

"Cornwood"
Combe Bank Drive
Sundridge,
Kent,
TN14 6AD

U.K.

27th August 83.

Dear Mr. Gavette

Frank Stuart, Thaxted
Mechanical Elephants

As an ex-sevceeman medical student
on vacation in Paignton - my home - I was hired by
Frank Stuart on 17th July 1981 to drive a big Genny.
On 25th July I went to Thaxted to see the "production
line" and pass out - and on the 28th set off
for Cleftonville, Margate with elephant and
stuff to make a fortune.

Being an English summer the
weather was uncertain - as was Genny's function.
I see comments in my diary like "clutch" "battery"
"4 springs" "copper wire" "battery" "brakes"
more certain was police interest which materialised
first on August 9th and became more frequent
and ~~more~~ official with requests for log books, licences
and warnings. I had no "Public Service Vehicle" licence
(for public transport vehicles) and the warnings became
more dire - with official photographs, and official
prohibition. Since Frank Stuart was gifted theatrically,
but less so administratively, it was an uncertain time
with me flaunting the law with the support of
the Council Officers. On September 3rd Genny
fractured a sleeve suspension and brought activity
to a close. Frank Stuart collected her on Monday
17th September. I returned to Medical School - no fortune
but good fun.
Yours
George Horatt [G.E. HORATT]

October 1, 1983

(1)

from DR. C.E. LOVATT, CORNWOOD, COMBE BANK DRIVE
SUNDRIDGE, KENT, U.K. TN14 6AD

Why did I write?

I was born in Paignton, grew up there, and my sister still lives in the house in which I was raised. She knew about the elephant and me, so took cuttings from

Herald and Express - 24th January 1983
- 7th February 1983
- 16th April 1983
(which gave your address)

} local paper
Torquay -
with whom you've
been in contact

Western Morning News 16th August 1983: refers to
(also a local Devonshire paper) the Exmouth one: going for £5000

Who employed me?

I should first say that the year was 1951, not 1981 as I mistakenly wrote in my letter.

I was home on vacation; I think there was an advert or newspaper notice saying "Drivers wanted" and as an ex RAF pilot, medical student on long vacation, I went to see what was what.

I met Jim Makin - photographed driving the large Jenny in the Herald & Express - and had a lot of time with him - and for him (he was a good chap). The name Karl Hellis is familiar but I had little if any thing to do with him.

I volunteered to join - Jim Makin - and (details escape me) met Frank Stuart when he came down & was hired for Margate.

over

Cleptonville is the "superior" end of Margate and the Winter Gardens - a theatre - is between the two. Hence the Margate elephant was 'mine' and any newsreel footage relates to 'my' elephant. However the news reel may have been filmed when the elephant arrived and probably shows Jim Makin, rather than me, as driver.

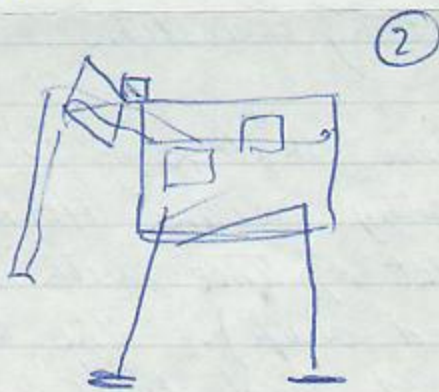
Thaxted - the factory!

The enclosed photo copies of letter heads show the firm's title. Frank Stuart had, for many years, prepared working animal models for stage shows - and was very gifted in producing life-like animals. Hence crocodiles, dragons & ultimately mechanical elephants all existed. People in the theatre of the time must have known about him & his creations - he was among the best. Probably used by Peter Van

I spent the 25, 26, 27 & 28 July in Thaxted waiting for completion of my Jenny. I saw the production line -!!!



NEAR COMPLETE
SKIN FIXING AND
COLOURING



ON THE WAY



BEGINNING

There were NO drawings. Man working on no 3 took measurements, by eye, from no 2, which was roughly (by eye) the same as no 1.

(2)
But each elephant ~~was~~ was a slightly different size. Because Frank Stuart was on the spot, continuous modification occurred. Jim Makin told me that earliest models did have moving heads but this, as you say, caused such a pain, that it was phased out of production. I think the artist in Frank Stuart went for reality, without realising that the wear & tear on a "working elephant" was greater than something creating a stage effect. A simpler - more robust - design might have been less of a "pain".

Frank Stuart was vague about the number of workers. Certainly 12-15 covered the fitters, joiners, etc making large metal models. However there may have been outworkers at home, sewing some of the fabrics.

I heard tales of elephants in South America (1 or 2 or 3) - details gone - and certainly several more (4 or 5) were in construction following my Jenny, which was different from the one in Pughton, in 1951 anyway. Whether all were finished I don't know.

I have no photos of Frank Stuart. I have an impression - see very bad sketch and jottings. Jim Makin said he was 65+, or even 70, at the time [I might be able to identify a photo]. Jim Makin trained me (!) and drove the truck that delivered Jenny & me to Margate. He drove Jenny off the truck and down the incline to the chosen site - which we changed later because of the police.

I'm glad he did because I was not that impressed with the braking system for $1\frac{1}{2}$ tons of Genny on a slope.

One elephant went to Scarborough, Yorkshire.

Mitchell and Maurice Radburn are not familiar to me.

My involvement was limited to 17th July to 17th Sept, 1951, after which I became a student again (being owed £12⁰⁰ pay and expenses)

What Genny did in Margate!

Apart from upsetting the police, she went out backwards and returned forwards in a straight line. The steering - as you must know - was limited and I never had room to define the turning circle.

I was no mechanic, had NO tools (bought some - eg. were £5^d 1¹¹ paint brushes 2.0.0.

Several lots of springs & axle
+ springs
spanners
screw driver
nuts & bolts
10" mole wrench

19.6.

12.6

Mostly I had to recharge the battery every 2 or 3 days

so I coped with minor repairs, but anything serious and I shouted for help.

She was not too reliable - and the strap brake steel was rapidly wearing

(3)

against the solid rubber wheel.

Exhaust through the trunk in mine
yes - vacuum line to change the
brakes from forward to reverse, but
as you know the brake mechanism was
essentially to engage in the rubber wheel
to permit the other moving leg to advance
Gave Jenny her head down a slope
and I don't see how you could stop
her except by throwing everything in
reverse and jumping clear as she went
base over apex. I don't recall any
red lights; one just heard the "his"
as they changed (and sometimes one didn't)
and that meant you would go the opposite
way.

I think each elephant was an original
(remember no plans nor specifications)
and could well have been modified
before it left the factory (based on reports
from the likes of me) (or how Frank Stuart felt.)

I was not impressed with the triple
horn either; it was not up to the
artistry of the model

Because of the police, registration particulars
of my Jenny were

Registration No R V X 7

Taxation class Private

Chassis no. 702003

Engine no Y397713

Dated 20 Nov 1950 - much to my surprise!

Incidentally, the police at RAMSGATE
Kent, took official police photographs

over

on 25th August 1951, and may still have some. I asked for copies after I returned to medical school but never got any.

I enclose a photocopy of one taken by the husband of the woman riding with the little girl - he lent me the negative.

I was on my own in Margate after Jim Makin delivered us.

I don't remember seeing a sales brochure.

SOLE RIGHTS OF "THE SILVER GATE" & "THE REALM OF HAPPINESS."
SOLE CONCESSIONAIRES IN THE U.K. FOR FRANK STUARTS ROBOT WALKING ELEPHANTS.

Stuart

FS/G

Fantasies

Ltd.

Directors :
FRANK STUART
JEAN STUART
ARTHUR FURBY

Secretary :
L. E. ELDRED
J. Stuart

LYRIC WRITERS
:: COMPOSERS ::
PLAYWRIGHTS

SETS DESIGNED
AND SCALE MODELS
PRODUCED

Regd Offices

Blue Gate Studios
Thaxted, Essex.

TELEPHONE : THAXTED 326

2nd August 1951.

Mr. G. E. Lovatt,
c/o Entertainments Department,
The Winter Gardens,
Cliftonville,
Margate.

Dear George,

Herewith money order for £8.5.1. (£8.10.0.
salary less 4/11 insurance). Would you let us have
your expenses list as soon as possible.

Just as soon as we know the position regarding
tax we shall make your salary the smallest possible
and the balance will be in expenses.

I hope you will have better success - do your
damdest - the spanners are on the way.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Stuart

Frank Stuart,

Stuart

FS/G

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~~W. H. H. H. H.~~
J. Stuart

Regd Offices

Blue Gate Studios
Thaxted. Essex.

TELEPHONE : THAXTED 326

14th September 1951.

Mr. G. Lovatt,
c/o The Entertainments Department,
Winter Gardens,
Margate.

Dear George,

You need not stay any longer in Margate.
Leave the elephant - we hope to collect it on Monday.
Would you kindly tell Mr. Rowlands.

Yours sincerely,

p.p. Frank Stuart
H.S.

Frank Stuart.

FRANK STUART

Theatrical Mask Maker

BLUEGATE STUDIO

THAXTED

Essex

PHONE—THAXTED 326

MAKER
of
COMEDY

Horses

Cows

Bulls

Donkeys

• • •

Cat Skins

Bear Skins

Dog Skins

Frog Skins

• • •

Spring Sides

Crinoline Steel

Ice Hockey Equipment

Giants Complete

Grotesque Costumes

Tights

• • •

Crocodiles

Dragons

• • •

Mechanical Elephants

Two Men Elephants

Single Elephants

• • •

MASKS

FANS

CANE WORK

Of every

DESCRIPTION

FS/JM

22nd. September, 1951.

G. Lovatt Esq.
London Hospital Students' Hostel,
Philpot Street,
London E.1.

Dear George,

Thank you for your letter from which I note the amount of money due to you. This will be paid next week, with the percentage I promised you, just as soon as I know what we have taken. I have had no statement from the Council, or a cheque, up to the moment, but I hope to get something just as soon as they wake up.

I must thank you for all the kindness, and the efficient manner in the way you left the elephant. Everything was in perfect order and, on trying the elephant up and down the parade, the matter which we thought to be serious turned out to be quite trivial.

However, I do hope you enjoyed your little change, and I do thank you very much for doing all you have for making the season a success.

We hope to have ten or twelve out next year, so if you know any enthusiastic elephant doctors do keep in touch with us.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Stuart

Brochure

FRANK STUART

Theatrical Mask Maker

BLUEGATE STUDIO

THAXTED

Essex

PHONE-THAXTED 326

383

MAKER
of
COMEDY

10. 8. 57.

Horses

Cows

Bulls

Donkeys

Cat Skins

Bear Skins

Dog Skins

Frog Skins

Spring Sides

Crinoline Steel

Ice Hockey Equipment

Giants Complete

Grotesque Costumes

Tights

Crocodiles

Dragons

Mechanical Elephants

Two Men Elephants

Single Elephants

MASKS

FANS

CANE WORK

Of every
DESCRIPTION

Dear Mr Lovatt.

Enclosed please find £12.
(Twelve Pounds) £7 for Darning £5

Towards's expenses. Mr Stuart will
be writing to you later, only we are
very rushed. Do hope Jennie will
be good.

Yours Sinc

F Stuart

PS We will have to arrange money's later
only having house at Scarborough + Panton
I am trying to run the office!!

DAVIE, PARSONS & Co.
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

L.E. PARSONS, F.C.A.
H.A. ESDEN, F.C.A.
F.A. PRATLEY, F.C.A.
E. RICHMOND, F.C.A.
W.O. NEWCOMB, A.C.A.

TELEPHONE: AVENUE 3753 (THREE LINES)
TELEGRAMS: DAVIPARACS, STOCK, LONDON.

6. Bishopsgate,

London, E.C.2

8th. November 1951.

Dear Sir (s)

STUART FANTASIES LIMITED.

I have to inform you that on 1st November 1951 I was appointed Receiver by the Debenture Holder of this Company. I can accept no responsibility for goods or services ordered unless such orders are given in writing by me or my duly authorised representative.

I shall be obliged if, for the purposes of record you will let me have a statement of any claim which you may have against the Company.

Yours faithfully,

W. O. NEWCOMB.

RECEIVER.

*Claim for
£12. for
17-28th July, 1951
included
14. 11. 51*

FEBRUARY 11th 1984

Franka Stuart & Elephants

YOUR LETTER 16 Nov 1983.

VARIOUS ITEMS

I lost touch with Jim Makin (a retiring chap) and Stuart on return to Medical School.

I think you are probably correct in that my year ¹⁹⁵¹ - with one elephant instead of three - was the second at Margate. I do not think too much went on in 1950 though. I agree that Karl Hellis drives the one in the brochure.

Never saw - nor heard of - water safe elephant. One of Stuart's "fantasies" I imagine. In 1951, mine was the only elephant in Margate ho - the man with flat cap, circled in your photocopy is NOT Mr Stuart. I would guess he was a holiday maker. Very strange that no photographs appear to exist.

In 1951, when I went to Thaxted, strip steel was being cut and drilled to make the internal frame.

I enclose the print of 'me and elephant' but have no idea of the name and address of the passengers. Please return when convenient.

Now that you remind me, it is possible that 'my' elephant was nearly if not completed when I arrived at Thaxted

over

I cannot be sure that it was not made in 1950 and being repaired.

The next point is that I do not recall actually checking the engine number against the registration book — nor can I remember the police doing so.

Like you, I'm sure Mr Stuart used one log book or registration book for more than one elephant.

Yes. ~~So~~, I do ~~not~~ think the photo is of Jim Makin. There was another driver in Scarborough, but if I ever knew him, I've forgotten (Have put Scarborough on back?

no — the suit I wore is the one in the print enclosed.

I think I can do little to add to your facts. For me it was a very transient — but worth while — experience; lasting less than 3 months. I'm fascinated to hear your story and impressed by your detective work. From what you say, Frank Stuart was in business after 8 November 1957, the date that I heard from the receiver of bankruptcy. In fact you suggest he was still building in 1972.

The photocopy of the photograph with ladder on the right, ~~is not~~ — I do not recognize the driver. Could it be me — remote and unlikely? Certainly not.

~~65+~~

65+ Perhaps 70

FRANK
STUART

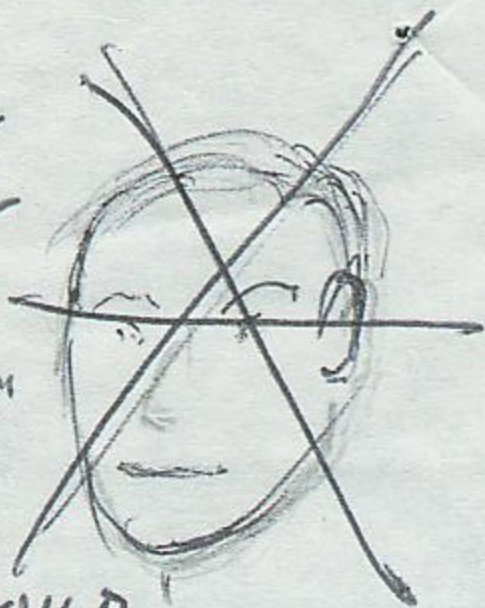
TALL
ABOUT 6'0"

MEDIUM BUILD.

PLUMP - BUT
NOT OBESE

TENDED TO
WEAR
BLUE
REEFER
JACKET

AND GREY FLANNEL
TROUSERS



THIN
SILVERY
GREY HAIR
~~- THIN -~~

PREFERRED

ROUNDISH FACE
+ NO NOSE