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25 - 4 - 83

MR. LARRY GAVETTE,  
4080 LEDGESTONE,  
WATERFORD,  
MICHIGAN, 48045,  
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Gavette, You ask how did it all start, well way back in 1946 my Father bought a children's platform type roundabout and he gave me the job of operating it. I had just left school at the age of 14 years old. During my school days I had worked on the Fairground at weekends and Summer Holidays and I really enjoyed it. Therefore all though my Father had a Garage where he did Motor Car repairs, he <sup>thought</sup> I would be better operating the Roundabout in the Summer and work in the Garage in the Winter. There was 2 or 3 other platform Rides on the Fairground, so during the Summer I help my Father to convert the platform Ride into a Flying Chair Ride. We made the chairs on rainy days and fitted them one Sunday Morning. In those days you couldn't open till 2 p.m. on Sunday, therefore we didn't lose any



business during the conversion.

I had a short lapse of interest, I decided that I wanted to work in the Garage full time. I wanted to finish work at 5pm and have weekends off, therefore my interest in Amusement Catering had gone, so at the end of the Summer Father sold the Roundabout. My Father had got more interested and he went for a day out with Mother to Belle Vue, which is a Zoo and Amusement Park at Manchester and there he saw an Elephant, the real live kind, giving rides to the children and the idea struck him, being a mechanically minded man he decided that a mechanical Elephant would be more in his line and he was going to build one.

He did mention to me on his return about this idea but I showed little interest. The following Sunday while having lunch my Father said, I have started to build it, build what I said, and he replied, the Mechanical Elephant, oh! I said, have you, showing little interest. I couldn't resist going down to the Garage to see what he meant. He had gone down to the Scrap Yard and.



③ purchased some old iron bedsteads, and with the angle iron from these he had made a frame for the Elephant. Several weeks went by and with the help of a friend he built the first Mechanical Elephant. I didn't think they had made a good enough job of the Head, therefore when Father started to build the second one I decided it was time I gave it a little of my attention and from then on I was just as involved as father and we went on to make other things, something new every year.

During the Summer of 1947 we operated two Mechanical Elephant on the Beach at Morecambe, one on the Central Beach and one at the West end Beach. During the following year we also built and operated on the Beach Sausy Sue a Paddle Steamer which ran on wheels, it was named after a Paddle Steamer which appeared on T. V. in a Childrens program at that time. We went on to build and operate Trackless Trains The first proto type which was like a Steam Locomotive, wasn't rusefull, with 4 big



④ driving wheels and 2 ~~small~~ small wheels at the front, we had difficulty in steering it. I suggested that we made it like an American Diesel Electric, 4 wheels at the back and 4 wheels of the same size at the front which steered. This idea was successful. My Father and I made quite a number of these.

I was called up for National Service in the R.A.F. and ~~when~~ during this ~~time~~ time I help Father build several Tractor Trains, when every I was on leave or had a long weekend pass. I was stationed 180 miles away but I managed to get home in my little AUSTIN ~~2~~ 7 CAR about every 6 weeks. When I was demobbed I intended to carry on as before, but Father said are you going to get a job or work for your self. I decided I would carry on building Tractor Trains myself, and although Father had left me to fend for myself, he allowed me to use his Workshop. Father had sold his Motor Repair business and he just had a Workshop for building and maintaining his



⑤ Rides. He now had in addition to the two Rides on the beach, a miniature Railway on lines at Heydon Head and a Miniature Railway on lines at Happy Mount Park, all in the Morecambe area. We still worked together & help him on his projects in return for the use of his workshop. I manufactured ~~train~~ Tracked Train and sold them, ~~and~~ I exported one to South Africa. I also operated one at Redcar which is on the other side of England 100 miles from here. I also operated a Train on lines on the Fairground. I made a body for the Jet Plane my father made. The body was mounted on the chassis on hydraulic jacks. and when you moved off you could jack the front up as if it was taking off, then jack the back up as if in level flight and lower the front as if diving to land, then lower the back.

Just going back to 1949, Father went to Brighton, where he met a Mr Johnson who built and operated Miniature Buses. Father bought 2 of these which he operated along



⑥ ride the miniature railway at Heydon Head. They carried 4 children and you had to ~~lift~~ lift them in. I always wanted to improve on them and in 1958 I built a miniature bus which went to Canada. It carried 12 children and they could step in the doorway and walk down the aisle just like a real bus.

Father also ~~made some~~ bought some miniature cars and put a petrol engine in them and a drop arm from the track rod which ran in a sunken guide rail, these he operated with the Miniature Railway at Happy Moments Park and he also build some go karts to operate on the beach for the older children that were capable of steering themselves.

I would be 1950 when I made the coaches and a streamline Coronation Scot Body for the steam locomotive Crossi which my Father bought and fitted a petrol engine to it, but after several years wear and tear he thought he would make a miniature American Diesel Electric. Therefore he got one of the boggies of the type we had on the coaches and.



⑦ He mounted a petrol engine on it, which had a centrifugal clutch. When he started it up for a test in the Workshop he didn't realise that there wasn't a throttle return spring on it. The ~~was~~ vibration of the engine when he started it, shook the throttle open and with increased revs the dam thing start to chase him across the Workshop. I took a dive and grabbed the tie bar (which are at each end of the bogie, holding the side plate apart) and it dragged me across the Workshop, my weight stalled it down and fortunately when it stopped pinning Farther to the wall all the damage was two bruised legs, instead of two broken ones.

It was Xmas, I was on leave and Farther had mounted a childrens Tricycle on two pontoon float. I volunteered to test it out on the Canal. Farther was cautious he tied a rope to it, but the tricycle was mounted a little too far back and the rear of the floats was just underwater. When I pedaled



⑧ out to the middle of the canal. Farther  
shouted, that's enough. I felt it was a  
little bit unstable and turn round shouting  
to him dont pull the rope, but this  
through my weight to the rear and  
before I knew what was happening the  
whole thing caprized and I was  
underwater, Xmas time with snow on the  
ground, not an ideal time for a swim  
especially clad in a thick jumper and  
a duffle coat. Yes these were happy  
time and the most interesting time of my  
life. I have never forgotten them and I  
often think I might have another go at  
this kind of thing and I might do that  
because I have recently bought a workshop  
in partnership with a young fellow and we  
are going to build Car Trailers and who  
knows what else. Although I have spent  
most of my life in the Motor Trade I have  
recently sold my Garage and bought a



(9) Furniture shop. and I am hoping this business will give me a little spare time and with a workshop available and a young fellow who doesn't mind how many hours he puts in who knows.

I don't know whether all the content of this letter will be of interest to you but it has been pleasant for me to recall all the memories. I would be interested to know what sort of man takes an interest in Mechanical Elephants, do you use them to promote your business or may be you operate ~~the~~ them giving children rides. or is it just a hobby

By the way Mr Jack Law a builder whom I bought a house off many years ago, rang me and told me, his son Mr Michael Law of Walsley York, England, had heard that you wanted to get in touch with me. I presume you know this man and will have his address but if not I could get it for you.



(10) Sorry I have been so long in answering,  
but now I have wrote the letter, I will  
sign off and attache another sheet with  
Technical details and some answers to  
your question which the letter may not  
have given

Yours Truly.

Eric Smith



①

MECHANICAL ELEPHANT.

INVENTED AND BUILT BY MR. FRANK SMITH  
KING STREET, GARAGE.  
MORECAMBE  
YEAR 1947

PATENTED BY MR. FRANK SMITH. AN OFFER OF £5000  
WAS MADE TO HIM BY A GROUP OF LOCAL BUSINESSMEN  
FOR THE PATENT ~~WITH MR. SMITH~~ ON CONDITION THAT  
MR SMITH WOULD MANAGE THE COMPANY WHICH  
WOULD MANUFACTURE AND OPERATE THE MECHANICAL  
ELEPHANTS. MR. SMITH REFUSED THE OFFER, BUT  
ACCEPTED THE OFFER OF £1000 ~~£~~ FOR THE PATENT  
WITH NO PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT.

MACADES WAS THE NAME OF THE COMPANY FORMED  
BY THE PURCHASES OF THE PATENT A MR WADE,  
MR MAC???? MR JAMES WILSON AND A MR R.W. TOOLE  
WERE INVOLVED. MACADES HAD ELEPHANTS MADE BY  
FRANK STUART AND ALSO LUNESIDE ENGINEERING  
OF HALTON WHICH IS ABOUT 7 MILES FROM MORECAMBE  
A MR BENIRSKI IS THE PROPRIETOR OF LUNESIDE  
ENGINEERING AND I BELIEVE HE REMEMBERS THIS  
VENTURE

FRANK STUART WAS THE MAKER OF THE BIGGER  
WALKING VERSION, BUT I BELIEVE IT WAS AN  
INFRINGEMENT OF THE PATENT. THIS COULD BE  
WHY HE SOLD THEM ABROAD.

ONE OF FRANK STUARTS MECHANICAL ELEPHANT  
WAS FOUND ON THE SCRAP HEAP AND SOMEONE



② REBUILT IT AND IT APPEARED ON T.V. B.B.C.  
"BLUE PETER" PROGRAM. THE B.B.C. WROTE TO THE  
"VISITOR" WHICH IS THE LOCAL PAPER AND THEY  
RUN A FEATURE ON IT APPEALING FOR INFORMATION  
WHICH I GAVE THEM AND THEY DID A FOLLOW UP.  
THIS WAS JANUARY 1977. NOW OF COURSE THE  
MORECAMBE GUARDIAN THE OTHER LOCAL PAPER  
HAVE DONE EXACTLY THE SAME THING.  
MR FRANK SMITH MY FATHER BUILT JUST THREE  
MECHANICAL ELEPHANT AND I DONT KNOW WHAT HE  
DID WITH THEM, THERE IS ONE POSSIBILITY. A MR  
HART OF ST. ALBANS BOUGHT QUITE A LOT OF  
RIDES FROM MY FATHER AND I, BUT I DO NOT NOW  
HAVE HIS ADDRESS. THERE IS ONE SURVIVER SOMEWHERE  
BECAUSE ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO A MAN FROM THE  
POST OFFICE, POST CODE DEPARTMENT, RANG ME  
AND SAID HE HAD HIRE A MECHANICAL ELEPHANT  
AND THE MAKER NAME F. SMITH & SON, KING ST.  
MORECAMBE WAS STILL ON IT. MR HART'S BUSINESS  
WAS THE HIRING OF RIDES, HE DIDNT OPERATE ON  
PERMINENT SITE, THAT WHY I SAY MR HART OR  
WHO EVER MAY RUN THE BUSSINESS NOW IS A POSSIBILITY  
THE MAN FROM THE POST OFFICE WANTED TO  
BUY AN ELEPHANT, THERE MOTO DONT FORGET THE  
POST CODE, I THINK HE MAY HAVE WANTED A KNOT  
IN THE TRUNK. I DONT KNOW JUST WHICH OFFICE  
HE IS FROM, I KEEP MEANING TO FIND OUT



③ I COULD TRACE THE ONE HE HIRED. AT THAT TIME I DIDNT HAVE FACILITIES TO MAKE ONE SO I PUT HIM IN TOUCH WITH LUNESIDE ENGINEERING

I DO NOT HAVE ANY PLAN OR DRAWING, JUST WHAT IS IN MY HEAD. I MADE THE DRAWINGS FOR FATHER TO SUBMIT TO THE PATENT OFFICE BUT WE DIDNT KEEP A COPY, BUT IF FATHER DID HAVE THEM COPIES HE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE GIVEN THEM TO MACADES

THE SKIN WAS BARRAGE BALLOON FABRIC ~~WITH~~ WHICH WAS STUCK ON A FRAME,  $3/4$ " TUBE AND  $1/8$ " WELDING WIRE AND PAINTED OVER WITH BOSTIC AND WHEN DRY I THINK WE MUST HAVE PAINTED IT GREY THE TOES WERE SEA SHELLS THE EYES WOULD BE PLASTIC, MADE BY A DENTIST WHO WAS A CUSTOMER, WE SERVICED HIS CAR. THE EYES AND EARS WERE MADE TO MOVE WITH A WINDSCREEN WIPER MOTOR.

THE TUSKS WERE STEEL TUBE TAPERED AT THE END THERE WAS A HOLE IN THE SIDE OF THE HEAD WHICH WAS USED AS A HANDLE TO STEER IT BY, AND JUST IN SIDE WAS A THROTTLE LEVER AND A STARTER BUTTON. YOU START IT UP AND AWAY IT WOULD GO AS IT WAS PERMENTY LEFT IN GEAR. ALTHOUGH FOR MAINTIANENCE YOU COULD PUT IT OUT OF GEAR. THEN BY SQUEEZING THE MOTORCYCLE TYPE HANDLEBAR LEVER YOU COULD INCREASE ITS SPEED BY PULLING OR PUSHING THE HEAD FROM SIDE TO SIDE YOU STEERED IT.



④ THE HEAD WAS ATTACHED TO THE MAIN FRAME BY AN AUSTIN 7 STUB AXLE MOUNTED IN THE CENTRE E.G. THE TURNING OF THE HUB ON THE WHEEL BEARING WAS STEERING. THE KING PIN MOVEMENT WAS THE SUSPENSION. IN OTHER WORDS THE STUB AXLE WAS POINTING TO THE GROUND, VERTICAL

THE BODY APART FROM ITS REAR END WAS COVERED BY THE SEAT ON TOP AND CURTAINS DRAPED ACROSS UNDER THE SEAT, THESE COULD BE REMOVED TO EXPOSE THE POWER UNIT.

INSIDE THE ~~FRONT~~ FRONT ~~WHEEL~~ LEG WHERE WHEELS WITH LARGE BALLOON TYRES, EX WAR DEPT. I THINK AEROPLANE WHEELS, PROBABLY TAIL WHEELS IN SIDE THE REAR LEG WHERE WHEELBARROW TYPE WHEELS, TWO TO EACH LEG WITH A CHAIN SPOCKET MOUNTED IN BETWEEN.

THE POWER UNIT WAS AN AUSTIN 7 ENGINE AND GEAR BOX WITH A SHORTENED PROP SHAFT DRIVING A CUT DOWN AUSTIN 7 ~~REAR~~ REAR AXLE WITH CHAIN SPOKET ATTACHED TO EACH END AN AUSTIN 7 RADIATOR WAS USED.

THE MAIN FRAME WAS MADE OF ANGLE IRON FROM OLD IRON BED STEADS.

THE 1" ROUND STEEL AXLES DID RUN ACROSS FROM ONE LEG TO THE OTHER AND HAD A ~~TIE~~ TIE BAR FROM ONE AXLE TO THE OTHER, POSSIBLY IT DIDN'T HELP THE APPEARANCE BUT NOBODY BOTHERED ABOUT THAT.



(9) IT IS POSSIBLE ~~WE~~ WE COULD HAVE GONE ON AND IMPROVED ON THE DESIGN BUT HAVING SOLD THE PATENT, WE LOOKED TO OTHER TYPES OF RIDES, WHICH I MIGHT ADD DIDN'T QUITE HAVE THE SAME NOVELTY VALUE BUT WERE MORE FINANCIALLY REWARDING WHEN OPERATED. BUT THIS COULD HAVE BEEN BECAUSE THE OTHER RIDES WE MADE CARRIED MORE CHILDREN AND IN ~~THE~~ MOST CASES THE ADULT COULD ALSO RIDE WITH THEM.

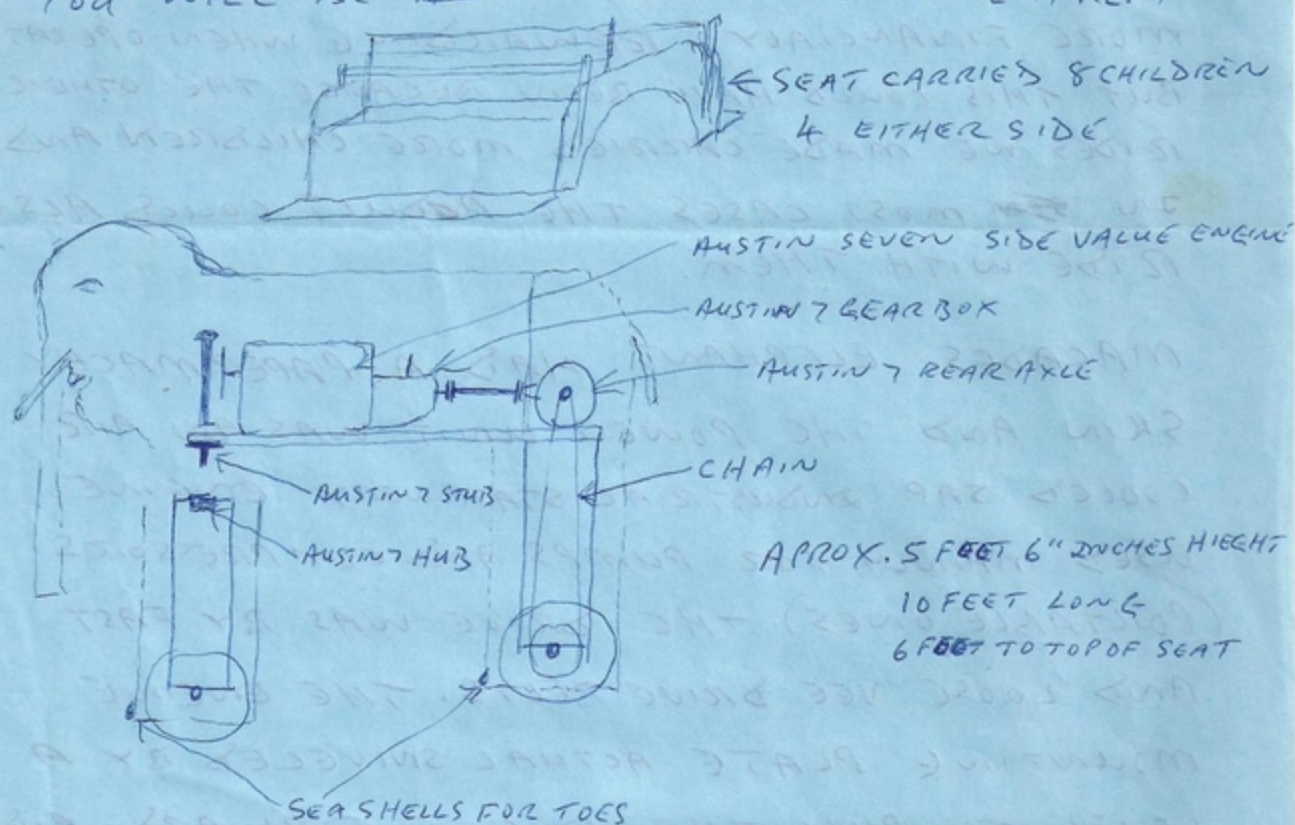
MACADES ELEPHANT HAD A PAPERMACHY SKIN AND THE POWER UNIT WAS AN AIR COOLED JAP INDUSTRIAL STATIONERY ENGINE USED MAINLY FOR PUMPS AND COMPRESSORS (PORTABLE ONES) THE DRIVE WAS BY FAST AND LOOSE VEE DRIVE BELTS. THE ENGINE MOUNTING PLATE ACTUALLY SNIVELED BY A LEVEL, TO PULL THE ENGINE FORWARD AND TIGHTEN THE BELTS

WE ADOPTED THIS TYPE OF ENGINE FOR OUR SANDTRIAN OR TRACKLESS TRIAN (ONE AND THE SAME) BUT WE USED A CENTRIFUGAL CLUTCH. MACADES DID HAVE AN ELECTRIC ELEPHANT BUILT BUT I CANNOT REMEMBER ~~ANY~~ ANYTHING ABOUT IT, I ONLY SAW IT ONCE FOR A FEW MINUTES.



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I WILL HAVE TO SEE WHAT ~~IF~~ I CAN DO  
ABOUT COPY'S OF PHOTO'S AND NEWSPAPER CUTTINGS  
BUT I WILL NOT HOLD THIS LETTER UP, I  
FEEL SURE, ALL THE EFFORT YOU HAVE GONE TO  
YOU WILL BE ~~BEING~~ ANXIOUSLY WAITING A REPLY



OPERATED ON MORECAMBE BEACH 1947 TO 1951

I AM NOT AS GOOD AS I ONCE WAS  
AT DRAWING I MEAN.

MY TELEPHONE NUMBER 0524 413064

JUST IN CASE THERE IS ANYTHING ELSE YOU  
WANT TO KNOW