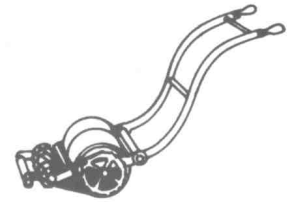


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 20

Spring 1997

A PROMISING YEAR

This year promises to be an exciting and interesting time for the Old Lawnmower Club. We are organising more rallies and get-togethers than ever before, and there are some special events planned too (more of that inside).

This being the last edition produced before the Annual Rally, I should like to mention that everyone involved in the Club is welcome and encouraged to attend this event at Milton Keynes Museum, which incorporates the AGM. Because of the rebuilding work at the Museum, this year's event may be a little different to previous years, but that should not detract from the enjoyment of the Club Members who make the trip.

Mailed with this edition should be this year's Membership Directory and revised versions of the Information Directories first produced last year. I hope that these little information sheets are useful to Members, especially as I know the time and effort spent collating the information and compiling each booklet. A big thanks to everyone who sent in information.

MOWER CARRIER



Tim Durant found this unusual Greens lawn mower carriage at a local auction. It can carry 12", 14" and 16" models. Tim believes it could date from as early as the 1880s, and hopes to bring it to Milton Keynes and other rallies this year.

VISIT TO RANSOMES

The Club has arranged a visit to the Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies factory in Ipswich for Friday 6 June. The visit will include a guided tour of the factory and an opportunity to see some of the latest models in the company's range. Members wishing to visit the Ransomes factory must contact Keith Wootton before the Friday 25 May. Places are limited, and will be available on a first come, first served basis.

Unfortunately it was not possible to arrange a visit on a Saturday (they do not do them), but a Friday was thought the best alternative, to allow Members to spend a long weekend in Suffolk if they wish.

MUSEUM MAKES PROGRESS

The Museum has now found a suitable wooden building to re-house the collection of lawn mowers. It is hoped that this building will be erected in time for the Annual Rally in May. Work on the other replacement and new buildings has started and is proceeding well.

EMERY CLIPPER REVEALED

With reference to obscure machines (Grassbox 19) requesting information on the EMERY CLIPPER lawnmower one of which I acquired 18 months ago, and will be pleased to share what little I know of this mower with other members.

The CLIPPER was manufactured by A J EMERY AND SONS, ENGINEERS, WHITEHALL ROAD, HALESOWEN, BIRMINGHAM between 1938-1955 though not in large numbers as commercially they were not cheap to manufacture, the construction being both robust and very heavy, especially when taking into account it was manufactured for the domestic market.



Unusual features of the CLIPPER can be seen in the cutting cylinder, which comprises six blades set in a V formation, designed to throw the grass-cuttings to the centre of the box filling it evenly, and enabling more grass to be collected. The second of these features worth a mention is that of the flipover-type foot-clutch which when operated transmits drive via heavy chain to the cutting cylinder only, while a hand operated clutch controls the drive. Two widths were manufactured, 14" and 17" both being cylinder models and powered by single cylinder, 4 stroke, JAP Type 2A engines. The 14" machine weighed in at 1¾ cwts while the 17" weighed a hefty 2¼ cwts.

Bill Mills

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held at 12 noon on Sunday 18 May at Milton Keynes Museum. All Club Members are encouraged to attend and help contribute to the way the Club is run. Everyone that attends will receive free admission to the Museum. Although the AGM is held on the same weekend as the Annual Rally, it is not essential to bring a mower. However, it would be great if everyone did!

DIARY DATES

As mentioned in the Autumn edition Drusillas Zoo Park has invited us to hold a rally again this year and the date is Sunday 7 September 1997. Drusillas is situated near Alfriston in East Sussex just south of the A27 midway between Lewes and Eastbourne. There will be an attractive area of garden set aside for visiting lawn mowers, plenty of refreshment and other facilities, a playground for children (including a narrow gauge railway), and families of exhibitors will be given free access to the award winning zoo. For enquiries and information, please contact David Lumsden on 01323 870215. Other events planned for this year are:

Chester Carnival

Saturday 10/Sunday 11 May

Details from Ian Fewtrell, Ellesmere, 9 Seabank Road, Lower Heswall, Wirral L60 4SN. Tel: 0151 342 7159.

Milton Keynes Museum

Saturday 17/Sunday 18 May

Details from Keith Wootton

Note: Club AGM, 12noon, Sunday 18 May.

Ransomes Factory Visit

Friday 6 June

Details from Keith Wootton

Banbury Steam Rally

Saturday 28/Sunday 29 June

Details from BA Robinson

Witney Show

Saturday 19/Sunday 20 July

Details from B A Robinson.

Otmoor Show, Oxford

Saturday 26/Sunday 27 July

Details from B A Robinson.

Trerice, Cornwall

Saturday 2/Sunday 3 August

Details from Keith Wootton

Erewash Museum, Ilkeston

Saturday 16 August

Details from Keith Wootton

Croydon Show

Saturday 16/Sunday 17 August

Details from B A Robinson

Drusillas, East Sussex

Sunday 7 September

Details from David Lumsden (see article).

Old Kiln Farm Rural Life Centre, Farnham

Sunday 21 September

Details from Keith Wootton

Hanbury Steam Rally, Worcestershire

Saturday 20/Sunday 21 September

Details from Martin Briggs. Tel: 01527 458240.

If you're organising a rally, or are attending a show where lawn mowers are welcome, let Keith Wootton know. The Club will support the event by promoting it in a future edition of Grassbox and by writing to local members to tell them about it.

County of Salop Steam Rally

The Club has decided not to attend the County of Salop Rally over August Bank Holiday this year. At last year's event, those attending did not feel that the main event organisers appreciated the Club's efforts in putting on a display. We are therefore looking for alternative venues in the north west to hold a rally for local members.

Want to borrow one of the Club Banners for your lawn mower event this year? Contact Keith Wootton in good time. There's nothing to pay, and the Club even pays the postage!

INSURANCE

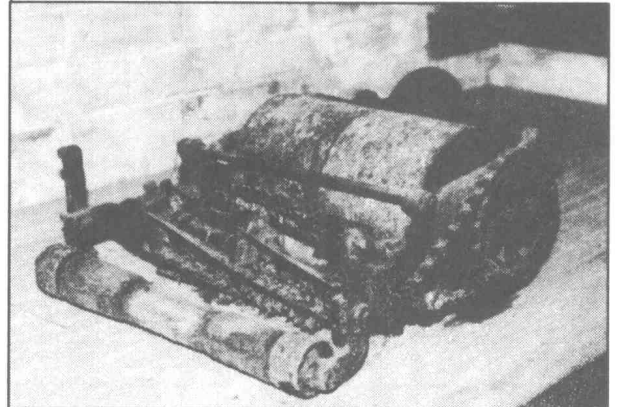
Most rally and event organisers expect exhibitors to have third party public liability insurance. This is so that exhibitors are covered against accidental damage to other people and property. The insurance is relatively inexpensive, usually less than £10 a year. The Club does not arrange this insurance, but does suggest two brokers who can. Details of these are contained in the new Services Directory.

RESTORING AN OLD LAWN MOWER

By Alec Hillyar (Part One)

To some of us stripping down an old mower for restoration may seem straight forward and easy but others may think twice. Over the next few issues of this magazine I hope to lay some problems to rest, in doing so I also hope to receive some feedback and ideas from club members on how they have tackled some of their problems, these will hopefully be published later in the series.

The main question I get asked is where to acquire machines like this, well, a visit to the local tip can, on rare occasions, reveal some interesting pieces, village fetes and garden shows can also add to a collection, its amazing what's on your doorstep, farm sales and collective auctions which are normally attended by farmers who are not interested unless they are collectors, being aware of Saturday sales where there may be people who will get a little carried away. Lawn mowers are one of the most inexpensive hobbies, let's keep it that way for as long as possible.



Take a photograph of your mower before you take it apart - it may help when you come to reassemble your machine.

Once you have located your machine (or machines) take a good look at it, if there are a lot of parts missing, damaged or broken its not really worth bothering with unless it is believed to be very old or rare, this can be kept and used for spares, more than likely if you wait awhile a complete or even working one will appear.

If you can find a grubby looking, working side wheel mower, easy for restoration, strip it down to find out the basics of how a mower works, clean and paint it, then reassemble, once you have gained confidence go back and get that rusty, seized up but complete Silens Messor or Ransomes patent chain or gear, it doesn't really matter if the wooden handles and rollers are missing, rotten or have woodworm, although the latter should be measured up, removed and burned as soon as possible, new handles can be turned but more on that later.

Next, before you start restoration, take the all important photo of how you received the mower so that you can proudly show everyone your resurrection from scrap to showroom. Now you are ready to start work.

In the next issue we will assess what we need to do before shearing all the bolts off and breaking the castings.

GET SMART FOR 1997!

Want to look good at all those Old Lawnmower Club events piling up in your diary? Don't forget that the following Club souvenirs are still available:

Car Stickers, 40p each (20p postage per order).

Ransomes Model Vans, £9.50 each.

Exhibit Log Sheets, 10p each (20p postage per order).

Sweat Shirts (£15) & Polo Shirts (£14), available in small, medium, large, extra large.

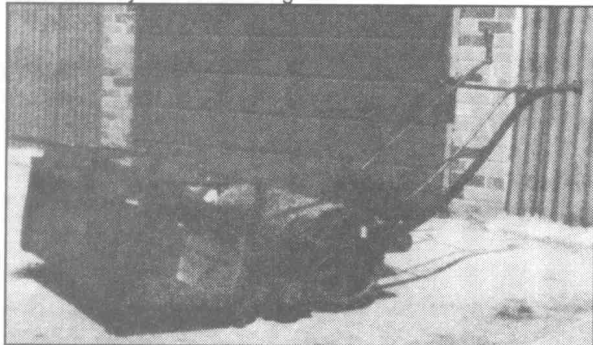
Sew on Badges, £5.

Prices are inclusive of postage, except where stated. All items available from Keith Wootton, except clothing and sew on badges which are from Robbie Robinson. Please make cheques payable to The Old Lawnmower Club. For Car Stickers and Exhibit Log Sheets, send postage stamps to order value, if preferred.

HORSES FOR COURSES

By Roger Evans (Part One)

The world's first horse-drawn mower appeared in Scotland some 11 or 12 years after Edwin Budding's original cylinder mower patent. In 1841 the wealthy philanthropist WF Lindsay Carnegie asked a local Arbroath engineer, Alexander Shanks, to produce a large mower for the 2½ acre lawn at his Scottish estate. The result was a 27in wide horse-drawn machine, of which the design was registered on 18 July 1842. This pioneering step led to the establishment of one of Britain's leading mower manufacturers, Alex Shanks & Son Ltd. of Arbroath and London, who continued to make and develop mowing equipment until 1960 when this side of their business was taken over by Atco of Birmingham.



Shanks pony mower, part of the Hall and Duck Trust Collection, made in 1895.

ROLLER MOWERS

Shanks' original machine was the first of three main styles of mower subsequently developed for animal traction. Basically, the machine was an enlarged version of the man-powered push mower, but gradually a number of refinements were added by the many competing firms who developed mowers of this kind during an era which stretched from approximately 1842 until the mid 1920s. Such machines are probably best termed 'roller mowers' to distinguish them from the other horse drawn mowers which subsequently evolved. To call them horse mowers is actually somewhat inaccurate as various sizes of machine were made those with a cutting width of around 22 to 24 in. could be pulled by a donkey, those 25 to 30 in. wide by a pony and 30 to 48 in. machines by strong, full-sized horses. Roller mowers were gear or chain-driven from the large rear roller, with the animal attached by chains to a whipple tree at the front.



Ransomes pony mower, probably around 1910.

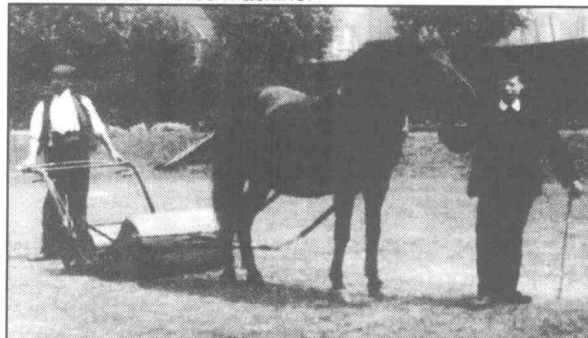
The operator walked behind, holding the handles of the machine and the reins. From the start, grass boxes were provided to collect clippings but herein lay a difficulty.

Rotary Engine Lawnmowers

Alex Darkes found a reference to rotary (or Wankel) engined lawn mowers made during the 1970s. He wonders if anyone has ever seen one of these machines, who made them and do any still exist. Let Grassbox know if you know!

The operator was in danger of losing control of his draught animal if he relinquished hold of the handles and reins to move round and empty the grass box in the normal way.

Mechanisms were therefore developed to allow box emptying without leaving the rear of the machine. Sometimes lines or levers were provided to permit the grass box to be swung up and over the rear roller and so discharge clippings behind the mower at the operator's feet. The most commonly employed arrangement was, however, the side-discharge method whereby the grass box was open-sided and a sliding shutter could be moved across it, by lever or crank-wound chain, to push accumulated clippings out to the left or right for subsequent collection. To dampen vibrations caused by mowing over uneven ground, some manufacturers introduced roller axle springing (Shanks) or sprung handles (Ransomes) to allow more comfortable operation. Cutting cylinders were originally gear driven but at the end of the 19th century chain drives became increasingly popular. Shanks of Arbroath and Ransomes of Ipswich dominated the production of this style of mower in the UK but were rivalled by Greens of Leeds who produced an excellent chain-driven rear discharge 'Silens Messor' horse machine.



Greens pony mower, based on the popular Silens Messor design, date unknown, but probably c1900.

Other makers included Barford & Perkins of Peterborough ('Godiva' mower), Barnard, Bishop & Barnard of Norwich ('Improved gear' mower), John Crowley of Sheffield ('Invincible' mower), James Ferrabee of Stroud (an enlarged and improved Budding machine), Follows & Bate of Manchester (pony mowers and a model called the 'Golfer'), Hartley & Sugden of Halifax ('Osborne' and 'Balmoral' mowers), Parkinson of Ripon ('Studley Royal' mower), Picksley Sims & Co. of Leigh, Lancashire ('Improved Patent' mower), Samuelson of Banbury (pony and donkey models) and Sutton & Sons of Reading the last named sold their own brand of machine, actually made for them by Ransomes.

A unique side-wheel machine was produced by Follows & Bate in Manchester in 1874, this being simply a large 24 or 30 in. wide pony or donkey mower mechanically identical to their patent side-wheel lawn mower their 1869 'Climax' which was the first side-wheel hand mower.

This article, which is serialised in Grassbox in three parts, was written by Roger Evans of the Sports Turf Research Institute. It is reproduced with the permission of the Institute, having first appeared in the October 1996 edition of its Turfgrass Bulletin.

CHANNEL FOUR MOWERS

Look out in the near future for the Channel Four programme which features old lawn mowers, some of them belonging to Club Members. There's no definite date for transmission yet, but stay tuned for more information!

LITERATURE SALE AT CHILFORD HALL

A collection of approximately 50 lots of lawn mower literature will be offered for sale at a forthcoming auction to be held at Chilford Hall, Linton, Cambridge on Saturday 26 April. Many Members will be aware that the Chilford Hall sales, held twice a year, are the premier regular vintage machinery auction in the south east. Full auction catalogues can be obtained from Cheffins Grain and Comins, 49/53 Regent Street, Cambridge CB2 1AF (Tel: 01223 358721).

Advance notice of the Annual General Meeting of The Old Lawnmower Club

to be held at

**Milton Keynes Museum of Industry & Rural
Life, Stacey Hill Farm, Southern Way,
Wolverton, Milton Keynes MK12 5EJ**

Sunday 18 May

12noon

Formal Business will include Selection of Committee & Officers for coming year, Ratification of Accounts for 1996/97, Consideration of any motions.

All Members are entitled to attend the AGM, which is on the Sunday morning of the Annual Rally. Exhibiting at the Rally is optional.

Members should submit motions in writing no later than four weeks before the AGM (ie by 20 April 1997).

Copies of the Club Constitution are freely available to Club Members from the Club Secretary on request, but please send an A4 sized stamped addressed envelope.

Members attending the AGM are requested to bring their Membership Cards to obtain free entry to the Museum.

Back Copies of Grassbox

A number of Members have asked about Back Copies of Grassbox, and the Club is now able to announce that copies of all previous editions are now available once more. Back copies can be obtained from Tony Edwards, 24 Wynn Road, Penn, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV4 4AL. The price of each back copy is £1. Please make cheques payable to AJ Edwards. A small contribution from the proceeds will be made to Tony's local church restoration fund.

WANTED!

Do you have a mower in your collection that you would like featured in a future Grassbox? The Club would like to include more photographs of Members' mowers in the newsletter. It does not matter if it is unusual or not, but preferably the model will not have been featured in a previous edition. Photographs should ideally be normal sized colour shots. It makes reproduction easier if the background is plain, so shooting the mower on the lawn or yard or against a wall is best, and without unwanted items in the background. Send any photographs with details of the machine to Keith Wootton at the normal address.

FUTURE ARTICLES

A big thanks to everyone who has been sending in suggestions and text for articles in the newsletter. Those that have not appeared in this issue will be in the next one (I've already started compiling it - honest!). However, there is always room for more, so if you feel like writing a letter or short article for publication, send it to Keith Wootton before 18 May.

NEW MOWER DIRECTORY

Chris Thompson has started compiling a brand new Directory of Vintage Lawn Mowers and Lawn Mower Manufacturers for publication by the Club. This will take the form of an alphabetical listing of names and makers, each entry being confined to a few lines. As far as is known, this is the first time anyone has compiled a reference book of this type. It therefore has the potential to become an important contribution to the study of lawn mower history. A typical entry may look like:

ATCO STANDARD: popular motorised lawn mower manufactured from 1921 to 1933 by **Charles H Pugh Ltd**. The Standard was the first mass produced motor mower, and was available in sizes from 12" (as **HY** variant) to 36". Sizes up to 22" had Villiers two stroke engines, while larger models had JAP four stroke engines.

The objective is to include brief details of as many manufacturers and machines as possible, with cross referencing (indicated by **bold italics**).

A number of people in the Club have already offered to help Chris with this important project. All Members are invited to submit entries to the Directory, giving brief details of models and manufacturers in a similar format to the above, together with serial numbers of known machines. Suggested entries should be accompanied by the name, address and telephone number of the sender in case further information is required. Chris can be contacted at 222 Panfield Lane, Braintree, Essex CM7 5RJ (Tel: 01376 320259).



This Army & Navy mower was made c1890 for sale by the famous store by Greens, and is based on the Silens Messor. It belongs to Christopher Proudfoot.

NEW DIRECTORIES ISSUED

Issued with this Grassbox are the 1997 editions of the Membership Directory, Books & Information Sources Directory, Museums Directory and the Suppliers and Services Directory. These have all been fully revised for this year, and are as up to date as possible.

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.

Next Edition

Jun 1997

Grassbox

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Edited and written

(except where stated)

by Keith Wootton