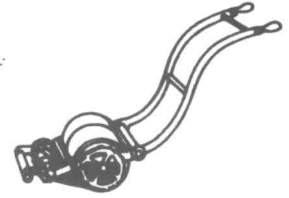


# Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 18

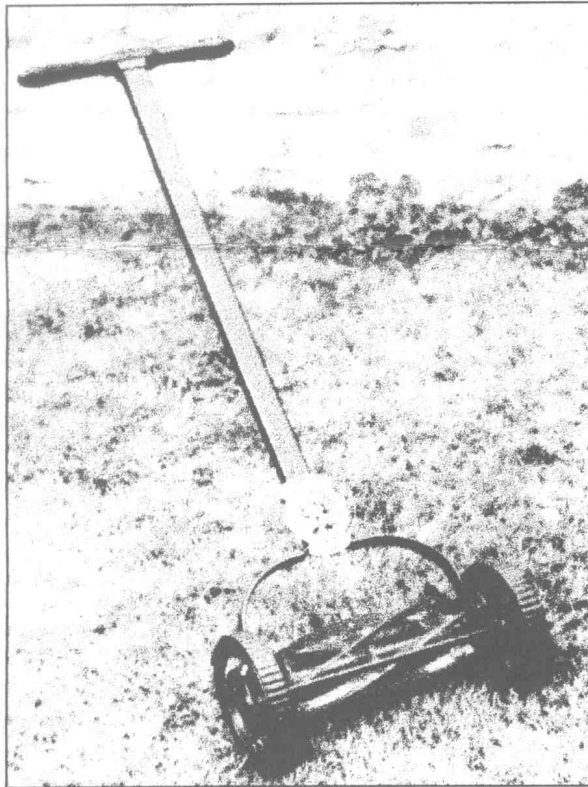
Autumn 1996

## IMPROVEMENTS

This issue of Grassbox, perhaps more than any other before it, contains a number of articles written by Club Members rather than myself. Thanks to everyone who has sent in items, ideas and information. I try to include everything, so if your piece is not in this time, it should be along soon. But please do not stop. If more is sent in, I can begin to look at ways of expanding the newsletter or producing other information leaflets. And it all saves me time too!

Incidentally, I have tried to make a few improvements to the quality of the reproduction in this edition. I hope it is evident, but please let me know if there is anything else I can do to make Grassbox better.

*Keith Wootton*

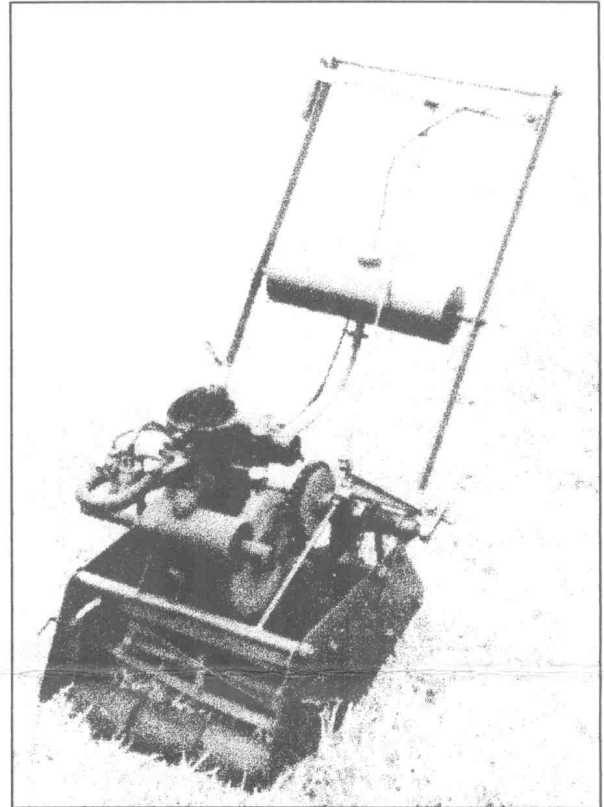


*Robbie Robinson's Shanks Scot, c1900.*

## SOMME MOWERS?

Taking a trip to the battlefields of the First World War recently, I stopped off in the little village of Pozieres on the Albert - Bapaume Road, the scene of much fighting during the Somme battles. Adjacent to the little cafe in the village is a small museum housing relics dug out of the nearby fields. There, nestling amongst the stick grenades, mortar bombs, rifles, and other battlefield detritus, was, believe it or not, the side iron from the grassbox of a Ransomes mower. "No need to take the Lewis gun lads, we've got the Patent Chain Automaton".

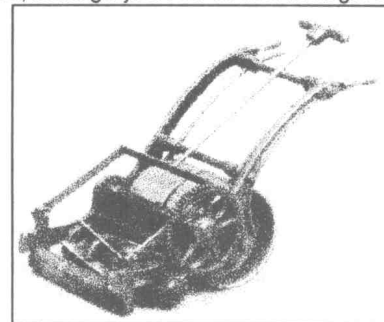
*Chris Thompson*



*Automower, belonging to Alan Hardwick, c1935.*

## BUDDINGS FOR EVERYONE

Someone recently sent me a Budding mower in the post! No, it is not a joke. In fact, the Budding was a 7mm scale (approx 1:43) model, making it just over an inch in length and height.



Neil Loudon spotted the mower in a recent copy of *Railway Modeller*. Although advertised as a 1920s mower, it was apparent that the model was based on an earlier machine than that! The kit is supplied in brass pieces and is complete with hand draw bar and dog clutch levers. It is almost identical to the 'Budding' mower at Milton Keynes Museum. The manufacturer kindly sent me a completed model (which I had to return) so that I could see what it looked like. The kits can be obtained from Classic Commercials, PO Box 800, West Wrattling, Cambridge CB1 5NB. The price is £14.95 plus 50p for postage and packing. Now everyone can have their own Budding. An ideal Christmas present?

# RALLY REPORTS

## BANBURY RALLY - 29/30 June

Around twelve Club Members attended this year's Banbury Rally, and there were over seventy machines on display in the marquee and demonstration areas. There was an excellent mix of hand and motorised mowers, including a number of Automowers.

This year, the working area was particularly busy, with Alan Hardwick and Alec Hillyar spending a fair bit of time running their machines. I was less fortunate, spending most of the time trying to get an old Shanks Jehu to start, eventually succeeding at about four o'clock on the Sunday.

As usual, Banbury presented an ideal occasion to meet and talk about mowers while seeing a large steam rally and enjoying a few drinks. Congratulations to Robbie for another successful event, and for his excellent marquee display of mowers and related adverts and leaflets.

*Keith Wootton*



*Alan Hardwick with his Dennis at Banbury Rally.*

## EREWASH MUSEUM - 17 August

On Saturday the 17th of August, around half a dozen club members attended the annual gathering in Derbyshire,

The display of nearly thirty machines looked particularly at home within the beautiful walled garden of Erewash museum.

All the major manufacturers of lawnmowers were well represented, including examples of Atco, Shanks, Ransomes, Greens, etc, as well as a number of unusual machines including a Velo-City roller mower. It was widely believed amongst those present that this was a catalogue machine, but perhaps you know different?

Several of the exhibitors brought along their families, who enjoyed spending time browsing through Ilkeston street market.

Although this event isn't one of the bigger shows we attend, it really is a fun and relaxing day out for the whole family, and I would like to thank Keith for organising it.

## MEMORIES OF ATCO

Chas H Pugh is synonymous with Atco mowers, but how many people realise the man never saw an Atco Motor Mower.

My time at the Tilton Road site in Birmingham has left many memories.

Billy (in the stores in the 1960s) had been a mobile service man with a Rudge Combination in the early years. He spoke of the runs into the country, with the sidecar loaded with regrind sets (ie a sharpened and painted cutter assembly and a ground bottom blade fitted into its carrier) which would be swapped on site and. If necessary, the engine barrel removed for decoking, the magneto checked, and a carburettor and filter clean out. Very few spares would need to be carried due to much standardising and simplicity. Long runs were common in all weathers with several on-site calls per day.

I would strongly suggest to anybody who hasn't rallied lawnmowers before that this would be a good event to attend, meet others who enjoy this hobby of ours, and keep the whole family happy.

*Andrew Grout*

## COUNTY OF SALOP RALLY - 25/26 August

The first day of the rally started with some apprehension as the weather forecast was not good. We need not have worried - the weather was excellent.

This year our location had again been moved - one day they will make up their minds. As it turned out the position was OK as we were able to park our vehicles and trailers close by and the public found us with no problem.

Approximately 75 mowers were on display over the two days with a good cross section of all types. A mower I had only purchased two days earlier caused a lot of interest among the attending members. It is an open frame Greens petrol mower from around the late 1920s. You may see a picture in this newsletter.

The rally was well attended by the public on the Sunday but there appeared to be less people around on the Monday as the weather had deteriorated. This caused a problem with the arena events where most had to be cancelled. It was interesting to watch the steamers extract themselves from the soft ground by a "push and pull" method; a rigid bar was put between two machines and whoever gained grip became the puller or pusher.

One of our members bought a mower from one of the stalls; a rather neat sidewheel going by the name of 'Victoria'.

I don't know how they managed it but Messrs Hall and Duck were treated to a private viewing of the estate by the owner, Mr Wingfield. The family had a steam mower which was scrapped in the 1940s (was there an ulterior motive do you think?)

There are quite a few mowers offered for sale from the public, most of which will appear in this newsletter - after I have sorted out the ones I want. Well, you are all thinking that anyway!

The glasses which are distributed as a rally memento arrived after most members had left, consequently I am attempting to distribute them. If you did not get a programme or a glass please contact me.

*John Barnard*

## DRUSILLAS, 7 September

Around 45 machines were on display at a get-together organised by David Lumsden at Drusillas, East Sussex. A number of Club Members attended and David thinks the venue, a large country house with terrific gardens, would be an ideal location for future events. Drusillas is keen to encourage an event, and David has suggested a date for Sunday 7 September 1997. More details of the event will be available in due course.

Progress of course meant smart vans with the lads in white coats with 'Atco' in red on our pockets, nationwide service branches were set up to maintain the wide range of mowers.

Beside mowers, Atco made many other things, including a boat impeller in the 1940s and 50s, which were sold worldwide. When needed, the impellers were cleverly and quickly converted to a water pump for spraying in the garden. It was powered by a small Villiers Two Stroke engine.

A little book published by CH Pugh in 1956, 'The Story of Atco', explains how Charles Henry Pugh died in 1901, long before his descendants decided to market their first mower in 1921.

*Tony Edwards*

## 25 YEARS OF DENNIS MOWING

I got my first Dennis mower from a scrapyard in 1971. It was ex Thames Valley Police Sports Club and was complete with trailer seat. It is a 1926 30 inch, No 5155 with the Blackburn engine. My second Dennis came from Devon in 1980, and is also a 1926 Blackburn engined machine - a 24 inch, No 5827.

Both mowers (Dennis and Denise) have been in regular use since then, so I thought it might be helpful to pinpoint problem areas and the solutions I have found effective over many hundreds of hours of use.

Blackburn engined Dennis mowers are distinguished from later types by the flat rectangular fuel tank on top and the generally open engine construction as well as having the clutches and drive chains inside the side plates. Wearing parts like clutch linings, shear plates and cutting cylinder blades are still available. Other parts are also available from OLC Dennis enthusiasts or engineer's merchants.

This makes Dennis mowers highly repairable (the ultimate green machine?) by anyone with a modest toolkit.

### PROBLEMS

The magneto is fixed on a tray sticking out of the side of the engine. The outer end containing the contact breaker assembly is only just inside the machine frames but is vulnerable to bushes and overhanging objects. I once wiped the entire contact breaker assembly off the magneto on a stone mushroom in the garden- so don't cut corners!

The only other magneto failure I experienced was overheating, causing the shellac on the armature to melt and insulation breakdown. The cause was a gap round the nose of the magneto where it enters the crankcase. This provided a path for the hot crankcase compression gas to escape, cooking the magneto while mowing on a hot summer's day.

The cure was a rubber chevron pump packing pushed on to the magneto nose to block the gap when the magneto is bolted up to the crankcase.

The other main problem is vibration, causing fatigue fractures of pipes and brackets. The Blackburn engine is not well balanced, so it tries to move independently of the frame. Over the years, fuel, oil and exhaust pipes have all cracked.

The solution is to fit a flexible rubber section in fuel and oil lines, and leave the exhaust free to vibrate at the silencer end. I found out about the exhaust the hard way, when about a third of the thin exhaust outlet casting on the cylinder head broke off. The cure was to push a length of 38mm copper water pipe up into the cylinder head pocket below the exhaust valve, and incorporate it in a new clamp assembly. The original silencer also dissolved into holes, and this was replaced by a similar sized car tailpipe box from an autojumble, with the inlet pipe pushed about six inches into the larger curved pipe connected to the manifold and not clamped at the silencer end to allow for vibration.

The engine driven oil pump on the 24 inch (Denise) also failed due to vibration, which cracked off the bottom intake pipe fitting. Unfortunately, the pump casing was made from a die cast zinc alloy, which proved impossible to repair reliably with epoxy resin, possibly because the metal had become impregnated with oil, and could not be completely degreased. The oil pump was disconnected, and a small drip feed oil tank was fitted above the engine. This has proved an effective repair for the last 10 years, but one day I hope to find a replacement oil pump!

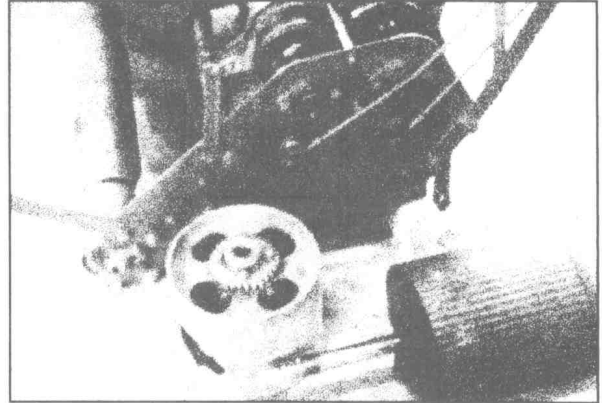
Other vibration failures have broken the grass deflector plate brackets and fan shroud. Both were fixed and strengthened by welding. Another unusual failure was a hole which appeared in the end drive roller section of the 30 inch (Dennis). This was due to over 60 years of wear which had thinned and weakened the roller. The 'holey roller' was taken off the machine, the hole strapped by a piece of bent aluminium, and the roller section filled up with fine strong concrete, which was profiled before it was hard, to match the rest of the roller. This proved a simple and effective repair, leaving a future option of replacement if a spare can be found.

Apart from the foregoing, routine repairs have included assorted bearings, a new shear plate and cutter blades for Denise and new clutch linings for Dennis, all of which are still

available from Dennis Motor Mowers of Derby, because those parts are identical to later machines.

The only actual engine breakdown occurred on Dennis about 22 years ago, when the engine stopped suddenly when the exhaust valve head broke off.. Fortunately, it stayed in the valve seat, and did no damage. The nearest equivalent automotive valve I could find was for a Ford Consul engine which had the same head and stem diameter, but was longer. This was altered to fit, and has worked ever since.

After 25 years of vintage Dennis mowing, I leave the last word to my 1926 mower manual - 'It will be found that the lasting qualities of the mower are of a very high order'.



Note that the mower is safely up on bricks- it weighs some 5 cwt, so I made sure it was safe before poking about underneath! Another tip when trying to unscrew the side caps carrying the cutting cylinder and roller bearings is to heat the INSIDE end with a gas torch while applying torque to a box spanner inserted in the cap if you don't have the special tool. Before applying flame, make sure any oily grass is cleared away or you will have a fire. Keep a fire extinguisher handy anyway. A useful trick for all chain drives is to tie a thin string on one end of the chain when you undo the link, and pull the string round the sprockets on the end of the chain as it comes off. Secure the string in place, so you can use it to pull the chain back onto the sprockets. Finish by threading the cord through the other end of the chain so you can pull them together to get the link in. Use cheap gardening string, and cut it off when the job is done. Make sure the link clip travels round end first or it will come off, followed by the chain!

I'm sure some of this will be 'old hat' to some members, but may be helpful to others. I leave it to you whether you splice the extra stuff into the piece I sent.

*Anthony Hopwood*

## NEW DISPLAY AT MK MUSEUM

Milton Keynes Museum has recently announced details of its redevelopment plan. Buildings lost in the fire earlier this year will be replaced, with work commencing in November. A number of new buildings will also be constructed.

The redevelopment will mean finding a new home for the lawn mower collection. The plan is to erect a cricket pavilion or groundsman's hut in the Museum field and devise a completely new display in time for the 1997 season. It would be great to have an opening ceremony in conjunction with next year's Annual Rally on 17/18 May. But the Museum has not yet been able to find a suitable building. Please contact Keith Wootton as soon as possible if you know of one.

## TIMING TROUBLE

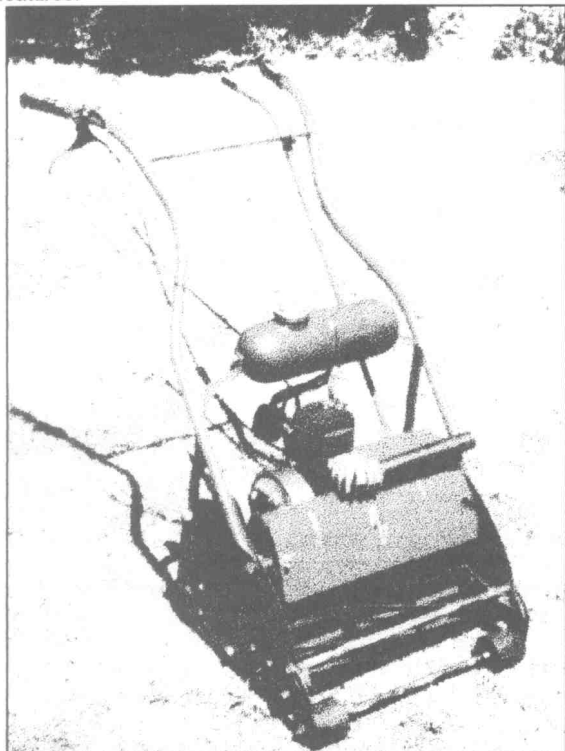
Martin Seymour would like to find out how to set the valve timing on a 348cc Sturmev Archer engine in a 1948 Ransomes Mk8. Contact Martin on 01449 774207 (Stowmarket) if you can help.

## NUTS

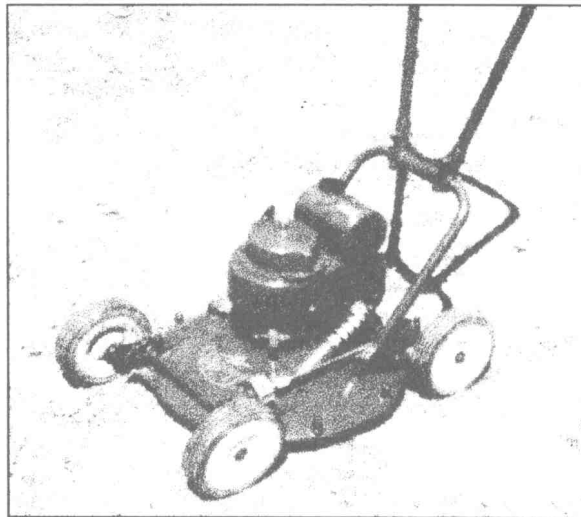
Alex Paton thinks the Shanks engraving in Grassbox 14 may feature Balmoral, as he has seen other Shanks advertisements using the same setting. On a different note, Alex wonders if the brass nuts on the original Ransomes Ajax were replaced with steel ones on the Mark 3 models, or were they just painted like that. Does anyone know?

## OZ MOWS

The Austral Villiers mower was made by a company based in Armadale, Victoria which produced a number of lawnmowers for a time in the 1950s. They were Australian designed, but used British Villiers motors, hence the name. Most of these machines were superbly engineered and had some unusual features.



This one, with kick-start, has an exhaust which exits through the side plate. It also has a detachable grass shield at the front of the machine. The company made a number of reel (ie cylinder) mowers and a kick start rotary mower.



The other photograph features an early (1950s) Victa. This model has become collectable in Australia. It has a manifold which leads to an exhaust underneath the motor in the base plate. It also accepts an edge trimmer which attaches to the left hand side of the mower. It has a two stroke motor which starts first pull. The height adjustment on the right hand side operates all four wheels. I do not know if you get these machines in England or not.

The Alcoh (not shown) was made in Western Australia. This firm has made tennis court mowers for many years. Originally this machine had a Villiers four stroke motor. Villiers had a factory in Victoria for many years producing mainly four-stroke stationary motors. New Villiers parts can still be bought here - at a cost! These motors can be seen all over the place powering pumps, cement mixers and goodness knows what. I have three in my shed.

*Mark Shuttleworth*

## The German Machine

Sitting at home watching the old goggle box one spring evening last year when a phone call disturbed my enjoyment of another one of those programmes that the 'management' had decided we should watch.

The caller was unknown to me and after confirming that I was Robbie Robinson of the Banbury Steam Society he introduced himself and asked if I was interested in an old lawn mower. After a few questions I found out that it was a side wheel mower called The Brill, with a wooden T handle. This was an unknown make to me and I thought it would be interesting to see it. On asking the price I was told that it was free (getting better all the time). He had tried to dump it at his local tip but they would not take anything made from metal.

I then asked him where he lived and he said Germany. Somewhat taken aback, I said that I would like to have the mower but getting it from Germany would prove to be a bit of a problem. No problem he said because he would be coming to England in May (VE Celebration Weekend as it happened) to go to York for a steam engine driving course (run by M Davies of the Banbury Steam Society with the NTET) and he would deliver the mower on his way there if I sent him a map of where I lived.

No sooner said than done, and true to his word he arrived at my place on the Friday evening with the mower as well as a colour advertisement for it that his wife had found in her gardening magazine in an article about old lawn mowers.

I have since bought another similar Brill machine but this one is an import and has Foreign Made on it and no German writing on the handle announcing it has ball bearings, unlike the first. The only thing that puzzles me is how did two steam men get onto the subject of lawn mowers - perhaps they have a steam one!

*Robbie Robinson*

## DIRECTORY UPDATES

The directories published earlier this year (Museums, Services, Books) will be updated in the next few months in time for reissue in the New Year. If anyone has any comments, suggestions, amendments, additions, etc, please let Keith Wootton know, for it is he who will be doing the work. Also, if anyone has any ideas for any new directories or information leaflets, Keith would like to hear from you. Suggestions so far include dating lists for particular makes and recommended paint colours. Also, if anyone would like their Membership Directory entry changed, please let either Keith or Robbie know before the end of November.

## ROLLMO QUERY

Jeff Skinner has two Rollmo mowers, one a 10" push mower, the other a 12" motor mower with a BSA motor. Can anyone help with the ages of the machines and the correct colour to paint them? Jeff is on 01782 537440 (Stoke on Trent).

**Keith Wootton** can be contacted by post at Milton Keynes Museum or at 92 Artizan Road, Abington, Northampton NN1 4HS. Tel: 01604 31192. **Robbie Robinson** can be contacted at 10 Burchester Avenue, Headington, Oxford OX3 9NA. Tel: 01865 450899.

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