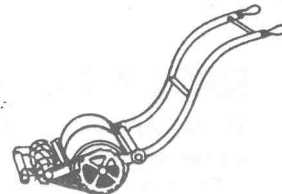


Grassbox

The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 11

Winter 1994



HAPPY NEW YEAR

By the time this Grassbox arrives it will be New Year, although I am writing this a week or so before Christmas. This year has been another successful one for the Club. There are now more than 160 of us in the Club, a sign that the hobby is growing in popularity. We have been invited, as a Club, to a number of new events for 1995, on top of those we attended for the first time in 1994.

This issue has a number of items either written by or suggested by Members of the Club. This is the way it should be, because the Club should be about taking part and sharing knowledge that will be interesting to other enthusiasts. On top of that, it makes putting each edition together a lot easier! I am particularly keen to receive more photographs from Members for inclusion. Many people do send shots in, and quite a few of these get used, but there is always room for more.

1995 promises to be another exciting year for lawn mower collectors around the world. I should like to wish everyone in the Club a very successful and happy year, and to thank everyone for their continued support. And I hope that I will be able to meet even more Members at our events and rallies in the coming year.

Keith Wootton

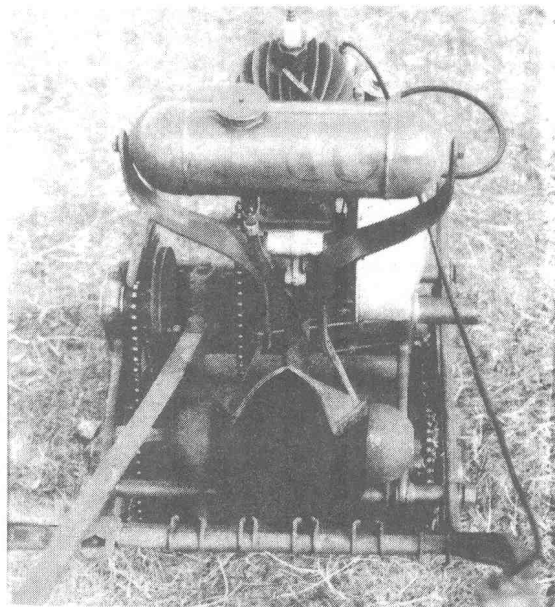


Robbie Robinson shows how to use a 1920s Ransomes, as owned by John Barnard, at County of Salop Steam Rally, Shrewsbury.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY

This year's Membership Directory has been issued with this issue of Grassbox. As usual, it includes a list of Members and brief details of their collections and interests, as supplied by everyone on their membership forms. In certain instances, some of these entries have been edited. To minimise space requirements, and to comply with the wishes of a number of members not to have their address published, generally speaking only telephone numbers are included. The full address of any Member is available on request from either the Secretary or Chairperson of the Club. The telephone numbers include the existing codes, but of course some of these may change in the middle of next year.

DON'T DO THIS



It had taken me all weekend to get my 'new' Atco HY running properly. It had been a bit sluggish all year, since I bought it. But at the Shrewsbury Rally in August, a bit of fiddling with the timing and it was soon running really well. In true Atco fashion the mower was racing across the display area. As this was a typical rally field, it was only a matter of time before I hit a bump. The mower stopped dead, but unbeknown to me the flywheel spun through about an eighth of a turn, throwing the timing right out. A few turns of the handle could not start the mower, which I attributed to a warm engine. Suddenly, a very loud bang in my left ear. What happened was that petrol had gone right through the system and into the silencer, where it ignited and exploded. The mower was out of action for the weekend, but it was simple enough job back in the workshop to put things right as the seam on the silencer is only tapped over and not welded. And now the moral of the story. If you change the timing of a mower with a flywheel mag, make sure you tighten up the central locknut as much as possible once it is set. And if you do happen to stall the mower, it is worth a quick double check to see that the timing is still spot on.



A 16" Shanks Eagle, dating from the 1930s, part of the Hall & Duck Collection and restored by Michael Duck.

RALLY NEWS

Museum of Garden History

A small contingent of Club Members attended a one day rally at the Museum of Gardening History on Sunday 16 October. One Member, Alec Hillyar, even brought his Eden sidewheel on the train rather than driving all the way from Rugby. There were many interesting historic garden items, including a number of very early hand mowers, to see in the Museum, which was also holding an Apple Fair on the same day. The event was considered a reasonable success and it is hoped to hold a similar event next year.

Several members of the Club displayed mowers at a new venue in September, the Shefford Steam and Country Fayre, in mid-Bedfordshire. This has replaced the well-known Roxton Show, where the site was no longer available. As can be seen from the photograph, pride of place was taken by Roger Wilkinson's beautifully restored 1935 24" Dennis. Other exhibitors were Andrew Grout with a range of machines, Eric Hickling with a 14" Atco and Alan Hardwick with push mowers and an Allen Scythe, which he motored to the rally site from home about a mile away (with cutter blade removed of course). The Club has been invited back in 1995, on September 16/17. Further details from Alan or Dick Hardwick on 01462 816018.

1994 SHREWSBURY RALLY

The site was new for this well established rally and proved to be very good.

A new item for the rally was a Sunday auction. There were three mowers in the sale: a 1950s Ransomes, a late 1920s Atco Standard, and a 1930s 24" Dennis with grass box and seat. The Ransomes fetched £18, the Atco £45 and the Dennis £45. I do not believe that any of the machines were runners.

It as the first time that this rally had a separate lawn mower section, this I believe was mainly due to Mike Dibley's efforts. Unfortunately mower exhibitors were sparse on the ground.

It is a bit disappointing when these things are organised for Club members and they do not take advantage of them.

This particular rally has a waiting list of exhibitors and we less than half filled the area given to us.

The majority of mower exhibitors there had travelled 70 miles or more, and I know there are mower collectors who live a lot closer than this. Surely they were not all on holiday.

However, a good time was had by all who did turn up and swaps and purchases were made.

I came away with a 6" Shanks mower complete with grass box, which I could guess was from between 1870-1880. This purchase was made after haggling with a stall holder.

All in all it was an excellent weekend marred only (for me, at least) by the shortage of lawn mowers.

John Barnard

DIARY DATES 1995

Suffolk Garden Festival

Saturday 29/Sunday 30 April

Milton Keynes Museum

Saturday 13/Sunday 14 May (including AGM at 12noon Sunday)

Banbury Steam Rally

Saturday 24/Sunday 25 June

Hatfield Festival of Gardening

Saturday 24/Sunday 25 June

Trerice/National Trust Centenary

Sunday 2 July

County of Salop

August Bank Holiday, to be confirmed.

Erewash Museum

August, to be confirmed

Otmoor Show

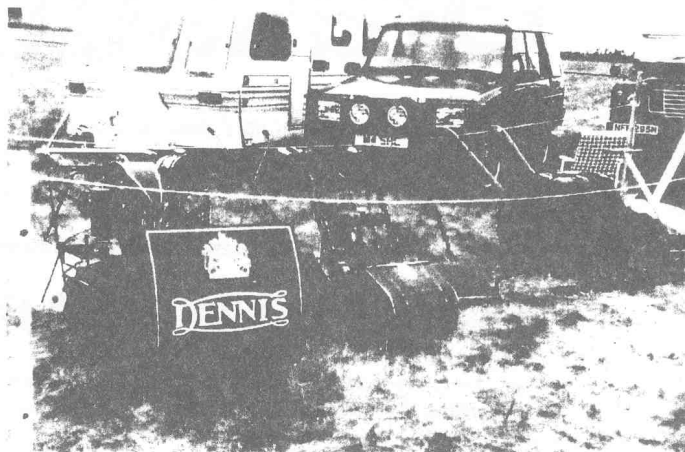
September, to be confirmed

Shefford Steam Fayre

Saturday 16/Sunday 17 September

Museum of Gardening History

September/October, to be confirmed

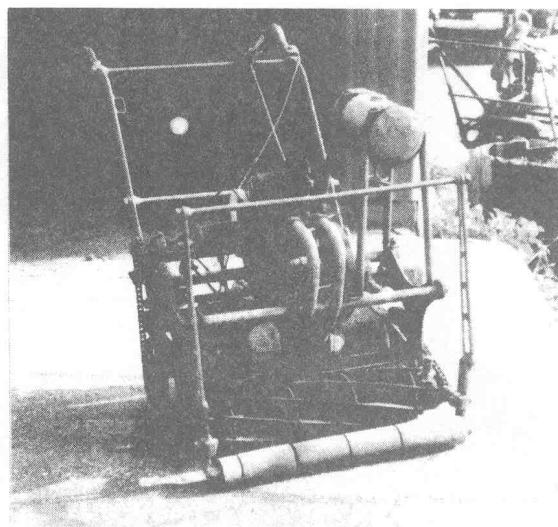


Some of the lawn mowers on display at Shefford Steam and Country Fayre in September.

RANSOMES DATES

Michael Duck has supplied the following dates showing the various name changes of Ransomes. It might help date more accurately some of those early hand mowers:

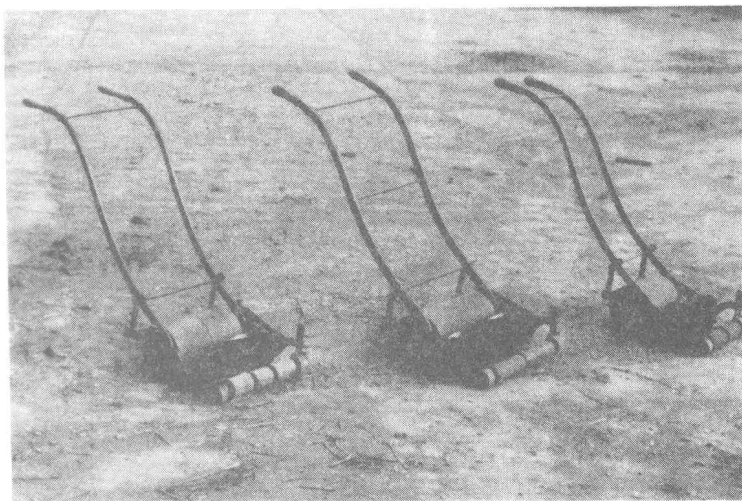
1789	Robert Ransome formed company.
1809	Ransome and Son
1818	Ransome and Sons
1825	J & R Ransome
1830	J, R & A Ransome
1846	Ransomes and May
1852	Ransomes and Sims
1869	Ransomes, Sims and Head
1881	Ransomes, Head and Jefferies
1884	Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies Ltd



An early Greens motor mower with a four stroke engine. Note the unusual two-port exhaust manifold. Part of the Hall & Duck Collection.

INFORMATION SERVICE

New forms for the Club's special information service, run in conjunction with the Hall & Duck Collection, are enclosed. This is an excellent service available to Club Members at a discount rate (the Hall & Duck Collection normally charges twice the amount to non-Members of the Club). The service fee is £3 for each lawnmower, covering research and copying costs, and is well worth it to find out all there is to know about any particular lawnmower. Completed forms, with a cheque made payable to the Old Lawnmower Club, should be sent to Club Secretary 'Robbie' Robinson, who organises the service.



A selection of Shanks Caledonias from the Hall & Duck Collection. These models date from the 1890s.

375 MILES NON-STOP!

Martin Seymour describes an unusual journey by lawn mower

Back in April 1959 a very strange event took place. Five students from Hatfield Technical College drove a lawnmower non-stop from Edinburgh to London. It was designed as a publicity event to show the reliability and endurance of the machine, and publicity it certainly got. All the local and national media on the route covered the event, and news spread as far as Cape Town, South Africa, and Kuala Lumpur.

The machine in question was a Ransomes 24" Matador fitted with a 288cc JAP four stroke engine, with a trailing seat. To conform to highway regulations the mower was fitted with lights and brakes (on the trailing seat presumably) and rubber tyres. To make sure the engine would be reliable it had 100 hours of testing before the event.

The five members of the team each did a shift of eighteen hours on and twelve hours off. Driving the mower was in two-hour stints whilst the remaining time was spent resting or driving the chase (!) car or trying to sleep in the dormobile which met up at pre-arranged points every six hours.

At 11.45am on Saturday 28 March the crew set out from Edinburgh Castle, piped out to the tune of *Scotland the Brave*. A haggis had been presented by Mr Strachan, Deputy Superintendent of Parks in the city, to be conveyed to the college in Hyde Park, London. The crew was feeling a little groggy, having been entertained in the usual fashion the night before by the staff of Ransomes' Edinburgh branch. The route had to be carefully planned to avoid steep gradients, so a map was provided by the AA.

The weather over the next four days was variable, from swirling mist to incessant rain. The machine performed faultlessly, with a little wheel-spin on steep gradients in the wet. They all successfully arrived at Hyde Park at 3pm on 1 April, having travelled 375 miles non-stop in 99 hours. The haggis was found and presented to Mr Barbour, Chief Superintendent of Royal Parks. The crew was entertained to a meal at Ransomes, and then a visit to the Windmill where they all fell asleep!

The members on the journey had to turn down an offer of marriage, foil an ambush attempt by University of London students. One member received a pint from a local landlord, and then spilt it over himself when going over a bump.

The machine was found to be in good condition on inspection, albeit with a battered chain case. It had used 18 gallons of fuel and had performed faultlessly. It then went on show around various Ransomes dealerships.

The crew on this unique journey were Tom Hudson, Mike Savage, Mike Smith, Hugh Tansley, and John Wilson.

I have plans to recreate the event next year, in an attempt to raise £20,000 for multiple sclerosis. If any member of the Club is interested in joining in, please contact me on 0206 761012

DATING GREENS SILENS MESSORS

A couple of Members have suggested that the Club should try to organise a dating list for Greens Silens Messors. As many readers may know, Silens Messors were made over a long period with various design changes. Although the company cast a unique, sequential number into one of the handle struts it is not possible to determine the age of any given machine because there are no company records to check the numbers against. For a few years in the 1890s the company even cast a date into the upper part of the handles. In theory it should be possible using information supplied by the people in the Club with Silens Messors to create a dating list. What we will need is a full description of the machines in Members' collections, and if possible any evidence to prove that a machine was made or sold on a particular date. The basic information required is as follows:

Shape of handles (ie straight or curved 'S' style)

Machine number (found on handle strut)

Width of cut

Description of wording and design of roller scraper plate.

Whether it has a one or two piece roller.

The number of wooden rollers at the front.

Any other distinguishing marks.

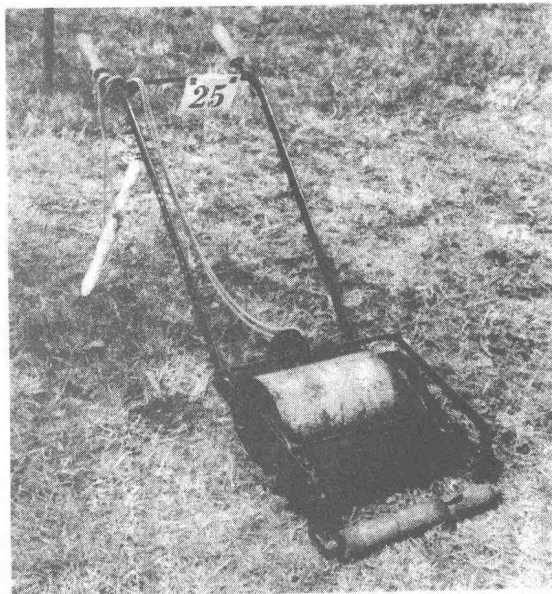
Proof of sales/manufacture date.

Single or double bolts to attach handles to frame.

There are other distinguishing marks on Silens Messors, but the ones above should be enough to tell the difference between designs.

If any Members would like to provide information for this project, please send it to Keith Wootton at 92 Artizan Road, Abington, Northampton NN1 4HS.

An update of progress on the project will be included in the next edition. If it is a success, a similar exercise could be used to produce an Atco Standard dating list.



Greens 12" Silens Messor. Any ideas on the date?

LOOK OUT!

By now everyone who reads Old Glory will have seen the profile of the Club in the January 1995 edition. This tells the story of the Club from those early days back in the 1980s, right through to the present, and even includes photos of some of the club members. For those who have not seen it, it should still be possible to get back copies either at the news agents or from the publishers.

Even more embarrassing for the Club Chairperson Keith Wootton will be his appearance on ITV's You Bet in the New Year. Keith has to identify 10 lawnmowers - blindfold. He cannot say whether he did it or not, but all will be revealed on the second show of the series, which should mean it's on some time in January.

RESCUE OF A c1935 RANSOMES, SIMS AND JEFFERIES 42" RIDE ON MOWER

By Andrew Grout

Having bought the 24" Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies ride on mower in September 1991 it was a great surprise to be given information leading to the purchase of a second machine less than a month later.

Whilst exhibiting at the Ouse Valley working rally, held in Bedfordshire over the weekend of the 28/29 September, a fellow exhibitor informed me of the existence of a 42" ride on Ransomes supposedly being stored at Plysu plastics in Woburn Sands, a village less than two miles from my home.

The following Wednesday I telephoned the factory and a very helpful gentleman gave me the grim news that the mower had gone to a scrap yard in the past two days. With this in mind I had to work quickly if the mower was to be saved. I telephoned the local scrap yard the same day and got a decidedly cool response. They denied having seen the mower, and said they were unaware of the mower's existence and did not believe the machine was in their yard. I would not take 'no' for an answer and managed to persuade them to allow me to visit the yard the following morning.

I was in the yard by 8am and within a few minutes I found the mower. The only part visible was the rear corner of the machine, with the words Ransomes Ipswich written on it. The rest was buried under a heap of scrap iron. One of the resident crane drivers was enticed by the sound of loose change before he would lift the mower from the heap and place it in a safe corner of the yard out of further harm's way.

Having fixed a price to purchase the machine I was able to survey the what I had bought and a very sorry looking mower would be an understatement.

The following Saturday using one friend's low loading trailer and another's Land Rover and assistance, the mower moved home.

The mower in question is the remains of a 42" Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies ride on, fitted with a four cylinder Orwell engine. The engine is stuck solid with rust in the bores, lacks a carburettor and the magneto is incomplete. The radiator, tin work, seat, starting handle, grass box and side delivery mechanism are all missing, but despite these problems I still expect to return the machine to full working order. When will I get around to starting this project? I expect it will take up to five years to complete, but I am of the opinion that when it is returned to its former glory, it will have been well worth saving.

My thanks should go to Brian Clarke and David Hatherhill for their assistance in rescuing the mower.

Editor's Note: Tracing the history of this mower will be an article for a future issue of Grassbox, by which time we hope to have a photograph too!. Has anyone else an unusual story to tell of how they found a favourite mower? If so, why not write it down for a future edition.



Roger Burnett's 36" Ransomes ride-on from the 1930s is similar to the one that Andrew has found, except that it is in a little better condition at the moment following Roger's restoration work.

CHOOSING OILS

Selecting the right oil for an old lawn mower is not, on the face of it, particularly tricky. There are many good quality lubricants available for two and four stroke engines, and these should work with older machines, even ones which are only used once in a while and rarely flat out.

However, on closer examination the situation is a little more complex. Oils are for lubrication of the moving parts of the lawn mower, the most important of which is the engine. To work effectively, they need to lubricate as well as maintain suitable viscosity across a wide range of temperatures to ensure that a thin film of oil clings to all internal surfaces and does its job.

The engines in old (let us assume we mean pre 1960 for the sake of argument) lawn mowers were designed for use with the oils available at the time. The tolerances in the machined parts, as well as filters, gauzes, tubes and so on were different than might be found in today's engines. Modern oils are designed for the ultra fine tolerances and high speeds, temperatures and pressures encountered in modern engines. They flow rapidly, with low viscosity, and often do not cling to the metal surfaces very well.

This can have two major effects on older machines. First, the oil will not lubricate properly. Second, on machines used only occasionally, the oil will run off surfaces, leading to a greater chance of corrosion and reduced lubricating effect during start up, when the engine is at its most vulnerable.

In two stroke oils, the problem is equally serious. In the early Villiers two stroke engines, a 16:1 or 20:1 petrol:oil mix was recommended. However, these oils were generally equivalent to SAE40 or 50, whereas now the modern oils can have viscosities as low as SAE5. Additives are used which are designed to help keep high speed units clean. Using these oils at 16:1 mixes in older engines creates a petrol/oil mix with too low a viscosity which, when used for even relatively short periods, can lead to inadequate lubrication and even seizing.

So do collectors of old lawn mowers need to worry about the oils they use? In general, if the mower is only used for a few hours a year, at shows and rallies for example, it is probably not worth the additional expense of special 'vintage' oils. On the other hand, all collectors value their machines and would want to make sure that they are not going to cause damage for future generations to deal with. If machines are used more regularly (and let us face it, many club members do use an old machine!), it might be worth looking at the type of oil used.

Two strokes appear to be the most vulnerable. Using more oil to give a 12:1 mix might help, but will lead to a smoky exhaust and might even give starting problems. Four strokes will generally manage with a good quality modern 20W50 multigrade. Collectors preferring to take a more authentic approach might like to try a specialist 'vintage' oil used by a number of motor cycle enthusiasts, known as Penrite. This is widely stocked in specialist shops. Details of local suppliers can be obtained from the company on 021 333 5237.

Next Edition Feb/March 1995

Materials For Mowers

Hall & Duck at the IoG

Grassbox

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