

FAIRGROUND DREAMS

by Philip Morgan



Bartholomew Fair by Thomas Rowlandson, c. 1808

You're twelve. You're bored. All you want to do is run away from the farm and join a fair: a proper fair. You've heard about Bartholomew Fair in London with its seven-legged horses, calves with two heads, prize-fighters, swordsmen, and wild beasts; that's where you want to be.

You've heard you can get work there. How an archaeologist called Giovanni Belzoni went to visit the fair in 1803 was spotted and hired by a showman and became a star billed as "The Patagonian Samson." Admittedly you aren't six foot seven but you are pretty good on the tin whistle. Perhaps if you went there, you'd be spotted among the fires, candles, oil lamps, drums, trumpets and spangled dancers and

could leave the farm at the foot of the Downs forever where the only excitement was the arrival of a new plough and the occasional visit of a foot-powered roundabout.

You can't even get across to the Sloe Fair in Chichester. Too far. No money. No way out. Looks like this is it: stuck on the farm. Admittedly you help your dad with the traction engine but that's it. Then everything changes. Your dad is arrested for poaching and sentenced to 14 years transportation. Your mum gets chucked out of the cottage. She and the four young ones cram in with your aunt. No room for you and with your dad a convicted felon no chance of any job locally. So, you hit the road and walk to Brighton. And there's a fair on The Level!

Fair on The Level by Delamotte 1844



You hang about. Lend a hand. Start to get fed. When it comes time to take down the stalls and the stages there you are. You help load the horse drawn carts. Load yourself on as well and seamlessly you become part of the fair, a showman.

Self-propelled Roundabout – 1805



Bobstock & Wombell's Menagerie 'On the Move.' 1914



As you're moving between towns you chat away. You talk about traction engines. About how they work and how if the fair got one, it could do away with most of the horses and save money. You convince the boss and in 1861 he buys one.

Celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee on 22 June 1897



He likes it and so do you. And then you and he start to think about jazzing the traction engine up. It already creates quite a sensation when you arrive anywhere so why not make it beautiful. Electric power is coming in so why not fit a dynamo so you can put electric lights on the stalls and drive rides with the flywheel and the electric. Maybe it's your boss who asks Charles Burrell of Thetford, Norfolk to build one according to his specification and maybe it's because of you that the first Showman's Engine the 'Monarch' is built in 1889.

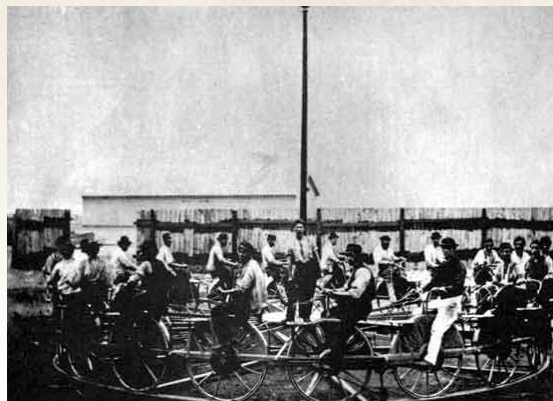
Crimson' with 'Deep Yellow' wheels. Artists are hired to paint scrolls on them. The canopy is extended to the full length of the engine to protect the dynamo and flywheel and it's supported with fancy twisted brass poles. An extra chimney length is strapped to the top of the canopy to improve the draught and protect the public from the sparks and smoke from the coal fired boiler. And brass stars are attached all over the place. And it is magnificent something to be proud of.

Not only do Showman's Engines look great they are very practical. Their flywheels and dynamos and capacity to pull heavy loads open up the possibility of designing and touring much more complex and exciting rides than the existing simple people-powered ones. And you want to be part of that so join up with Frederick Savage who is designing new rides



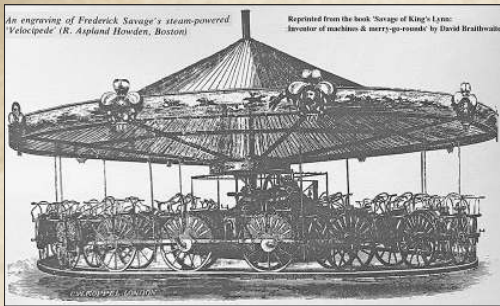
The first ride Savage develops is The Velocipede.

Here's the prototype Velocipede being tested out by the workers!



Burrell Showman's Engine no 2547 'Endurance' 1903

You're bored with the road, you bore easily, and get yourself a job at Burrell's and bring your practical experience to the design of the engines. It's decided to paint them 'Lake



Here's the finished article driven by a steam engine in the centre

The success of the Velocipede leads to the development of Savage's Golden Gallopers in 1870.



The 'Golden Gallopers' on Brighton seafront built in 1888 by Frederick Savage at his workshop in Kings Lynn

Savage revolutionises the concept of the carousel. He designs up-and-down cranking machines that make the horses gallop. He commissions complex mechanical organs for the centre of each carousel. The horses are hand carved to order by specialist makers like Anderson & Garland. The ornate hand painted panels and trimmings are unique to each carousel and not only make them look sumptuous but also hide the mechanics. Hundreds are assembled in his workshop and sold around the world. And at least a hundred will survive into the distant future to be treasured in museums and astonish and delight as working attractions.

The Showman's Engines continue to enable more and more complex and heavy rides to bring wonder and excitement all over the country. It's a far cry from the foot operated roundabout.



Charles Thurston's switchback ride 1900 approx

The fairs change from a place to buy a goose to entertainment hubs.



Nottingham Goose Fair 1908

They become things to be looked forward to throughout the year and travelled miles to experience and as you repeatedly say it's all because of the Showman's Engines. But because of WW1 surplus trucks, reduced road tax and the improvement of the internal combustion engines diesel trucks take over.



Charles Thurston's Diamond "T" Tractor "Alexandra" - 1968

The last Showman's Engine is built in March 1934.



Jack Wharton's 1934 Fowler "Supreme" the last Showman's Engine to be built

But they don't disappear. 100 machines survive and are loved and treasured. I like to your spirit is out there with them with them adjusting the dynamos, polishing the stars and making sure that they continue to bring wonder and delight to the child in all of us.