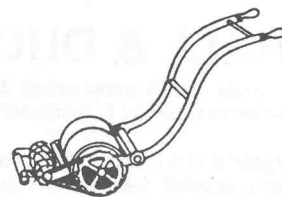


Grassbox

The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 6

Winter 1993



KEEP ON MOWING

Well, here we are again, with yet another action packed, information filled Grassbox. This one is Number 6, but it only seems a few days since Number 1 first appeared, although it's nearly two years. Membership now stands at just over 140, and the letters still keep coming in.

In this issue, there is the usual mix of Club News, restoration tips, adverts and so on, with a few unusual items for good measure. I hope that everyone likes it, but in any case, please feel free to write something yourself for inclusion.

I should like to say a really big thank you to everyone who has joined the Club, sent letters, photos or other documents and contributed to the various Grassboxes, rallies and events. It is good to know that there are so many fellow enthusiasts around. 1992 was full of happy memories for me, and I am sure that everyone else in the Club has many of their own. Let us all hope we can say the same of 1993 this time next year.



Stanley Hardwick and his 24" 1928 Dennis on parade at York Steam Fair.

FUNDING THE CLUB

Many Members have suggested that the Club should introduce a small Membership Fee as a way of funding projects such as Grassbox and the Network Directory. As many of you will know, I have always been against this because any form of Membership Fee would ultimately prevent some people from joining and it would mean more time taken over keeping accounts and so on. While Membership was below 100 people it was not too expensive to fund the Club from my own pocket to supplement the very generous donations of cash, stamps and envelopes that many Members have sent in. However, now that there are well over 100 Members, postage and printing costs have risen steeply and it takes a lot of time to keep track of the donations. I am therefore considering introducing a nominal fee of between £3 and £5 to start from May, when the Club celebrates its anniversary. If we are to introduce a Membership Fee, it seems only right that we should have an Annual Meeting of the Club to discuss its running and so on. It would seem logical to make this coincide with the annual Milton Keynes Rally, also held in May. However, I would certainly not want to make any changes in the structure of the Club without giving Members plenty of time to let me know what they think, so please let me know whether you disagree or agree with the basic proposals. Perhaps if people could let me know what they think within the next month (by the middle of April 93) I can then put a proper proposal in the next Grassbox which could then be discussed properly and decided upon in time for May.



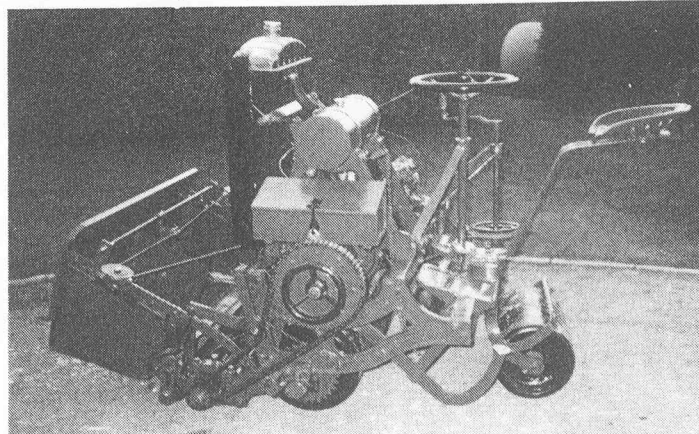
Andrew MacMorland and his 1920s Shanks mower.

Price of Machines

As lawnmower collecting becomes more popular, people want to know more about the value of their machines. The Club receives many letters asking for valuation help, but it is not always easy to give a fair and correct answer. If you are selling you want to get a good price but if you are buying you do not want to pay too much.

There are two main problems. First, there are still more mowers than buyers, which means that prices should remain comparatively low. If you are prepared to look, and be patient, it is still possible to get an Atco Standard, complete and running, for less than £20 either privately or at auction. On the other hand, ordinary Standards have also changed hands for over £100. Early push mowers can be picked up for a few pounds, but it is not unusual to see similar and less rare machines on sale for much higher prices at flea markets, bric-a-brac sales and so on. Second, many collectors new to the hobby may not have any idea of the value of a particular machine and may pay over the odds to unscrupulous "dealers", who to be fair may not know the true value either.

Put simply, for old lawnmowers, being old does not mean rare or valuable. Most collectors realise this and are realistic when setting a price or deciding on what to swap. It seems that higher prices are generally asked by non-collectors who may not know the true value of the mowers in question. If both parties are happy there is little to worry about of course, but the best advice would seem to be that if you are unsure on a realistic value of a particular mower, ask one or two other Club Members what they think you should pay.



Roger Burnett's rather large 36" Ransomes ride-on mower.

HALL & DUCK AT 10

I would like to congratulate Messrs Hall and Duck on an excellent weekend in Somerset viewing part of their collection.

Myself and a friend arrived at about 3pm on the Saturday and were greeted with an amazing display of more than 200 mowers of various designs and ages. A good percentage of these were restored - and we all know how long that takes.

I was pleased to see Patrick Knight there, snapping away merrily, so I have no doubt we will see some of the results in various national magazines.

After an afternoon of viewing and chatting and a bit of bartering (unfortunately I could not part them from a machine I desired desperately - they had better keep it well locked up!) we all helped put the machines away for the night, hopefully without too many scratches.

We then proceeded to the local pub. It turned out that the local brew, which was free, had been renamed "lawnmower" for the evening. Every few minutes you could hear "lawnmower" and a pint of beer would miraculously appear.

The food appeared, again free of charge, and it was all the stuff I am not allowed to eat at home - bangers, mash and beans (lovely) - and a variety of sandwiches and cheeses. This was followed by a beautiful cake, similar in shape to a fifty pence piece, with various inscriptions around the sides and on top. After sampling a three inch wedge of this I had to be lifted out of the chair, at which point I had, regretfully, to leave the party.

I will enjoy hearing about what I missed from those who stayed and those who went on the Sunday. Again congratulations and thanks to Messrs Hall and Duck on an excellent event.

John Barnard, Warrington



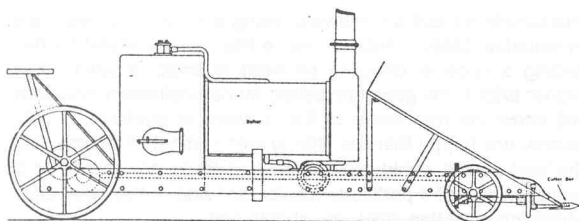
Michael Duck and Andrew Hall putting the knife in - to a 10th anniversary cake.

Keith Wootton Continues...

Sunday got off to a slow start for those of us who had stayed over night! It turned out to be even colder and windier than the Saturday and, although the display was the same as the Saturday, there was still a lot to see. Most visitors will have picked out their own favourites from the collection, but with so many machines to see, this was not an easy choice. As on the Saturday, it was good to see so many of the OMC Members who were able to make it. Over twenty visited during the weekend, some having travelled a considerable distance. I am sure that everyone felt the trip worthwhile, and I know that Andrew and Michael appreciated everyone's efforts in getting there.

Steam Mower Sighted

As part of research I have been undertaking for Milton Keynes Museum into the boat building firm of Edward Hayes of Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire I have discovered a very early patent for a type of steam mower. Hayes was established in the early 1840s and eventually went out of business in the mid-1920s. Starting with steam ploughing equipment, the company later began boat building in a yard which was over 100 miles from the sea.



2.8 Elevation of Hayes patent steam mower of 1872

The mower patent (No 2669) was taken out in 1872. It described a device for "improvements in reaping and mowing machines in which steam is substituted for animal power". Predating the James Sumner patent by some 20 years, the Hayes design seems to have been aimed at the agricultural market with the mower consisting a horizontal reciprocating blade rather than the cylindrical cutter used in most contemporary lawn mowers. It had a small steam engine and boiler and the patent paid heed to minimising weight. The crankshaft of the engine was connected by gearing to the main drive axle and there was also a geared drive from the crankshaft to produce the reciprocating motion of the cutter knife blades. The operator was seated at the rear of the machine behind the engine, boiler, small coal bunker and water tank, and was able to steer the front axle by means of a chain acting on a central pivot.

Judging by the drawing accompanying the patent the machine was somewhat impractical. The weight would have been considerable and the wheels unsuitable on all but hard and flat ground. The machine would have been difficult to steer at the ends of the fields, requiring a large turning circle, and virtually uncontrollable on rough ground. The machine would also have run over the crop it had just cut. It is not known whether an example was ever built or whether there were attempts to sell them commercially. If any were produced, it is unlikely that they were successful. But if anyone finds one!?!?

Neil Loudon

RALLY NEWS

Rally dates for next year include Milton Keynes Museum (15/16 May), Hatfield House (19/20 June), Banbury Steam Rally (26/27 June). Forms for these rallies have been sent out with this Grassbox to a number of Members, but if anyone who has not received them should like copies, please get in touch with Keith on Northampton 0604 31192.

Also on Saturday 19 June, Club Members Tony Brown and Antony Lewis are organising a rally at Sawston in

Cambridgeshire. If anyone is interested, please get in touch with Tony Brown on 0223 837312 (Duxford, Cambridgeshire).

I am also trying to arrange a number of other OMC sponsored events throughout the year at locations around the country. The idea is organise an OMC rally at steam rallies and vintage fairs local to Members who may not be able to travel to the other events. Although I have a number of venues in mind, I would be pleased to hear from anyone who has suggestions.

Dating Agency ATCO STANDARD

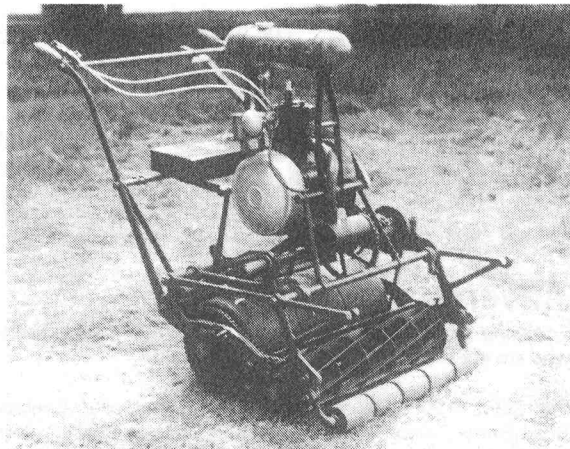
The Atco Standard was introduced in 1921 and was the first mower made by Charles H Pugh. The company had been in existence for many years, being most successful as a manufacturer of small repetition turned components. These had been used extensively during the First World War on many items, including armaments. Demand for these products dropped following the Armistice in 1918, and the company looked for new products and markets. One of the first products was a carburettor, called the Senspray, which was sold to engine manufacturers, notably Villiers, for use of motorcycles. Another product was Alfred Appleby Cycle Chain, "The Best Cycle Chain In The World".

Legend has it that the first motor mower was produced when the pony which pulled the mower of one of the Directors died. Rather than buy a new pony, the mower was designed. The name "Atco" was derived from the Atlas Chain Company, another name owned by Pughs.

The first design, from 1921, was a 22" machine with an oval section cast iron frame and a 269cc Villiers MkIV two stroke engine with brass flywheel. Cast iron was only used because Pugh's preferred supplier was unable to deliver the right components because there was an industrial dispute in the foundry. The cast frames were very fragile and apparently many of these early machines broke during assembly, particularly when the frames were tightened. Atco's own figures show that they sold 921 mowers in the first year of production.

The "oval frame" casting was replaced in 1922 with a more resilient "I" section malleable frame, although the precise date of introduction is unknown. Malleable iron is more springy than cast and these mowers were much better at withstanding the knocks and bumps which inevitably occurred during use. Interestingly, Atco avoided flat side plates (as used by most of their rivals by this time) because they were, according to Atco, more difficult to adjust, noisier and more prone to rust.

Also in 1922, a 16" version with a 147cc Villiers MkVI-C (numbers prefixed H) was introduced. Other models were introduced in the following years and by 1927 the company also had 14", 18", 24" and 30" models in production, the two largest being driven by 350cc and 500cc JAP four stroke engines. By this time, over 14,000 Atco Standards had been sold and the price of the 22" model had fallen from 75 Guineas in 1921 to 54 Guineas, a significant price drop, and due primarily to Atco's efficient production and, of course, competition.



Keith Wootton's 1921 Atco Standard 22" "oval frame"

The Standard was a very simple design, although it looks quite complicated. Open iron sideframes are joined together by cross struts made from tubular iron with long bolts running through them. The various components, such as drive shaft, clutch, engine, cutting cylinder and roller are all supported by the frame and are all very easy to remove, and this made the machines very easy and cheap to service. The design also allowed machines of various cut widths to be made from a relatively few components. The frame was virtually the same for each width of cut produced, with only the cross struts, rollers, cutting cylinder, bottom blade and reduction drive shaft required to vary in length. This enabled the company to produce a wide range of models using mass production techniques and sell them at a very low price.

In 1927, the range comprised of 14", 16", 18" models, powered by 1.5HP Villiers 147cc engines, with flat plate clutches. The 22" had a 2.5HP Villiers 269cc 2S engine and cone clutch. The 24" and 30" had cone clutches and 3.5HP/350cc and 5HP/500cc JAP 4S engines. The two smallest mowers had single lever "Atco" carburettors, while the 18" and above all had two lever "Sensprays".

In 1928/29 Atco introduced a 12" mower which looked very much like the Standards, except that it had the fuel tank mounted across the engine, rather than "in line". This was known as the "HY" model and is not officially a Standard.

Production of the Standards continued until the early 1930, when the model was replaced by a new Atco range, the DeLuxe, which incorporated flat plate steel side frames and other design changes. Many Standards remain in circulation and, while their value is not high, they are very popular with collectors, partly because of their unusual design and possibly because they are the oldest readily available motor mowers.

Technical Tip Freeing seized pistons

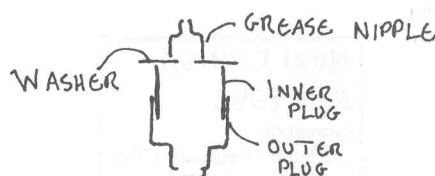
Freeing seized pistons is never an easy job, but here is a useful tip, from Geoffrey Christopher, which is much more effective and safer than using a hammer or wrench.

All you need is a two piece spark plug which you then turn into a supersized grease nipple. We have all got one of those old Lodge's or Champion plugs lying around with a broken ceramic, so it should not be too difficult to find one. All you need to do is take the plug apart and remove the inner, ceramic piece. Next, weld a washer to the top of the inner piece of the plug, and then weld a grease nipple to this. Alternatively, weld a nut to the washer with the correct thread to take the grease nipple. It sounds quite difficult, but it should be quite easy for anyone who has a basic welding rig. Once the spark plug and nipple arrangement is reassembled it can be placed in the plug hole. All you need to do is to use a grease gun to inject grease into the cylinder until it's full. You will only need to move the piston a fraction to free it up. The hydraulic pressure you can build up will exert a far higher force onto the cylinder than you can with a hammer or wrench. And because it is spread right across the top of the piston, there is less risk of causing any damage. However, there are one or two basic points to remember:

Always soak the offending piston/cylinder in diesel or de-seizing oil beforehand. This always helps, whichever method of freeing you use.

If you are trying to free a two stroke piston, it will normally only work while the piston is above either the exhaust or inlet ports. On some heads you might be able to block off the exhaust port, which is nearer the top, by bolting a flange over the port in place of the exhaust pipe. You cannot block off the inlet port unfortunately, but this is nearer the bottom of the stroke anyway.

On four stroke engines, make sure the valves are closed. Usually all this will mean is taking away rockers or pushrods. If either valve is seized, however, try covering the inlet or exhaust port (only one will be open after all) with a flange.



Two-Stroke.....by Neil



Adverts

Following requests from a number of Members, advertisers who are not Members of the Club are marked.

For Sale: c1960s Dennis, complete with seat/roller. Contact Brian Barry: Telephone 0883-622465 (Croydon, Surrey) (Not Member).

Wanted: Information on or where to obtain parts for the Teagle knife mower. Contact Geoffrey Christopher: Telephone 0425 616364 (New Milton, Hampshire).

Wanted: Wico Type A magneto as fitted to JAP and Petter engines. Also, BTH two cylinder magneto type K2. Contact Philip Swain: Telephone 0570 45284 (Lampeter, Dyfed).

For Sale: Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies motor mower 16" A5435 MkII c1936, with grassbox. Ransomes 12" Ajax push mower, with grassbox. Ransomes 10" Chain Automaton Minor, with grassbox. Atco 17" motor mower with Villiers 1.5HP 2S engine, with grassbox. Greens 6" Multim in Parvo push mower, serial number 18139. Contact WH Brown: Telephone 081 650 3933 (Beckenham, Kent).

Wanted: Spares for Amal carburettors. Contact Geoffrey Brooks: Telephone 0732 838921 (Tonbridge, Kent).

Wanted: Ransomes 14" Chain Automaton for spares. Contact Michael Duck: Telephone 0460 41374 (Ilminster, Somerset).

For Sale: British Anzani Lawnrider, without engine, but with grassbox. Offers around £20. Contact John Barnard: Telephone 061 775 9934 (Warrington, Cheshire).

Wanted: 6 or 8" sidewheel mower, any condition. Contact Mike Tomkins: Telephone 021 353 6618 (Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands).

For Sale: 1926 Atco Standard 16, complete with grass box, but in pieces, and authentic paint. £60. Contact K P Dunk: Telephone 0420 87223 (Alton, Hampshire).

For Sale: Spares for 1950s/60s Atco/Ransomes/Qualcast. Contact Patrick or Paul at AGM Services, Lowestoft: Telephone 0502 565811 (Lowestoft, Norfolk) (Not Members).

Wanted: Kick start springs for 17" and 19" Atco motor mowers c1947/50. Webb battery mower. Allen Scythe. Contact Dennis Whiting: Telephone 0268 726361 (Basildon, Essex).

For Sale (or swap): New parts for Allen scythe model F. Plough share for Allen horticultural plough. Front wheel and drive rollers for Allen Champion "Two". Wheel arms for Allen Rotary sickle. Wanted: New or good s/h parts for Howard rotavators. Low gear pinion (20435), gear box clamping nut (20473) for Bantam. Worm shaft (14080), wheel drive worm wheel (14024), rotor worm shaft (14096), rotor drive worm wheel (14025). Contact David Hammond: Telephone 0228 710858 (Dalston, Cumbria).

Wanted: Chain sprockets (for roller and cylinder) for Ransomes 10" New Automaton. Contact Keith Wootton: Telephone 0604 31192 (Northampton).

Wanted: Engine mounting plates for gear drive Royal Enfield motor mower. Contact Freddie McClughan: Telephone 0846 693991 (Dromore, County Down, NI).

Wanted: Silencer for Atco Marvel mower (looks like a flattened ball!). Also, Fan/flywheel cover (top half) for Royal Enfield 12". Contact Ken Denman: Telephone 0293 783501 (Horley, Surrey).

For Sale: Choice of two 22" Atco Standard early models with Oval Frame. Ransomes 14" 2S motor mower. Allen, Oxford 4S motor mower with cylinder cutting blade. Atco Standard 16, mid-1920s. Dennis 30", runner. JP 2S motor mower, mid-1930s. Drummond push mower. Ransomes 12" Automaton. Wanted: Very early (ie 1920s) Dennis 24" and Ransomes 20" Mk4. Also, grassbox and exhaust system for 30" Atco Standard. Contact David Claypole: Telephone 0604 763549 (Desborough, Northants).

Wanted: Dual lever for Senspray carburettor for Atco Standard. Contact Andrew MacMorland: Telephone 0621 853729 (Maldon, Essex).

For Sale: 20" Ransomes motor mower, c1920s, complete with Grassbox. Contact T J Wright: Telephone Banbury 262619 (Banbury, Oxfordshire) (Not Member).

For Sale: Shay Autoscythe, with original transfers. Also, Shay with four wheels, model not known. Contact Paul: Telephone 0603 720170 (Norwich).

For Sale: Villiers Mk12RG 120cc in running order, plus various Villiers 2S/4S engines, inc Mk25, Mk7 and Bux 120 parts. Wanted HT lead for 1926 Atco Standard. Contact Jeff Skinner: 0782 537440 (Stoke on Trent).

For Sale: 1940s Webb roller mower. Contact Mr Child: 0908 310652 (Milton Keynes) (Not Member).

Send in your advert for FREE inclusion in the next Grassbox!

Network Directory

As the number of Members grows beyond 150, and hopefully stabilises, it will make more sense to produce an Annual, rather than twice-yearly, Membership Directory. With this in mind, a new version will be prepared and issued in the early Summer and will then be updated once a year only. As before, any Member who has asked not to be included will be excluded, otherwise all Club Members will be listed.

Shire Albums

Shire Albums has announced that it is to reprint and republish its Album on "Old Lawn Mowers", written by Old Lawnmower Club Member David Halford. Although the exact date of publication is not known just yet, it will probably be around about April or May 1993. Hopefully, the Club will get a mention in the book.

Next Edition

Apr 1993

Grassbox

Edition 6 - February 1993

Edited by Keith Wootton



What's all this then? Various Club Members inspect Milton Keynes Museum's Budding patent mower in May 1992.

Apologies

A very big sorry to everyone who has been waiting (for too long) for this edition of Grassbox and their Membership details etc. This has been caused by a number of factors, which have hopefully now been put right.

Published by the Old Lawnmower Club, c/o Milton Keynes Museum of Industry & Rural Life, Stacey Hill Farm, Southern Way, Wolverton, Milton Keynes, MK12 5EJ. Telephone 0908 316222