

SEPTEMBER 1984

# THE SHEFFIELD MECCANO GROUP

NEWSLETTER No. 7

## Club Officers

Chairman:- Richard Bingham

Treasurer:- Peter Mason

Secretary:- Robin Johnson

## Editorial

This seventh issue of our Newsletter has been made possible by the articles kindly submitted by their contributors. However, all available contributions have now been used and Newsletter No. 8, due to be issued shortly after our next meeting, therefore needs more material.

Those of you who have seen the former Meccanoman's Journal, published in the 1970's by Mr. G.M. Morris, will recall that interesting reading was provided by the "Hints and Suggestions" and "Open Correspondence" columns. These rely, generally, on shorter contributions - often of Meccano ideas useful to other modellers, sometimes of suppliers of modelling materials, etc. - and can provide a valuable source of information and interest.

I'm sure most of you will have developed your own (perhaps local) sources of supply of special materials or use modelling techniques or ideas which you may feel can be of use to others. If you have, I want to hear from you! Fuller articles on any aspects of our hobby are also, of course, to be welcomed.

As a guide, it is intended to issue four Newsletters per year; one before and one after each of our Club Meetings, i.e. March, June, September and November. Please make these pages a forum for your ideas and interests.

See you at the meeting,

*Ker Ashton.*

CHAIRMAN'S PAGE

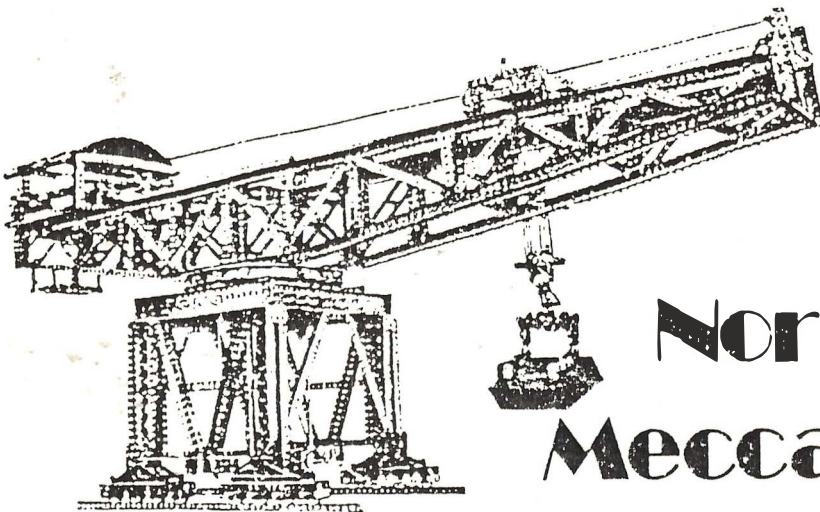
I want to start by saying a few words about attending exhibitions. For those who don't, the very warm welcome on arriving, setting up the model (which always looks far better than in your own home), you are now instantly rewarded for taking that extra care in selecting your better parts in matching colours by the appreciation from the general public. No matter how large or small a model, the delight of children and interesting conversations is not to be missed. This of course is a time when you meet enthusiasts from all over the country; names you normally only read or hear about, and also an opportunity to buy those much sought after parts which seem to keep turning up.

I managed to get to the Skegness Exhibition which has now turned into a grand affair spreading over three days (22-24th June), organised by Mike Cotterill on behalf of the NEMG. This year, John Macdonald was awarded the 'Alec Issigonis Award' for his magnificent model of a Leander Class Frigate. I hope John is able to bring both model and award to our next meeting in October. I also attended the NEMG Exhibition (11/12th August) held at the Salford Show, Manchester. Although not as big as Skegness, it was again a very enjoyable day.

Our next meeting on October 13th is the A.G.M. Matters to consider are the election of Club Officers. During the summer I have been in contact with Robin Johnson and he has taken over the duties of Secretary. Other items include the Treasurer's Report, Newsletters, and is the Club giving you, the members, the type of meeting and information you require to enjoy your hobby? Also, of course, "Any Other Business" which should be a lively item instead of blank faces and a prelude to closing the meeting. I am sure our new Secretary would be very interested to hear of any new ideas to be included on the agenda and discussed at the next meeting.

*Richard Bingham*

DARLINGTON EXHIBITION



# North Eastern Meccano Society

The 9th Annual Exhibition staged by the N.E.M.S. is to be held on Saturday, 10th November, 1984 at the Bondgate Hall, Darlington.

This has proved in the past to be an excellent day out to a large exhibition arena and is well worth attending. Prizes and certificates of merit are awarded which give a good incentive for exhibiting your models. Adequate car parking facilities and refreshments are available and all are welcomed.

KEITH CAMERON

Peter Mason

I was given the amazing opportunity, at very short notice, of attending a computing conference in May this year in Florida USA. This is a little out of the ordinary for me; it is usually a day trip to Wolverhampton that I get. When I had finished going on my knees saying "Yes Please", I started to think of who I might know in the USA that I could drop in on. The name that sprang to mind was Keith Cameron, but I only knew of him and I thought he lived in Kentucky. However, I know that Meccano opens many doors, so I found out Keith's address and discovered that he has retired to Florida, about fifty miles from Orlando, the conference place! That settled it, and I got in touch with Keith and was immediately invited to visit for as long as possible.

I arrived in Spring Hill on the morning of a typical Florida summer day - 85° F and 85% humidity. Everything is air-conditioned and, if anything, they keep some of their buildings too cool. There was nothing cool about my reception, however, and after all the handshaking was over we were soon down to talking about all aspects of our favourite subject ( or is it favorite? ). Keith has been in Meccano almost longer than Frank Hornby; the famous Midland single - wheeler engine that was in all the pre-war manuals was a prize model of Keith's from the 1920's. He took it up again when he moved to America around 1950, buying a set in Hong Kong on the way. Keith's name was rarely absent from the Meccano Magazine in its last years, and he makes many contributions to Club Magazines around the world, so I do not know how he finds time to do any modelling.

Keith had a couple of models on the go while I was there. He had nearly completed a robot arm; I think it was another based on a Rhino original. It has full movements in all its joints, and when you see it twist its 'hand' round and round you feel it ought to hurt! The main rotary bearing is a version of the circular strips, 6" circular plates and steel balls construction. This one was smaller and uses circular girders and 4" circular plates, and if carefully set up, it rotates very smoothly with an almost complete absence of 'wobble'. The arm contained some quite tiny motors for hand operation and rotation, and the whole thing was very effective.

The other model was a Meccanograph designed by Bill Sangster (of Canada I think). This is a very large one using a Geared Roller Bearing as the turntable to give very smooth operation and an ingenious sliding pen holder. I got a description of it that Keith had written up, and some photos came through the post when I returned home, so I hope to be displaying my reconstruction of it at our next meeting. Keith's letters usually have a pattern done by the machine at the top, so I must get mine working so that I can respond in kind.

Although I spent two days visiting the Camerons, and was royally entertained, it was all over far too soon. On the second day we visited the Homosassa River further up the coast, and we were treated to a mighty thunderstorm on the way back. As I left I had various parting gifts thrust into my hands, including a Meccano Magazine that I wanted for my collection. I will always remember the strange feeling of coming into the familiar surroundings of a Meccano room so far from home. (Keith makes an annual 2000 mile trip to a Meccano Exhibition in Canada, and usually gets a prize for the exhibitor who travels furthest to the show!) Meccano is truly an international enthusiasm.

GATE-CHANGE MECHANISMS

Julian Coles wrote to me recently regarding my ideas on gate-change mechanisms for gearboxes. Whilst I dashed off a reply on the back of a cigarette packet, it struck me that all my ideas left something to be desired.

Has any modeller developed a workable system for a 4 or 5 speed gearbox? Any contributions would be welcomed.

The Editor.



GADGETS

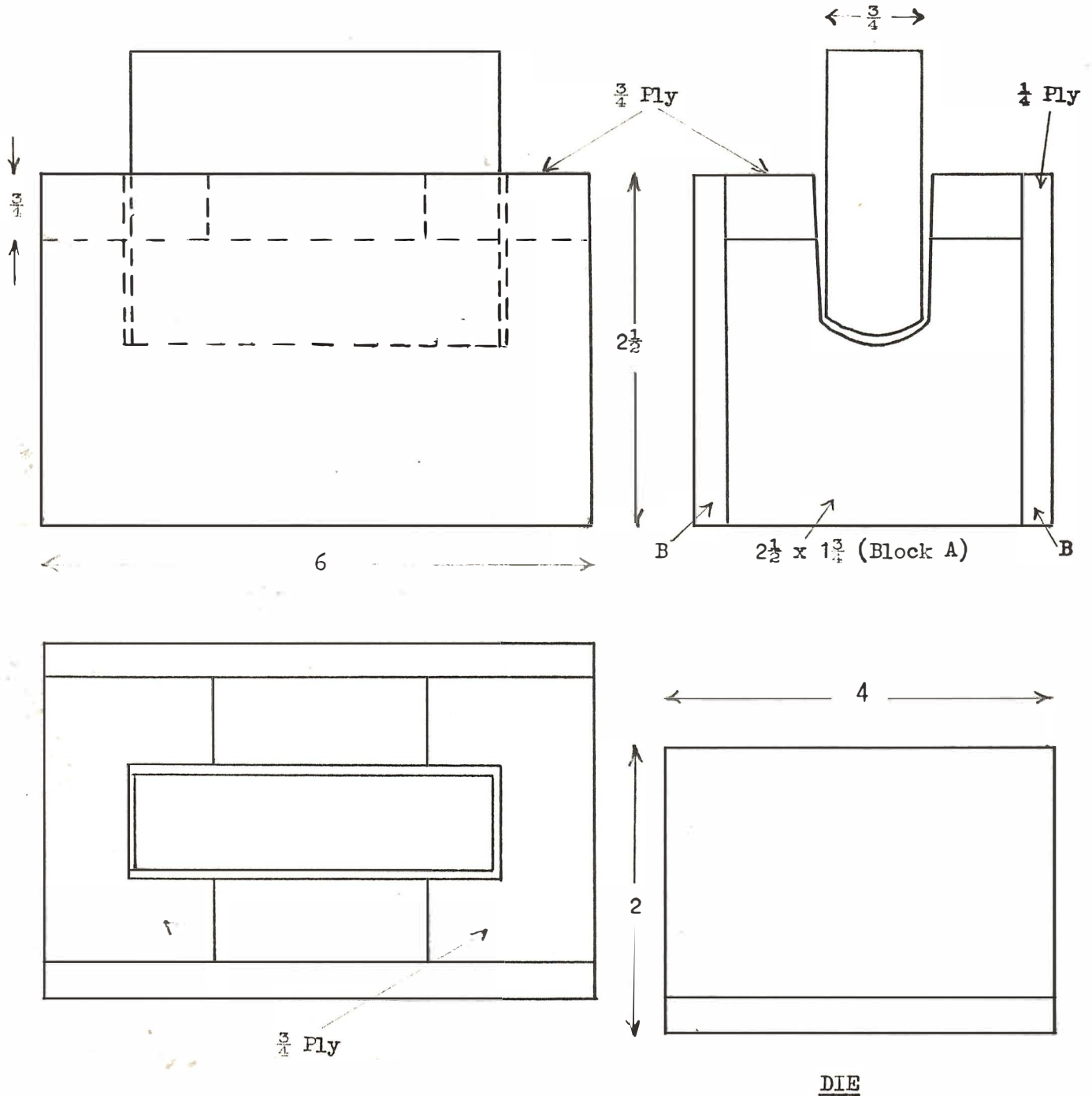
Alan Grimshaw

A few years ago I made this simple tool to make Part No. 199 to form the body of horses for a roundabout I was making.

It is easily made from a block of wood 'A' that has a  $\frac{3}{4}$ " groove cut out of the top and two shaped pieces of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood nailed on the top, and two pieces of  $\frac{1}{4}$ " plywood 'B' nailed on the long sides to form a housing for a  $2\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " flexible plate. A slight tap with the die and a passable curved plate is formed.

N.B. Drawings not to scale

All dimensions in inches.



THE MECCANO 110 VOLT ELECTRIC MOTOR

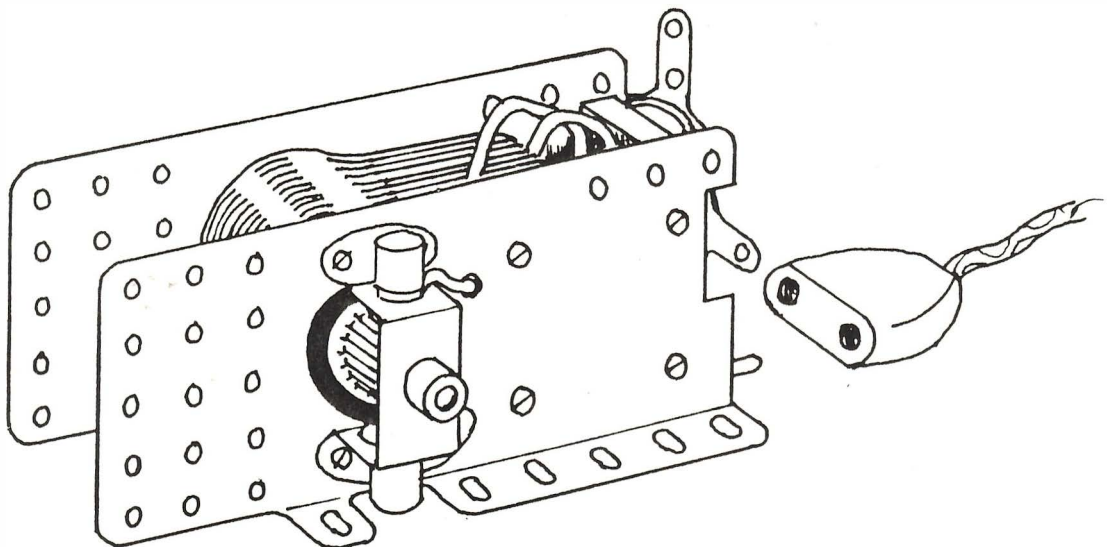
Roy Everitt

Looking through old Meccano Magazines and early instruction manuals you will find mention, albeit seldom, of a heavy current Meccano motor. This refers to the so called 110 volt electric motor of which, to my knowledge, two types were produced over a period of about 25 years span. The first, which is referred to to by Bert Love in his book, Meccano Constructors' Guide (MAP Ltd.) was run off the then 220 volt D.C. domestic supply, the current being dropped to about 110 volts by inserting a filament lamp or variable resistor between the source and the motor. I have seen somewhere a reproduction of a model with the motor in evidence and it appeared to be an untidy looking object with levers and other excrescences sticking out in all directions.

The second model, produced somewhere in the mid 1920's was a very much more sophisticated affair. It was designed to run off A.C. domestic supply which by that time was more or less universal throughout the country. As the illustration shows, the armature was too bulky to fit between the side plates of the motor which was designed basically for the then popular 4 volt version: consequently, the commutator and brushes projected through one of the side members with an extension bracket bolted onto it, in order to accomodate the extra length of the armature. I was fortunate to possess one of these motors, having seen one fixed to a display model in Messrs. Wilson and Gumpert's shop in Fargate, Sheffield, circa 1927, and purchasing it second hand for the princely sum of 28 shillings - Imperial!

After many years intermittent use one of the segments broke off the commutator and there being no spare parts available, that was the end of it.

Hindsight tells me that I should have hung onto it for possible future consignment to a museum specialising in old Meccano parts. I wonder if there are any still existing?



NOTHING SERIOUS

Robin Johnson

If I have a fault as a model-builder (which is very doubtful) I should say that it was a tendency to be over-ambitious. Critics have noticed this complex of mine.

"Why is it," they ask, "that young Robin drives himself so hard? There must be some explanation. This great, good man would not do it without some excellent reason."

Well, the fact is, unfulfilled ambition has been mine since the days of my first Trix set and my early discovery that there were insufficient parts in the Elementrix (containing 1 each units A and B) to build the 'Travelling Gantry Crane' which the instruction manual tantalisingly portrayed as the summit of the modeller's ambition. Graduation to Meccano has in no way eased the problem - it has merely resulted in substitution of the 'Giant Block-setting Crane' (SML 4) as the model I would most like to build.

A quick glance down the parts list reveals the awful truth - where on earth will I get my hands on 104 x 1½" angle girders (not to mention a Geared Roller Bearing)? To you more prosperous Meccanomen such shortages will seem incomprehensible, but when I tell you that I am a person who has only two girder-frames to his name you will begin to realise the true meaning of the word 'under-privileged' and may possibly think vaguely of leaving anonymous gifts on my doorstep. Doubtless my bank manager would frown upon a personal loan application for Meccano spares but even if he sanctioned it in a moment of weakness, where would I buy them? Not so many years ago there was a Meccano dealer on every street corner but where are they now? Yet another problem is that most of the usual sources supply in blue or zinc plate and I need green to match the rest of my outfit - doubtless I could write to Mick Burgess but something tells me there is little demand for replica angle girders and in any case I happen to know he is presently very busy working on an order for Trix motor brushes.

Apparently, in the early years of Meccano, the supply situation was even more unreliable than it is now. In those days you sent your order off to Frank Hornby, who used to cut out the parts by hand from a sheet of copper, and if he happened to be busy working on his 'System of Mechanical Demonstration', or laid up with a nasty cold, he would get Roland to take a note along to George Jones. George was a keen golfer so he might not get round to making up your order for ages. In those days, six months delivery was pretty good - anything sooner was sensational.

Of course the advent of computers has speeded up things quite a bit and many Meccano dealers place their affairs in the hands of I.B.M. and issue computerised lists and invoices. A friend of mine recently found, on going over his last order for Meccano spares, that he had overpaid to the extent of 48p. He wrote a civil note informing the dealer of this and received a computerised reply which regretted the error and begged to enclose, as requested, a cheque for £4-80.

My friend returned the cheque, saying that there had been a mistake and the computer, more apologetic than ever, sent him another for £48. When he returned this cheque it almost grovelled and enclosed one for £480. My friend was content at this point to take his profit and retire from the game, but I still think that if he had had the vision and enterprise to carry on he could have cleaned them out and set up as a Meccano dealer in his own right.

Communication and the personal touch are sacrificed these days to the needs of the computer - in fact these very qualities, or rather the lack of them, are in my view the root cause of most of the world's problems. It is not generally appreciated that there is no recorded incident of a war being started by a Meccano enthusiast and if we could only interest the political leaders in our splendid hobby the world would very likely be a better place. There would be no lack of détente between Messrs. Reagan and Chernenko if they had to look one another in the eye at Henley Town Hall each year and I fancy there would be a noticeable improvement in foreign affairs if Mr. Gromyko found himself relying heavily on Sir Geoffrey Howe for the loan of a mint condition set of W.R.Inglis channel segments to complete his Twin Cylinder Steam Engine in time for the Moscow



Meccano Club Annual Exhibition. It would be a hard-hearted politician indeed who could bring himself to press the nuclear button in the knowledge that he was sending to their doom an unspecified quantity of Blue/Gold No. 10 sets, Motor Car Constructor Outfits and 'K' Oilcans. When Bert Love wrote those immortal words "the enamel is strong but will not stand up to abuses of this kind" he may not actually have contemplated nuclear explosions but the comparison is apt.

Frank Hornby knew all this of course and had already become a Member of Parliament with a view to influencing international events, when he sent off a No. 1 Aeroplane Constructor Outfit (complete with motor) direct to Hitler. However, owing to an unfortunate mix-up in the postal department at the Chancellery, the package was opened by Goering and never seen again. Hornby died before discovering this development, with the result that World War II broke out soon after.

Despite all the aforementioned, I would not wish to paint too gloomy a picture of future trends - indeed I am sometimes in quite optimistic mood. Already one sees signs of a coming renaissance. There are distinct signs that the Meccano dealer is creeping back. Like some rare bird extinct, it seemed, only a few short years ago, he is repeatedly seen in his old haunts doing brisk business in pre-packaged plastic parts. True, he wants a bit more for his wares than in the golden age, but pay his price and he will come across with the goods. In hundreds of shops there is Meccano dealing going on just as of old. Who can say that ere-long signal arms, pointers and the entire twenty-six ships' funnels will not reappear in all their glory. I may even be able to get some green angle girders.

#### WHERE THERE'S BRASS THERE'S MUCK

Peter Mason

If you have recently acquired a barrow load of old Meccano that is not as clean as it used to be, or (perish the thought) some of your own parts that you have built into all those models over the years no longer have that showroom finish, you have a cleaning job on your hands. Many other erudite articles have dealt with stripping and spraying the painted bits, but if you have any mucky brass parts, this is what I do with them.

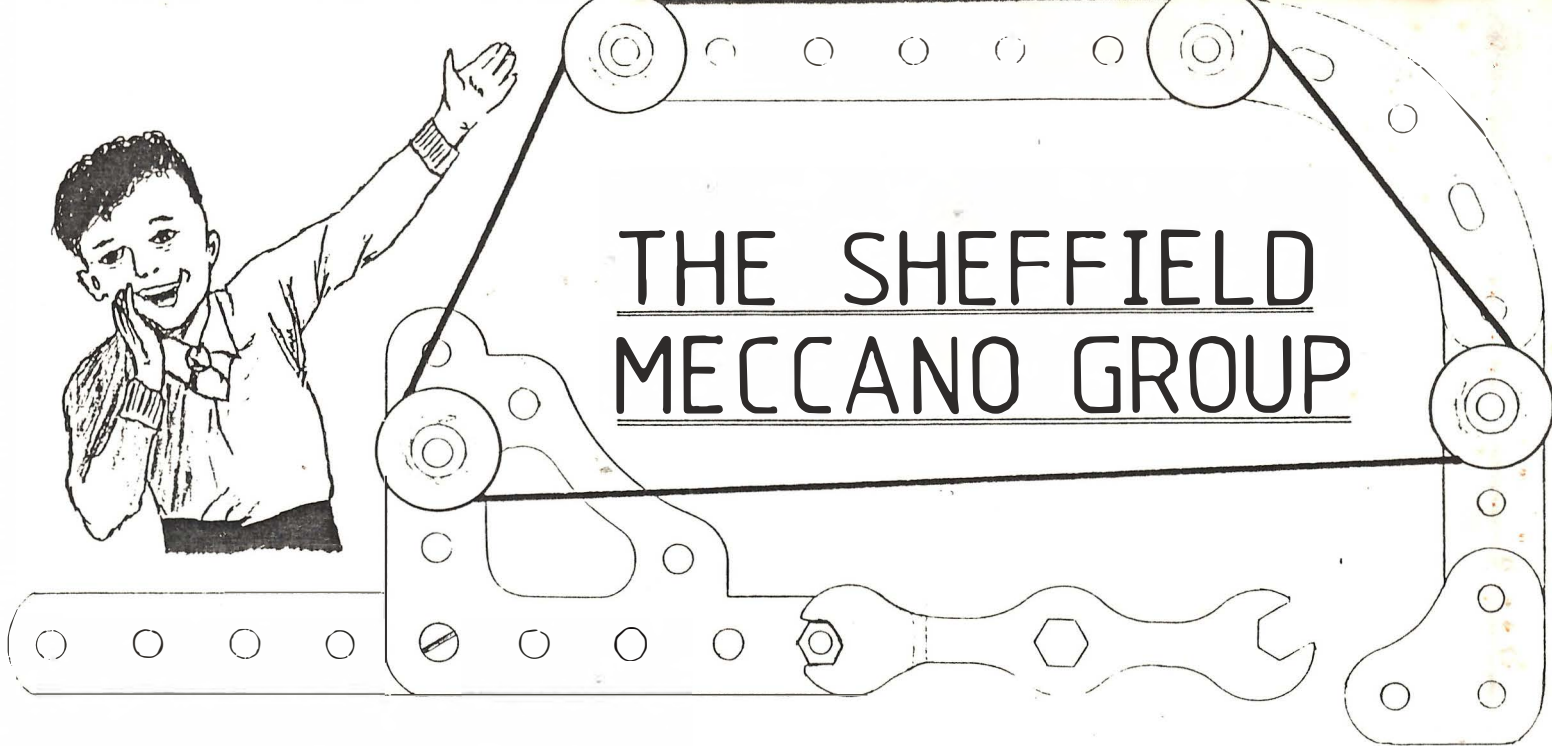
There is a product in your local hardware store called "Goddard's Silver Dip"; it is designed for cleaning the family heirlooms, so it is very suitable for use on Meccano parts. The product is just some sort of cleaning solution in a wide necked jar and it smells of metal polish. The procedure is very simple; just dip the brass parts in the solution for two or three minutes, fish them out and rinse them in water and then a light rub with a cloth shines them up like new. Old pinions may need a little scrub with an old toothbrush to get the genuine Meccano graphite grease out from between their teeth (that's why it's called a toothbrush of course), but then they come up like new.

I have found it works very well and is no trouble at all. I do not recommend trying it on zinc plated bits though; it seems to attack the finish and I think that if you left some bits in there for long enough you would just be left with a trace of sludge in the bottom.

#### THE SHEFFIELD MECCANO GROUP

Overleaf is shown a promotional sheet drawn up by Robin to publicise our Meccano Group. I understand this is Robin's Mark I effort and Mark II is already on the drawing board. Any comments would be welcomed at our next meeting.

The Editor.



#### CLUB OFFICERS

Chairman:- Richard Bingham

Secretary:- Robin Johnson

Treasurer:- Peter Mason

Newsletter Editor:- Ken Ashton

The Sheffield Meccano Group was formed in 1980 by a small band of local enthusiasts, and such has been its success that support rapidly increased and continues to do so. Many of our members travel considerable distances to attend the twice-yearly Saturday afternoon meetings held each Spring and Autumn in Norton Church Hall, Norton, Sheffield. This is a pleasant and conveniently situated building in close proximity to the M1 Motorway.

Annual subscription rates for Adult and Junior membership are presently £3 and £1.50 respectively. A newsletter is regularly issued free of charge to all our members, who are thus kept in touch with local and national events.

If you are a Meccano enthusiast and wish to know more or to apply for membership, we would very much like to hear from you. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the above-named for further details. A warm welcome awaits you.