of suitable vintage and was prepared to sell it. I am perhaps fortunate in having a friend who was trained at Albion. I persuaded him to come with me to the yard to inspect the lorry and report on its condition. So it was on a bright and sunny July afternoon we set off to find the yard. On contacting the owner, we were shown over the Albion, which turned out to be a mobile shop of 1954 vintage. The condition of the vehicle was remarkably good in view of its age. The owner asked us if we would like to see round the yard. As soon as we were through the gate we spotted a Foden S20 K Type lettered "Eddys Fairground Amusements". "That's fairground",

The Tilling and Stevens, complete except for the dynamo.

was my remark. "Oh yes", said the owner, "If you think that's good come and see these." Rounding a corner we were greeted by rows of vehicles, many of them with a Showland history.

First there was the ex Jonah Jones' Tilling and Stevens, complete except for the dynamo; next a 6 wheel ex W.D. Retriever of Arnold Bros., this vehicle was in bad condition and minus its engine; then came another ex W.D. Albion CX 22 tractor once used by Shufflebottoms. Lings 8 legger is perhaps the most recent addition to the yard. Two very interesting vehicles are two Fordson lorries, not ex fairground but well worth preserving. Many one arm bandits litter the yard but all have suffered from the elements. There are many more interesting vehicles in the yard, ex W.D. Hipoos, fire engines etc.

The owner will discuss the sale of any vehicle at a price we can all afford. There is one snag for those interested: the yard has been visited in the past by so called enthusiasts whose only aim was to steal the badges, etc., from the lorries. However, I explained the Fairground Association to him and he has agreed that any



serious visitor to the yard would be welcome to discuss a purchase. But at the first sign of any more vandalism the lot gets cut up, there is no walking round just for the sake of it. One final point, the yard boasts a large warehouse full of vintage parts for cars and lorries—everything from spark plugs to body parts and fire bells. If you are looking for a spare part this could be the place for you.

Malcolm Slater

Any member seriously interested (remember—no time wasters, please) in these vehicles should contact Malcolm at 7 Malvern Close, Huntington, York, telephone York 760837.

Truckin' on

Up until a few years ago you could walk on to any fairground and find plenty of ex W.D. vehicles and typical showmen's purpose built lorries, but owing to the recession, with second hand lorries being so cheap, it is very difficult to find these older and more interesting vehicles. So I have been looking through my 1981 photographs to find out just how many are left.

1. This is the last Maudsley on the grounds, first registered in 1948 (JXL 198) it is travelled in the Essex area by the Elliot family. Other

unique vehicles are the E.R.F. of J. Rowland (HCV 857) complete with tail-lift, which they use with their arcade, the GUY of E. Shipley that tours the north east (JVH 735). Still travelling Yorkshire, the oldest lorry on the fairgrounds, is a pre-war Leyland (JPP 458) owned by Mr. Williams. Two extremely good examples of the Foden DG that remain are Mrs. Chapman's (JX 8426) and Reuben Williams' (GMB 481). Until 1981 Scotland boasted one, that of Salvona and Evans (ANV 436).

2. This ex W.D. Leyland is used to transport F. Proctors' Chairplanes (YWY 138 G), a similar Leyland is used by Mrs. Holland in the East Midlands with sideshows (JWA 703). Another Ex W.D. lorry of great interest is the Commer that accompanies George Scarrot's Dodgems (DDG 641 C). A.E.C. Matadors were very popular with showmen and there are still quite a few, still pulling them out of the mud, mainly in the London area. Recorded in 1981 were A. Cole (JPO 932), J. Conely (GFH 108), T. Smith (GUR 827), Mrs. Searle (DGT 8 H), F. Dean (MPE 740), G. Rogers (PDD 781 M), T. Wilson (FWP 899) and Mrs. Amer's. Customised versions are owned by R. Armstrong, Dobson Bros. and Stokes (Hants.). Another useful vehicle to showmen was the Scammell Pioneer, but apart from





2

3



the brief appearance of Traylens' at Oxford St. Giles, only two are now travelling, Freeman's in Wales (HUH 422) and P. Cole's (837 TYD), though the latter has perhaps another three in his yard.

3. Also with the Cole family's Waltzer is this Thorneycroft (EAN 725) a very rare breed.

When I next write I shall take a look at the influx of foreign trucks that are on the grounds, and catch up on the growing numbers of Foden S80's that have been used on the fairgrounds in the last year.

Rod Jesson

Bude September

Following the annual Barnstaple Fair in Devon, it is certain that as sure as night follows day, a section of Anderton and Rowland's Fair will roll West down the A39 to Bude, in North Cornwall, for their last fair in the county for the season.

Nowadays the amusements are confined to the hard standing of the wharf car park, but in earlier days the fair occupied additional grassed areas outside the wharf and castle grounds.

In 1976 however, the Council banned the use of these areas so the attractions now use the wharf only. Some of the biggest fairs at Bude were held in the 1960s, and when there was a spare week between Barnstaple and Bridgwater Fairs, Bude was a useful event to fill in.

During one of these years we had the pleasure of having C. Wynn's Sensational Rotor, which built up on a triangle of grass outside the primary school; on another grass area outside the wharf was Wally Shufflebottom's Toboggan Ride, and further along again his famous Wild West Show, and Johnny Scotts Ghost Train.

Also attending in the 1960s period, in the wharf area, were T. Whitelegg & Sons Big Wheel, and A.C. Whitelegg's Octopus and Trabant. These would have either been open at Summercourt mid-week, or en route to Summercourt, after Bude. When Summercourt Fair was mid-week, then they came up to Bude for the last couple of days. Also attending, and a regular visitor until 1975, was Mrs. E. McKeowen and Sons famous Boxing and Wrestling Show, and also their Novelty Shows.

Making its first visit to Bude in 1970 was W.J. Studt's Cyclone Twist, which was present again in 1971 and 1972. In 1972 Anderton and Rowland's No. 1 Dodgems deputised for the No. 2 Track which was away in Dorset at Stourpaine Buses. During this rare visit to Bude by the No. 1 Track, Ernest Devey recalled that the last time he was at Bude was in 1938, when he was in charge of the Noah's Ark. He recalled that then the tenants had included Capt. Rowland with his Dodgem Track, and the Smith family of Plymouth with their Gallopers.

In 1973 Bob Phipps presented his Octopus

for the first time, and has been a regular visitor to the present day. In 1976 Mrs. Daisy Squires Astronaut Rotor put in an appearance, whilst returning in 1977 was Wally Shufflebottom with a Fun House, and Werewolf Show.

In 1980 Tommy Charles Jnr's Ghost Train made its first visit, and attended again in 1981, bringing us right up to date in 1981, Anderton and Rowland's latest attraction, the Skyrider Tilting Paratrooper.

Turning to transport, several interesting items come to mind from the earlier fairs; Anderton and Rowland's Scammell 6 wheel flat lorry "Demetrius" BLT 235, 'S' type Bedford van YDV 397 "Genghis Khan", the late Nelson Devey's Scammell 6 wheel box van BXC 322, and the late George Devey's Leyland living van, DGY 200.

With A.C. Whitelegg's Octopus was an 8 wheel Foden luton, in turquoise blue with "Coast to Coast" on the sides; down with the shows was Wally Shufflebottom's 6 wheel ex-Army tractor, a Mack, I believe.

An item of transport that stands out from the tenants/stallholders section was N. Codona's Leyland Comet and matching living wagon, a magnificent outfit with a livery of beige with red wheel arches, in later visits a Bedford with box body replaced the Leyland. This family used to visit the West country regularly and when at Bude presented a large hoopla part of which was rings/blocks on a green baize cloth, the other part the punter threw coins onto discs, which if landed in the right place set off a bell and lighting up the amount won.

Catering for younger patrons at the 1960s fairs and until 1971, was that classic juvenile ride, the Buzz-Bomb, presented by Anderton and Rowland.

Nigel Vanstone

Sales

Magazines

Back numbers currently available:

Vol 1 No. 3 30p (40p)

Vol 2 No. 3 40p (50p)

Vol 3 No. 1 50p (60p); No. 2 50p (60p);

No. 3 50p (60p); No. 4 75p (£1.00)

Vol 4 No. 1 70p (80p); No. 2 75p (£1.00)

No. 3 70p (80p).

Plus 20p postage and packing per magazine.

Please note: the figures in brackets indicate the price to non-members.

Badges

Gilt metal badge of the Mercury motif with fastening suitable for use as lapel or tie pin.

Price: £1.00 plus strong (5" x 7") s.a.e.

Car Stickers

Plastic, size 6" x 4", printed in four colours, 20p plus s.a.e.

All available from the Sales Officer, Paul Angel, 8 Hampton Street, St James, Hereford.
Telephone: Hereford 66288

Ads

This column is free to members. Send details of your sales or wants to the Editor, typed if possible.

Colour photographs of fairground rides and transport. Send s.a.e. for December 1981 list to: A.E. Davies, 64 McKinnell Crescent, Rugby, Warks. CV21 4AU.

There are still a few sets of assorted photos, b & w and colour, featuring rides, transport, organs and engines. All surplus to requirements. Will clear in lots of 10 cards for £1. C.W.O. Also, new list of 1981 fairground and rally photos now available. For free copy send large s.a.e. to Paul Angel, 8 Hampton Street, St James, Hereford.

Fairground Model Plans—fully detailed plans and building instructions for many popular fairground rides, organs and transport items. Send s.a.e. for lists please to Vic King, Model Fair Designs, 187, The Avenue, Kennington, Oxford, OX1 5RN, or telephone Oxford 735828.

Coloured photos of showmen's engines, steam wagons, fair organs, rides (inc. 60 sets of

Gallopers) and transport. 1981 list now available. Send 1st class stamp to Terry Darby, 26 Old Kiln Road, Flackwell Heath, High Wycombe, Bucks.
Tel: 06285 23375.

Record!

The Association's Bell & Howell cassette tape recorder (both mains and battery powered) is available to any member wishing to record interviews in connection with any personal project. It is hoped that such recordings would be transcribed for eventual publication in the Mercury and that the tape would form part of a library held by the Association. One obvious use is in recording the recollections of some of our older showfolk. The recorder is in the custody of Rod Spooner to whom application for its use should be made. Rod can be contacted at 7 Lansdowne Road, Studley, Warks., telephone Studley 3869.

Cine film

In order to create a library of films which can be used for Association events it has been decided by your committee to invest in a stock of Super 8 colour film. This film will be available free of charge to members with their own, or access to a cine camera, who would like to participate in the formation of such a library. Members wishing to take advantage of this scheme should contact the Secretary, Rod Jesson at 3 Warwick Close, Studley, Warks., telephone Studley 3482 for further details.

W.F.

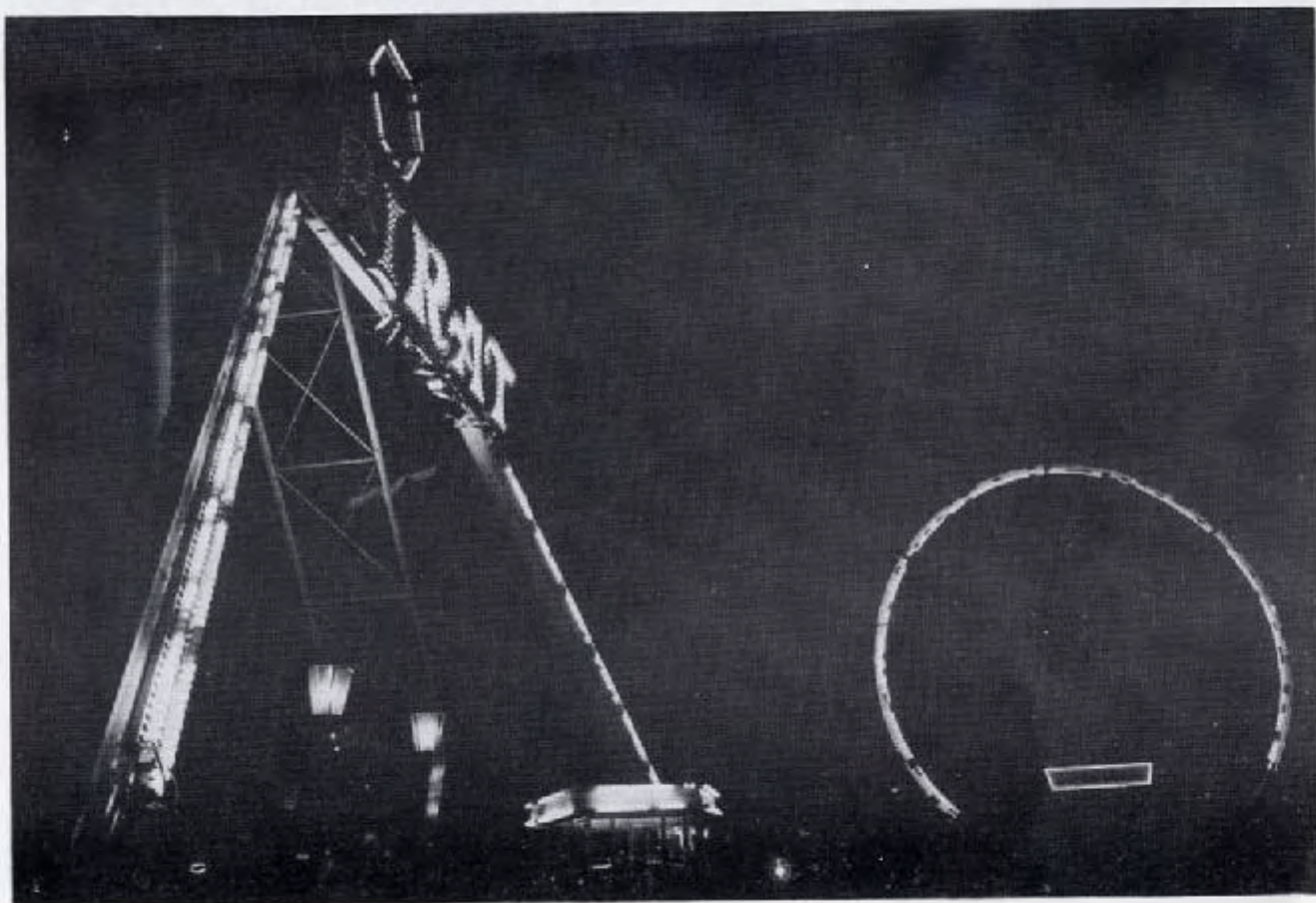
As you will have noticed, Jim Lawson is now responsible for the compilation of the regular F.A.G.B. Newsletter which appears in the World's Fair. The purpose of this column is to maintain regular contact with members between issues of this magazine. Jim will be pleased to receive details of any item—social events, special trips, exhibitions, etc.—that can be included in the Newsletter. He can be contacted at 11 Merton Avenue, Syston, Leicester, telephone Leicester 609804.

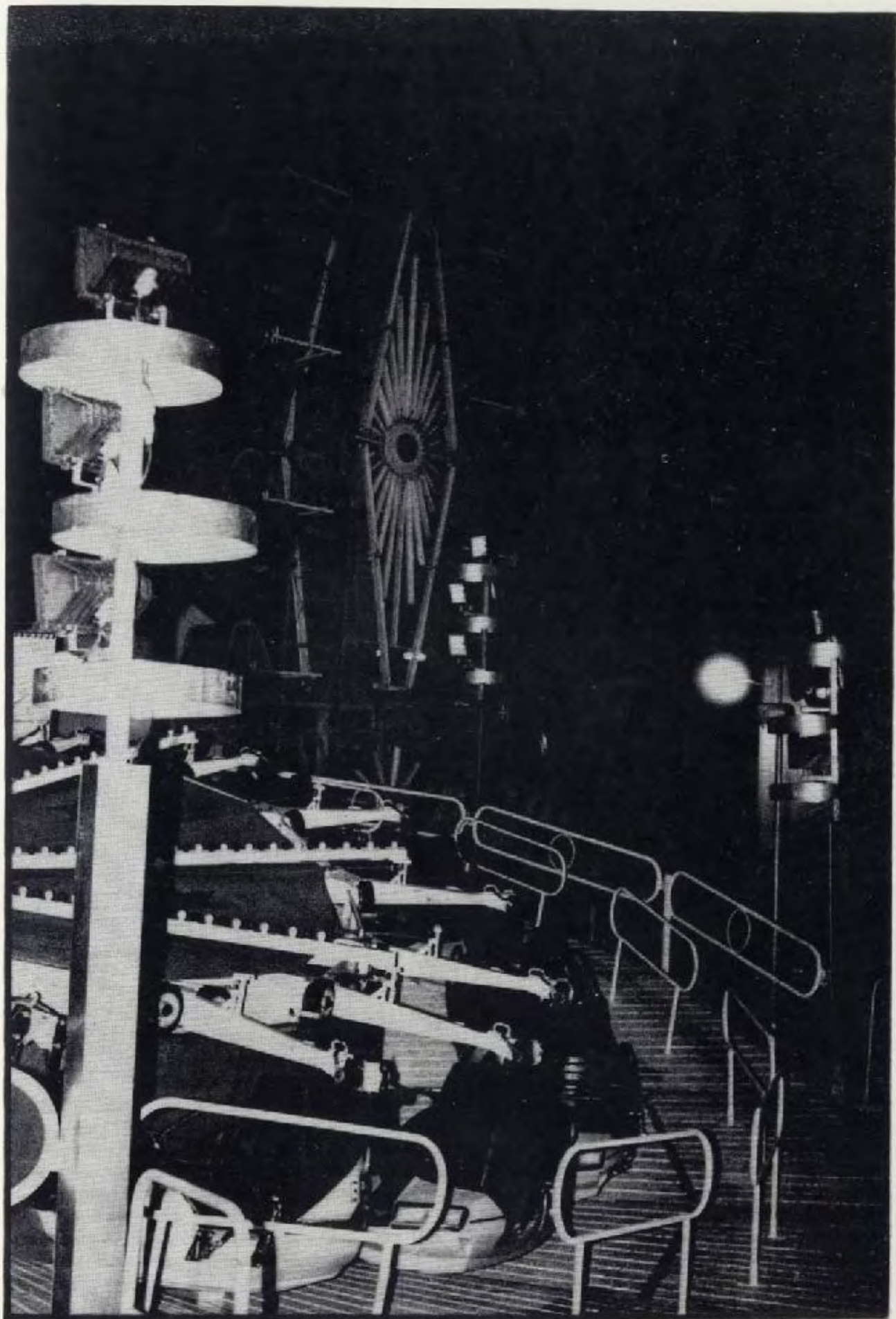


The Fairground Association

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
New Imperial Hotel, Birmingham
Sat. 30 January '82 2.30 p.m.

Dynamic duo: the Pirat and Super Loops, Hull 1981 (Bernard Mitchell).





After hours. Loughborough 1981 (Bernard Mitchell).

