

The Death of a Favourite Gadget

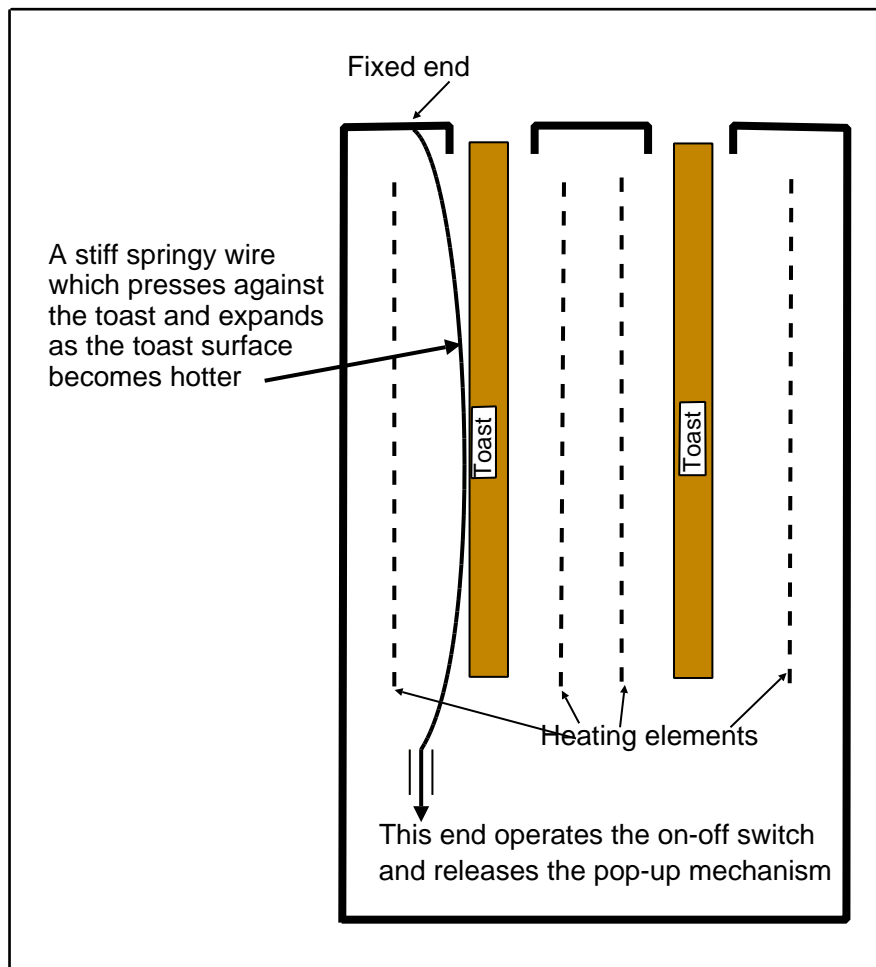
Alan Lancashire

About thirty years ago my son left home and, as a result, we bought an automatic toaster (until then, he had been our automatic toaster). We bought the model then recommended by Which?, an American design made by Proctor Silex. We were so pleased with the machine that when the element eventually failed, we searched high and low for a similar machine without success until, by chance, we came across one, seemingly brand new, at a Lib-Dem jumble sale. We bought it for £1. Upon examining it closely at home, we realised why it was being sold – the previous owner had tried to toast bread and butter in it! However, a little careful cleaning and it was truly as good as new.

A couple of weeks ago it died and we are now dependent on one of the latest toasters “with electronic control” which has a *very* inferior performance.

The toaster which has died had a beautifully simple mechanical control which is illustrated in the diagram. The springy wire responded to the surface temperature of the toast which is closely related to the degree of browning. So, once set, and using the same type of bread, toast was produced to a consistent brownness whether thick or thin, more or less moist, no matter how many times the toaster was used in one session. Our new toaster is also very consistent; it toasts each piece of bread for exactly the same number of seconds, but to every shade of brown including black. One has to continually alter the setting.

Looking at the Proctor Silex web site it seems that they now only make electronically controlled toasters. What a pity!



The original Proctor-Silex toaster