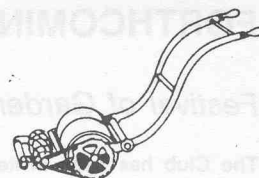


# Grassbox

The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 2



Summer 1991

## GETTING GOING

The first edition of Grassbox proved to be a great success. I even had to print a second run! Clearly there are more lawnmower enthusiasts than I imagined.

First, a big thank you to everyone who has taken the time and trouble to write or telephone. I have tried to put as much of the information I have gathered into this edition, but apologies if I have left you out (probably by mistake).

Having spent the last two or three months in a turmoil of organising the Rally at Milton Keynes Museum, a report of which appears below, and getting the Club off the ground, the second Grassbox has taken longer to prepare than I had expected, but I hope this will not spoil it too much now it is here.

There is a lot of interest in mowers at the moment. I have heard of a number of steam and vintage rallies which are planning to organise lawnmower sections later this year or next. Members have clearly been busy too, appearing on TV or in newspapers and magazines (see reports below), with their machines. Another lawnmower museum has opened recently. All of this publicity will make more and more people interested in our growing hobby.

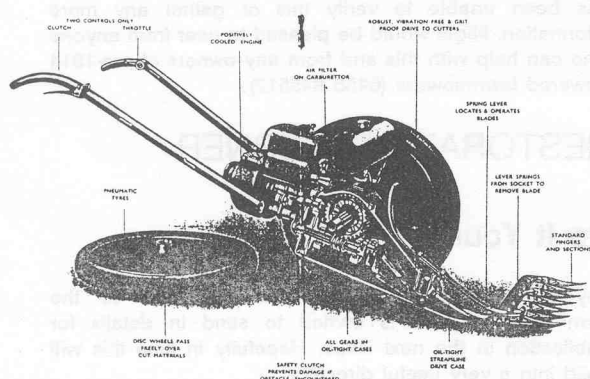
The Club has been publicised widely by GMS User News, which I know many Members read. This has been a major factor in getting the Club off the ground, so thanks to Jane and Roland for their support.

Keith Wootton

### THE "ALLEN" MOTOR SCYTHE

SELF-PROPELLED

BRITISH DESIGN AND MANUFACTURE



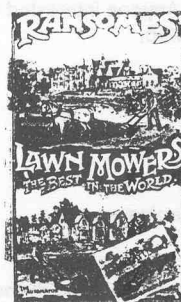
The only exposed part of the cutter drive is a heavy steel spring which throws aside the cut material, and retains the cutter blades in close contact with the fingers. It can be raised from its socket for the easy removal of the cutter bar for sharpening the blades.

Cut-away drawing of the Allen Scythe.

Anyone sending a stamped addressed envelope will help me save a bit of money on the next Grassboxes - Keith.

## CLUB NEWS

Interest in old lawnmowers (and the Club) continues to grow. I receive letters every week from people wanting to know more about the Club. Membership is now nearly forty (ie people who have returned the Membership Forms). Quite a few people have not yet returned their forms, but I have sent them this Grassbox in the hope that they will still join (it's free, so why not!).



Ransomes adverts c1900.

## RALLY NEWS

### Milton Keynes Museum: May 1991

So many people turned up at this year's lawnmower rally at Milton Keynes Museum that there was barely enough room on the Museum's Victorian lawn on the Sunday afternoon. Around twenty Members took part or attended, and over fifty machines were on display in addition to the Museum's collection. Everyone who came had a good time and we all made new friends. The Museum is hoping to organise another Rally next year on May 16/17, so make a note in your diary now.



Antony Lewis's British Anzani, as seen at this year's Milton Keynes Museum Rally.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### Festival of Gardening

The Club has been invited to participate in next year's Festival of Gardening at Hatfield House on 20/21 June. The organisers have offered to supply a marquee and set aside a demonstration area. A camping site will be available for anyone wishing to stay overnight (other accommodation can be arranged). If anyone is interested in participating, please write to me (rather than directly to Hatfield) via the Club so that I can liaise directly with the organisers. Although it seems a long way off, we will need to give them some idea of numbers before the end of this Summer.

### Banbury Steam Rally

Anyone who has ever been to Banbury Steam Rally will know it as one of the biggest and best in the country. From next year, thanks to the hard work of Robbie Robinson and Ted Sutton, there will be a special Lawnmower section at the Rally. Anyone interested should contact Robbie or Ted via the Club.

### Other Lawnmower Rallies

1992	
May	16/17 MKM
June	20/21 Festival of Gardening
	27/28 Banbury Rally

Details of these events can be obtained through the Club.



**Whoops!**

Get your Lawnmower Rally or event publicised in the next edition - send details now!

## TRANSFERS

Getting the right transfers to finish off that long restoration project may well be the hardest part. Transfers for most older machines are no longer stocked by manufacturers (those that still exist, that is), and of course if the manufacturer is no longer around there is very little chance. Although there are no guarantees, why not ask in your local dealer/repair shop - you never know your luck - I did hear of some old Atco transfers being found recently.

Some manufacturers (Ransomes and Atco/Qualcast spring to mind) are sometimes able to help with machines made after 1950, but even this can be a bit hit and miss.

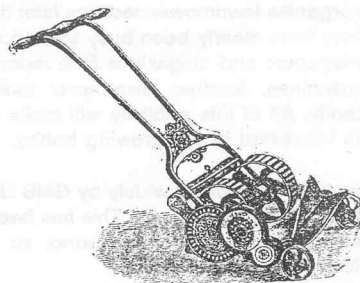
The best ways of reproducing transfers are to get the individual design repainted by a signwriter (which is very expensive) or to make some new ones. Making a few at a time is expensive but becomes cheaper if a larger quantity is printed. Mike Dibley from Norwich is hoping to print some Ransomes banner transfers, and would like to hear from anyone who is interested in either sharing the cost or ordering some copies from him. Phone Mike on Norwich 0603 611390 for more details. Similarly, anyone interested in obtaining some Atco Standard transfers should contact Keith Wootton (0604 31192).

## MYSTERY SECTION

Remember the TMMC mower mentioned in the Mystery Section of Grassbox One? I am reliably informed by Andrew Hall that I got it completely wrong (oops!) and that it is in fact a Monarch Mower. This was made from 1929 to the mid-1930s by The Excelsior Motor Co of Birmingham in three sizes (12", 15" and 18"). According to Andrew, the Monarch was placed at the lower cost end of the market and was sold mainly through agents, in particular The Army & Navy Stores. Interestingly, the Monarch had a twist grip throttle and a reduction gear, betraying Excelsior's work in the motor cycle industry.

Roger Burnett from Swinton in North Yorkshire has recently acquired a Standard Insulator Company "Four Seasons Scrubcutter" Type O, number 6045 and would be interested in hearing from anyone who can give him some information on it. In particular, Roger would like to know why it seems to be the same as the Lloyd Motor Sickle. Please send information Roger directly (0653 697388 Home) or via the Club.

One of the more unusual mowers at the Milton Keynes Museum rally was a Ransomes 10", brought by Michael Duck and Andrew Hall. The mower, which they have dubbed "The Colonial", is similar to the 10" Chain Automaton but has two cast iron wheels in place of the cast iron rear roller. If anyone has any suggestions on the origin of this mower, please contact Michael or Andrew through the Club or Andrew directly (see Andrew's address under "Finding Out More").



This "Coventry" mower has wheels at the rear similar to Michael and Andrew's "Colonial".

Was the world's first production petrol driven lawnmower made in Leicester? Nigel Mills from Earl Shilton, Leicester has heard that Grimsley & Son of Halford Street, Leicester was producing petrol lawnmowers as early as 1895, but has been unable to verify this or gather any more information. Nigel would be pleased to hear from anyone who can help with this and from any owners of pre-1914 powered lawnmowers (0455 845512).

## RESTORATION CORNER

### Do It Yourself

Anyone who knows of potential suppliers to the lawnmower restorer is invited to send in details for publication in the next issue. Hopefully in time this will build into a very useful directory:

Paint: Atco/Qualcast - Baron Tech Products, Unit 2, Peerglow Industrial Estate, Old Approach, WATFORD WD1 8SR

Engine Parts: Villiers - Meetons Industrial Engines Ltd, 261/9 Coombe Lane, Wimbledon, LONDON SW20 0RH Tel 081 946 4244

Transfers/Information: Qualcast - Qualcast Surpar Ltd, Limetree Place, STOWMARKET, Suffolk IP14 1EU Tel 0449 672737

Information supplied by Robbie Robinson

# DATING AGENCY

## JAP Engines - Looking "Under The Bonnet" again

JAP engines were fitted in a number of lawnmowers from 1920 onwards, including Ransomes and Automower. Usually the engine number is stamped on the timing chest cover or on the top of the crankcase. In general the code consists of one or two letters identifying engine size and type followed by an oblique (/). This was followed by another letter identifying year of manufacture and the serial number of the engine. Letters after a second oblique, if it appears, identify the engine as deviating from standard production models or as prepared to a customer's specification. Many of the codes below would (probably) not occur on lawnmower engines, but who knows!

### First letter (cylinder capacity)

A: 300cc - 70x78mm bore and stroke  
B: 250cc - 64.5x76mm  
E: 375cc - 74x85mm  
F: 300cc - 70x76mm  
G: 350cc - 70x88mm  
I: 350cc - 70x90mm  
J: 500cc - 80x99mm  
K: 500cc - 85.7x85mm  
L: 550cc - 85.7x95mm  
M: 375cc - 70x97mm  
N: 200cc - 55x83mm  
P: 250cc - 62.5x80mm  
S: 350cc - 74x80mm  
U: 600cc - 85.7x104mm  
V: 175cc - 60x62mm  
Z: 175cc - 55x73mm

*Note: all engines side valve*

### Letters after first oblique

P: 1920  
N: 1921  
E: 1922  
U: 1923  
M: 1924  
A: 1925  
T: 1926  
I: 1927  
C: 1928  
S: 1929

### Remaining letters before oblique

T: Twin cylinder  
O: Overhead valves (as opposed to side valve)  
W: Water cooled  
Z: Dry sump lubrication  
S: Short stroke sports engine/special  
C: Sports engine  
R: Racing engine  
Y: Twin exhaust port cylinder head

*Note: these letters often used in combination*



W: 1930  
H: 1931  
Y: 1932  
Z: 1933  
D: 1934  
R: 1935  
V: 1936  
F: 1937  
O: 1938  
G: 1939

*Note: the numbers were repeated from 1940 (P) through to 1959 (G). The manufacturing year ran from 1 September in the year preceding that identified by the code letter to 31 August in the year of the code letter (eg S = 1 Sep 1928 to 31 Aug 1929).*

Letters after the serial number and second oblique are less common, especially on lawnmowers. An "S" identifies engine made to customer specification (after 1925 only) and an "\*" indicates the engine was prepared for record breaking attempts (unlikely on lawnmowers!).

So, for example, an engine with the number M/Y1234 would be a 375cc side valve engine made in 1932 or 1952.

Has anyone come across engines with non-standard codings? There are probably quite a few, so let the Club know. Remember that engines were supplied in batches and could be replaced later, so this method can only provide an approximate date.

TWO STROKE BY NEIL



... OR I COULD USE THE 1927  
ATCO. POSSIBLY THE RANSOMES.  
HEY, MAYBE IT'S LONG ENOUGH  
FOR THE ALLERSCYTHE! OR...

## MORE ON MUSEUMS

### British Lawnmower Museum

Keen eyed Members will no doubt have seen the coverage in the national newspapers (Telegraph/Guardian) and TV (This Morning) on Brian Radam who has just opened the British Lawnmower Museum in his home town of Southport. Brian, who has built up his collection (100+) over the last 25 years, is also a mower racing champion, so visitors will no doubt see some of the fastest as well as the oldest machines around. Brian has said that Old Lawnmower Club Members can visit the Museum free, so why not go along and see his collection. 106-114 Shakespeare Street, Southport, Lancashire. Open daily (except Sundays, Tuesdays and Bank Holidays), 09:00 to 17:30. For more information call Brian or Su Radam on 0704 535369.



# FINDING OUT MORE

## Hall & Duck Collection

Andrew Hall has a vast collection of information about the history and development of the lawnmower, manufacturers and machines. Andrew will try to help with any queries and makes a small charge to cover photocopying and postage costs. Contact Andrew Hall, c/o Hall & Duck Collection, 84 Kenilworth Avenue, Wimbledon Park, LONDON SW19 7LR.

## Museum of English Rural Life

One of the most useful sources of information on many old manufacturers, and lawnmowers in general, is the Museum of English Rural Life which is part of the University of Reading. The Museum holds a vast amount of information, including many of the Ransomes records, which can be viewed by appointment. It also provides a research service to callers or by postal enquiry. All you need to do is contact the Museum giving some idea of what you want to know and they are usually able to help, although they do charge a small fee to cover costs. Contact The Museum of English Rural Life, The University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading, Berkshire (0734 85123).

If you still haven't done it, don't forget to fill in the Club Registration form and return it to Keith Wootton, The Old Lawnmower Club, c/o Milton Keynes Museum of Industry & Rural Life, Stacey Hill Farm, Southern Way, Wolverton, Milton Keynes MK12 5EJ.

## INFORMATION SWAP SHOP

The first edition of the Club Directory is enclosed to enable members to keep in touch with each other. **Only Members who agreed to participate** have been included and a copy has only been sent to current Members. The directory will be updated every six months (initially) and I would be most grateful if Members could let me have any amendments to entries as they occur.

## BOOKS

**Old Lawnmowers by David Halford:** Published by Shire Publications (Album 91). This book was first published in 1982 and is a very good introduction to old mowers and well worth reading. Unfortunately, the book is not currently listed in the Shire catalogue (Shire says it will be re-introduced next year) although with a little luck should still be available at good bookshops.

**Ransomes 1789-1989 200 Years of Excellence by Carol and Michael Weaver:** Published by Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies. Published in 1989 by Ransomes to celebrate its 200th anniversary this is an excellent book with many colour photographs and a heavy emphasis on lawnmowers. Copies of this book are still available from Ransomes, priced £7 (Contact Miss R Sheppard, Ransomes Sims and Jefferies plc, Nacton Works, IPSWICH, Suffolk IP3 9QG. Cheques payable to Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies plc).

**Old Garden Tools:** Published by Shire Publications (Album 41). Contains small section on lawnmowers.

# CLIPPINGS

Michael Duck from Somerset has just completed restoring a pony mower similar to the one featured in "Pony Patent" in Grassbox One. Michael has recently completed filming with another pony mower for the BBC's "The Victorian Flower Garden", to be broadcast in the Autumn, so look out for him.

## Ransomes Competition

Ransomes has recently been running a competition to find the oldest working Ransomes motor mower in regular use (is once a year regular enough I wonder?) and the oldest Ransomes motor mower no longer capable of working. The regional and national winners were announced in early July at a special ceremony held at Hatfield House. The winning working machine was a 1905 Ransomes mower similar to the one pictured in Grassbox One, the present owner being from Norfolk.

## ADVERTS

For all your wood turning needs (eg rollers, handles etc) send a descriptive plan to Andrew Hall, c/o The Hall & Duck Collection, 84 Kenilworth Avenue, Wimbledon Park, London SW19 7LR. Andrew will be able to supply your missing parts for a very reasonable fee.

Anyone interested in adding a 1955 36" Ransomes mower to their collection should contact Mr David Hutchins on Crewe (0270 585126).

Mr F Ford of Parkside Horticultural Engineers, 4-10 Scotswood Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE4 7JB has a 1926 Atco Standard for sale to a good home. Telephone (091) 232 0212.

Mr E Southam has three Atcos and two Ransomes which he would like to go to a collector and enthusiast. Telephone Fenny Compton, Warwickshire (029577) 610.

Mr N Davey has a March 1952 Barford Atom 30 Horticultural Tractor, complete with many attachments and a trailer. Telephone Rowlands Gill, Tyne and Wear (0207 54) 2821.

If anyone has a genuine starting handle from an early Atco Standard to spare, Mr John Woolley from Somerset would like to hear from you. Please telephone 0278 785548 or contact through the Club.

Send your advert for inclusion in the next Grassbox.



More advice from Atco in the 1950s: "Prevent self-styled engineers with time on their hands from tampering..." Ring any bells anyone?

## NEXT ISSUE Sep/Oct 91

Grassbox  
Edition 2 - July 1991  
Edited by Keith Wootton