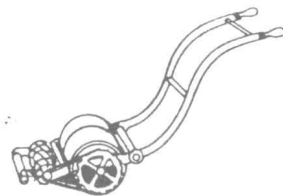


# Grassbox

*The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club*

Number 14

Late Summer 1995



## BEST YEAR YET

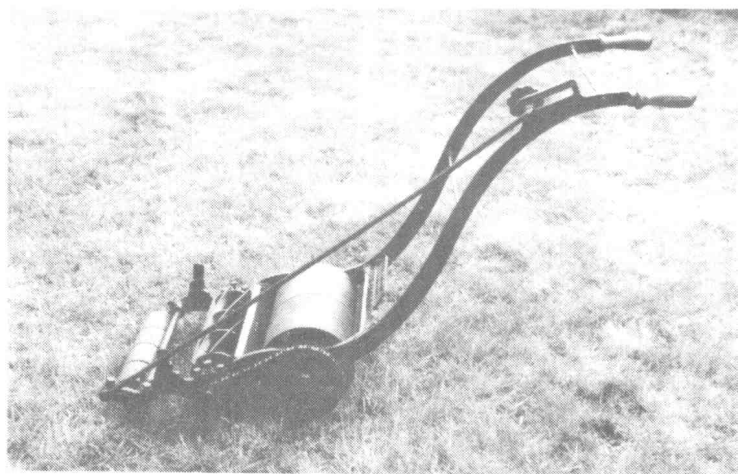
So another rally season is almost over, and I think it fair to say that this year has been the best yet.

Not only have more Club Members been to rallies, but the variety and standard of machines on display is now much better than when we first started organising events.

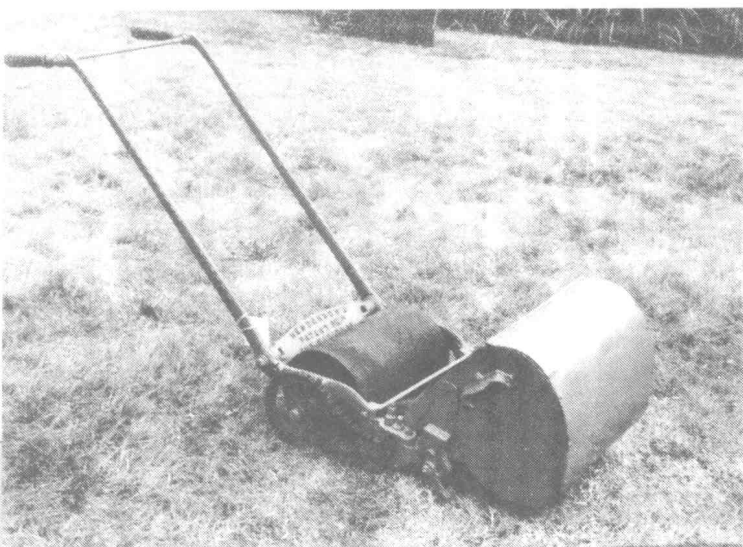
The Club, and individual collectors, are now welcome at a lot more rallies, many of which are now prepared to allow a separate section for grass cutting machinery. This trend is continuing, as evidenced by invitations from more events for the Club to put on, or organise, an exhibition of mowers.

Mowers are now generally well presented and working, or at least able to work, whether they are restored or not. What's more, people who exhibit lawn mowers seem to put on a different type of display to, say, stationary engines, motor cycles or classic cars. Many members of the public at events this year have commented how friendly OLC members seem to be, and how much fun we seem to be having.

The Club is already making plans for 1996 (see dates below) and a number of rallies will be held throughout the country. Hopefully as many members as possible will be able to attend at least one of our events, whether to exhibit or just say hello.



*The Barford & Perkins Godiva, c1890, as seen at Trerice House. The rod at the side is used to adjust the cutting height.*



*Henderson's patent 12" lawn mower, c1905, known as 'The National'.*

## Atco Goes German

The news at the beginning of September that Atco had been sold to the German company Bosch must have saddened many lawn mower enthusiasts.

Atco is probably the best known British lawn mower manufacturer, although Ransomes might think otherwise, and can trace its ancestry back well over 100 years to the beginnings of its parent company CH Pugh Ltd. The company existed for many years before producing its first mower in 1921, so next year will be the 75th anniversary of the Atco Motor Mower.

It is easy to get sentimental about these things, and the move will be seen by many as another symbol of national decline. In fact Atco has changed hands a number of times in recent years, and perhaps the latest change will mean some stability for the company at long last.

The sale effectively means that Ransomes is now the only large-scale British lawn mower manufacturer.

Nº149

ASK FOR

# Samuelson's

TRADE MARK

"Villa" & "Favorite"

## NEW LAWN MOWERS

Sold by all  
Ironmongers.

WHITE & PIKE, BIRM.

THE VILLA LAWN MOWER

FOR SIZES AND PRICES SEE BACK.

*Advert for Samuelson's 'Villa' and 'Favorite' mowers, taken from the 1881 catalogue of the Banbury company. Copy supplied by Roger Evans.*

# Rally News

## Banbury Steam Rally, 24/25 June

A new location on the rally field, with a larger marquee and demonstration area, was popular with exhibitors, a number of whom were visiting the rally for the first time. Robbie Robinson put on a large display of his hand mowers, and with the many machines from other exhibitors, this was the largest display yet at Banbury. Robbie also displayed some of his collection of lawn mower advertisements and catalogues inside the marquee.

Outside, the weather was dull on Saturday but very hot on Sunday. Nevertheless, some of the motor mowers were used to give demonstrations throughout the afternoon, and the grass had received a decent cut by the end of the weekend.



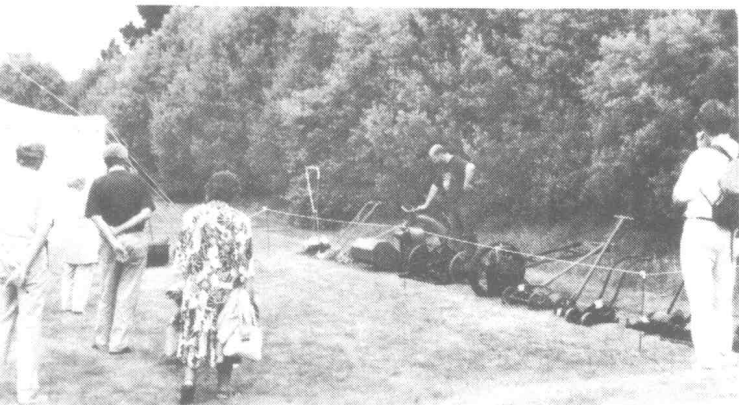
*Keith Wootton demonstrates how to let an Atco Standard get away from you at Banbury Steam Rally.*

## Hatfield Festival of Gardening, 24/25 June

The clash with Banbury meant that a few exhibitors had to choose between the two events, and this affected the turn-out on Saturday. On Sunday however a number of Members from Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex and Hampshire turned up to put on an excellent display.

## Trerice House, 2 July

Eight members of the Club made the long trip to Trerice for a rally organised by Brian Kirby as part of the National Trust's Centenary celebrations. The rally was held on one of the Trerice lawns and a number of machines from the Halford Collection which is housed there were rolled out for the occasion. On Sunday afternoon, Andrew Hall gave a highly interesting talk on the history of the lawn mower using the machines on display to illustrate his story. There were many visitors and the whole event was deemed to be a great success. It is possible that a similar event may be held again in a couple of years' time.



*Andrew Hall rests on a British Anzani lawn rider while discussing the history of the lawn mower at Trerice in July.*

## County of Salop, Shrewsbury, 27/28 August

This year we were located in a different position on the rally field, as were most of the other exhibitors. In our case it proved to be a good move as we were about 10 yards from the main arena.

A lot more of the public came to look at us. Several people approached us regarding mowers that could be interesting. I am sure most of these will be appearing in the adverts of this newsletter. I followed up one offer and ended up with a '36' Greens with a horizontal twin Norman engine - anyone want to do a swap?

There was a good turn out of mowers; I counted 70 on the Sunday, and even more on the Sunday, with an average of 12 exhibitors over the weekend. The organisers of the event appreciated our efforts and I have no doubt we will be asked back next year.

The weather over the weekend was not bad. A bit windy on the Sunday, but better on the Monday.

There was one mower for sale on the trade stands, a 1930s sidewheel called a Ransomes Ripper. The stall holder was asking £35 for it, which we all felt was bit high, but he had sold it for this amount by midday on the Sunday. It just goes to show - how do you put a value on old mowers?

Andy Grout may have had a bit of luck - a Ransomes horse mower was offered to him by an old farmer. I imagine it will involve him in a round trip of 300 miles. We will undoubtedly hear of the success or failure of this adventure in future newsletters.

There was a slight disappointment at the end of the rally when we did not get our glass tankard (which takes the place of a plaque at this rally). It seems that as we were booked in as a club, they did not know how many individuals to expect, so only a few tankards were allocated. I hope this is rectified next year.

In all, it was a successful weekend and I look forward to the next one. *John Barnard, October 1995.*

## Andy Grout's Get Together, 29/30 July

Andrew Grout celebrated his 25th birthday on 29 July with a small rally held in the garden of a pub near his home in Milton Keynes. In addition to OLC members, a number of Andrew's friends from other parts of the vintage machinery movement were also present.

Small, informal get togethers of this kind are a friendly and relaxing way to spend a day, and would probably be very popular with a number of members.

## Erewash, 19 August

The Victorian walled garden at the museum makes an ideal setting for a rally. This was the Club's second visit, and six members put on a modest display for the day. A couple of local papers took photographs, and these appeared the following week, which pleased the museum. It is likely the event will be held again next year.

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## Diary Dates 1996

MK Museum Rally and AGM, 19/20 May  
Hatfield Festival of Gardening, 22/23 June  
Banbury Steam Rally, 29/30 June  
County of Salop, 25/26 August

The Club has been approached by two rallies to see whether any members would like to exhibit next year. The dates of the events, and contact numbers for organisers are given below. If there is enough interest, the Club may decide to promote the events as full OLC rallies.

Malpas Vintage Machinery Association, Yesteryear Rally, September 1996. Contact D Ackerley, 18 Jamieson Close, Vicars Cross, Chester. Tel: 01244 311957.

Lister-Petter Tyndale Rally, 15/16 June 1996. Contact Mrs Witchard. Tel: 01453 546024 (Gloucester)

## PAINT

Following the article on cast irons in the last edition, here is a brief look at another essential material for producing lawn mowers: paint.

One of the questions asked most frequently to the Club is "What colour should I paint....?"

The answer is not as easy as one might hope. Basically, there are two considerations. First, how close a match to the original colour do you require? Second, what sort of paint are you going to use?

Paint technology has moved on some way in the last century. Early mowers were finished in a basic lead-based paint which was often mixed and blended in the factory paint shop. Consistency of colour, and overall paint quality, was not as important as today. This was mainly because customers were less worried, but also because additional expense would have been incurred in improving quality.

This means that two similar machines from the same manufacturer would have had a slightly different shade of green (or whatever colour was used) paint.

However, there is another problem in that lead based paint changes chemically. This has two effects. First, as the lead in the paint oxidises, the paint breaks down and the finish begins to appear powdery. In fact, old style lead paints were never as glossy as modern finishes in the first place, but the oxidation accelerates the effect. Second, when it oxidises, the lead constituent changes colour from a white compound to a black one, which has the effect of darkening the overall shade of the paint.

Lead paints were commonly used up to at least the 1950s on lawn mowers, and were gradually replaced by polyurethane and silicone based alternatives which use titanium compounds. These paints are more stable, easier to use and provide a glossy finish. Nor are they poisonous.

### Getting A Match

When choosing paint for a restoration project, the first thing to decide is how close a match is required. There are three basic options.

First, obtain paint from the manufacturer of the original machine. However, bear in mind that most manufacturers, such as Ransomes and Atco, have standardised on a colour of green (for example) that is different to that used more than 20 years ago. However, the colour is usually close enough for most people's needs, although it might be expensive.

Second, obtain a match from a machine that has been restored. The advantage here is that at least your machine will look right next to the other machine, but of course the first machine could be wrong in the first place. However, most collectors will be willing to share knowledge about their paint sources and it can save a lot of rushing about and expense.



*Greens New Royal sidewheel lawn mower, c1890. This machine is a large size, possibly for use on fine grass.*

The third option to obtain a match from the machine being restored or, if this is not possible, another unrestored machine. Old paint will generally be darker than the original colour because it will have changed chemically and probably been dirty for some time too. The best thing to do is find a piece of paint which will be as close to original as possible. Looking under tightened nuts or flanges is a good place because these will be cleaner and less affected by chemical action.

### Choosing a paint

Once you know what colour you need, the next thing is finding a source for the paint.

As mentioned, manufacturers such as Atco and Ransomes may be able to supply small quantities of the colours they use at the moment, and this will probably be OK for many people.

In addition, many specialist paint suppliers can mix paint to match exactly a customer's specification. This is a good option for many people, but is usually more expensive than buying ready made paint. Some companies can even provide a 'non glossy' version to add to the authenticity.

Most enthusiasts, however, are really looking for a close approximation to the right colour and are content to use an off the shelf brand. Many are available that give a close approximation to the required colours.

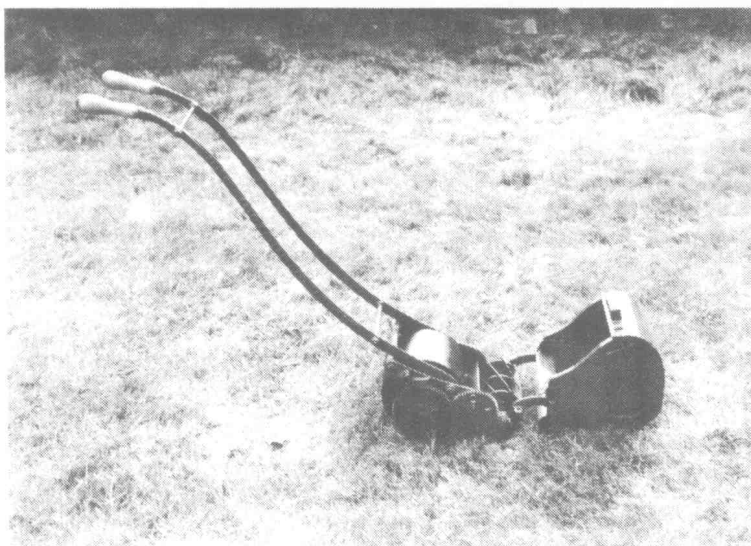
The trick is to hunt around because the well known brands, such as Dulux and Crown, often do not have anything appropriate. Sometimes, the 'own brand' colours at DIY stores can help.

Although it is not the intention here to list paints to use, Rural/Country Green from Woolworths is used by a number of collectors as a good match for Greens and Ransomes hand mowers, and Crown Signal Red is good for red parts on most machines. Another old favourite for early Atco, Greens, Dennis and Shanks motor mowers is Mid Brunswick Green.

Hammerite Red and Hammerite Green are preferred by a number of enthusiasts for general work because they are easy to use, quick drying and very tough. The range is limited in choice of colours but, nonetheless, good value for money.

The modern polyurethane and silicone based paints are probably better at protecting metal from corrosion and are easier to use than older paints. They give a long lasting gloss finish which, while not entirely authentic, is certainly attractive and practical.

At the end of the day, for most people if the colour looks right, it is right. Purists might argue that lawn mowers should be restored using original paints, and for those prepared to spend the time and money using them this is of course acceptable.



*This Shanks Caledonian 6" mower, was probably made in the 1870s or 1880s. Although only 6" wide, the mower works perfectly. A casing which half-encloses the gear wheels is missing on this example.*



## Leaflets Now Ready

Over the last year, the Club has been preparing a series of leaflets designed to help Members enjoy their hobby more. The first three leaflets are now ready, covering the following subjects:

**Museums Directory**, with list of museums containing lawnmowers or displays about manufacturers.

A **Sources of Information Directory**, containing information about books, magazines and other written information about lawn mowers.

**Directory of Suppliers**, containing information about suppliers of spare and replacement parts and other services for lawn mower collectors.

These leaflets will be issued free of charge to all Club Members, and will be mailed with the next edition of the newsletter.

The aim is to update the leaflets annually, and any suggestions for additions and/or amendments from Club Members would be most welcome.



*Ransomes gang mower unit from the 1920s. This would normally have been used in a gang of three or five. This particular unit, from Trerice, was built to Worthington's US patent, the concept having evolved in the US in the early years of this century.*

## PHOTO COPYING

The Club has arranged a special deal with a restorer and collector of old photographs in Milton Keynes.

The collector will copy any old black and white print for just £1 per 7x5" print, plus 65p to cover postage and packing for up to five prints.

Please send any photographs for copying to Keith Wootton, c/o the Old Lawnmower Club, Milton Keynes Museum, Southern Way, Wolverton, Milton Keynes MK12 5EJ. Please make cheques or postal orders payable to The Old Lawnmower Club.

Allow 28 days for delivery and return of originals. The Museum is also trying to build an archive of photographs of old machines and would be very pleased if people sending photographs also gave their permission for a copy to be taken for Museum use at no charge to the owner of the original.

## THE END OF THE LAWNMOWER

Scientists in Australia have recently reported that they have identified a chemical which can prevent grass from growing. They are now trying to produce the chemical in a form which can be sold to gardeners. The aim is to reduce the need to cut grass, but will this lead to the end of the lawn mower? It is hard to imagine that a watering can will ever replace the trusty mower, but who knows.



*The Follows & Bate Climax, introduced in 1869, was the first sidewheel mower in the world. The sidewheel was a simpler design than rear roller drive mowers, and cost less to make. The company sold more than 4000 in less than two years.*

## MORE GOOD NEWS

### Radio Two

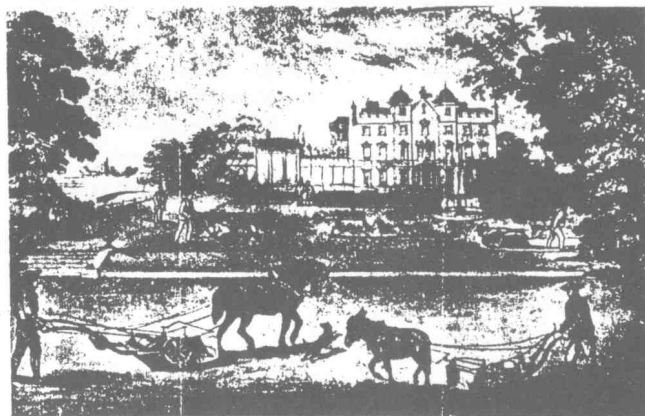
The Old Lawnmower Club and Milton Keynes Museum were featured on Radio 2's Debbie Thrower Show in July when Keith Wootton discussed the Museum's collection with a reporter. The piece was part of a series about clubs for people who collect unusual objects.

### Radio 4

Andrew Hall recorded a piece for a Radio 4 programme about lawns and gardens.

### Big Breakfast

Christopher Proudfoot appeared on Channel 4's Big Breakfast in May with some of his large collection of hand mowers.



*This unusual engraving, a copy of which was sent it by Roger Evans, shows a selection of Shanks pony mowers crowding a lawn in 1843 at a (presumably) prosperous country house.*

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**Grassbox**

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Edited by Keith Wootton