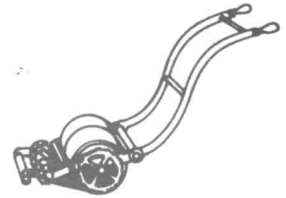


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 21

Summer 1997

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

As usual, Summer is flying by and many of the events that were being planned and looked forward to for months have already been and gone. The Annual Rally and AGM was the biggest and best yet, and even the weather was not too bad! A report on the event can be found on page two.

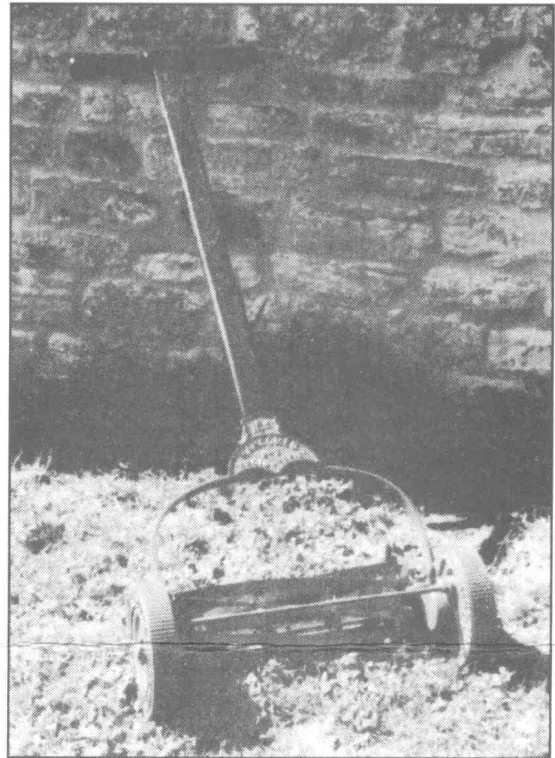
One comment I have heard from a number of Club members this year is that the variety and standard of mowers that people bring to events is getting better. Anyone who has been to one of the rallies in 1997 could not fail to agree. The main reason for this is, I believe, the friendly rivalry amongst members to produce the best restored or most obscure machine for others to see. Of course, not everyone wants to spend hours and hours restoring a machine to what is probably better than new condition, and there is even a school of thought which frowns upon any kind of restoration. At the same time, not everyone wants to find the rarest, oldest or largest machines or acquire a large collection. That to me seems to be the beauty of lawn mower collecting, display and research. There really is something for everyone (KW).



Tim Durant shows how the Greens mower carriage as featured in the last Grassbox operates with one of his small Silens Messor mowers at the Annual Rally.

ARMY & NAVY

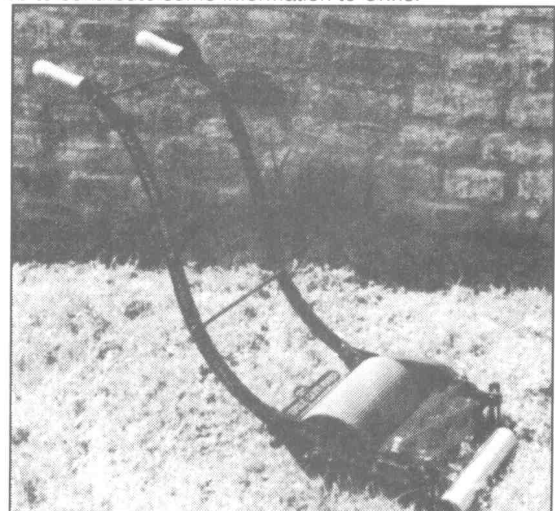
In Grassbox 20 I inadvertently said that Christopher Proudfoot's Army & Navy 'Auxiliary' was made by Greens. As Christopher pointed out to me, the Army & Navy roller models were Follows & Bate's 'Chain Tennis' in all but name. Apparently, they had separately badged models (the 'Victoria') for their main store in Victoria Street and for the Army & Navy Auxiliary store just behind, in Howick Place. That meant both handlebars and the name plate were different castings, and the latter had to be different for each size. Sorry to anyone who was confused by my error (KW).



This Ransomes Anglo Paris was produced in 1920. The mower was painted a pale blue colour, this being the 16" version, although an 18" model was also made.

DIRECTORY UPDATE

Chris Thompson reports good progress has been made with the lawn mower directory as mentioned in Grassbox 20. A huge amount of information has been collected, and the booklet is taking shape, although there is still plenty of checking and editing to do. An update on progress will be included in a future edition, but in the meantime, please feel free to contribute some information to Chris.



Robbie Robinson's 12" Shanks Eagle, made in 1930, as seen at this year's Annual Rally.



Left to right, Andrew Hall, Andrew Grout and Mike Duck with the prize winning Shanks pony mower at the Annual Rally (see report).

DIARY DATES

Details of each event can be obtained from the person mentioned (details of how to contact Keith or Robbie on p4).

Banbury Steam Rally

Saturday 28/Sunday 29 June (Details: Robbie)

Ripon Old Car Club Rally

Sunday 13 July

Details from Matthew Gibbs (01423 863969)

Witney Show

Saturday 19/Sunday 20 July (Details: Robbie)

Otmoor Show, Oxford

Saturday 26/Sunday 27 July (Details: Robbie)

Trelice, Cornwall

Saturday 2/Sunday 3 August (Details: Keith)

Erewash Museum, Ilkeston

Saturday 16 August (Details: Keith)

Croydon Show

Saturday 16/Sunday 17 August (Details: Robbie)

Moorgreen Show, Nottingham

Bank Holiday Monday 25 August (Details: Keith)

Drusillas, East Sussex

Sunday 7 September

Details from David Lumsden (01323 870215).

Old Kiln Farm Rural Life Centre, Farnham

Sunday 21 September

Details from Tim Durant (01628 521953)

Bedfordshire Steam Rally, Old Warden

Saturday 20/Sunday 21 September

Details from Alan & Dick Hardwick (01462 816018)

Hanbury Steam Rally, Worcestershire

Saturday 20/Sunday 21 September

Details from Martin Briggs (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.

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!

ANNUAL RALLY AND AGM REPORT

Everything came together to make this year's Annual Rally at Milton Keynes Museum a tremendous success. Lots of members, some wonderful machines on show, plenty of fun, a few pints (Saturday evening only!) and even the weather was good for once.

Although quite a few people were there both days, the main event was the Sunday, with around 40 members attending the Rally and Annual General Meeting.

It is not possible to list all of the mowers on show or the members who came, but many will be featured in future editions of Grassbox.

At the AGM, Keith Wootton presented a brief report which highlighted some of the memorable events of the past year.

Bernard Robinson reported that the Club had 230 members and that renewal forms would be sent out soon.

Martin Stephenson presented the Club Accounts, which showed income of £1937 and expenditure of £1473. The surplus would be used to fund some special projects by the Club, details of which would be announced in due course.

All of the 1996/7 Officers and Committee Members were subsequently elected for a further year, these being Keith Wootton (Chairperson), Bernard Robinson (Secretary), Martin Stephenson (Treasurer), Andrew Grout, Alec Hillyar, John Barnard, Les Harrison and Tim Durant.

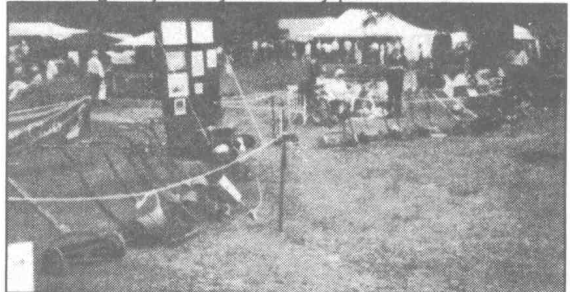
A special event was held on the Sunday afternoon to mark the start of work on Museum's new Lawn Mower Display Building. Museum Director Bill Griffiths cut the first sod for the foundation of the building, and a number of members also had a bit of a dig. The building should be ready for the 1998 Rally.

A raffle was organised on the Sunday afternoon, with prizes including a Qualcast Panther lawn mower, wire brushes and paint for restoration projects, and some tea bags and coffee for 'rally supplies'. This raised over £30, which was donated to the Museum to help its restoration projects.

The Andrew Grout Plate, for the mower which members voted as the best to take home, was won by the Hall & Duck Trust for the restored Shanks Pony Mower (as featured in Grassbox 19). Interestingly, this was a similar mower to last year's winner, so pony mowers are clearly popular!

THE WOBURN EXPERIENCE

The second May bank holiday weekend saw several members attending the Woburn Abbey Festival of Gardening, with myself, Alec Hillyar, Andrew Grout and John Bloxham spending all three days at this new (for us) event. Andrew, who works as a gardener at the abbey, had made a good job of arranging the event for us and had a good display of his own machines including a Ransoms Simms and Head push mower and Orwell engined motor mower. Alec and John arrived just after 10am and were not allowed to bring their vehicles into the show area so had to pass them over the fence and push them to the display area. Its a good job they were only push mowers!



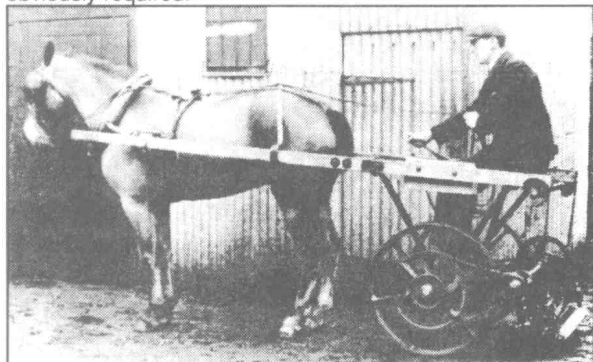
On Sunday Tim Durant brought his 6" Greens Silens Messor, his two mower carriages and a display of garden tools. Tony Houghton brought a good collection of machines as well as some horticultural machinery as he is also a member of the Horticultural Machinery Club which was exhibiting next to us. On Monday, Dick and Alan Hardwick came along with several machines including the Archimedean and a very nice 1885 Shanks machine. The weather on all three days was very good and we all had a good time and I know that the event organisers were very pleased with the display. A very good event and I hope that we will be invited back next year. Many thanks to all who attended and especially to Andrew for organising the clubs display. *Robbie Robinson*

HORSES FOR COURSES

By Roger Evans

HIGH SIDE-WHEELS

Mowers of the type dealt with above were heavy and slow, did not deal effectively with relatively long grass and, of course, forced the operator to plod along behind. For very large lawns and for the increasing body of sports ground and golf course maintenance work which was developing during the late 19th century more efficient machines were obviously required.

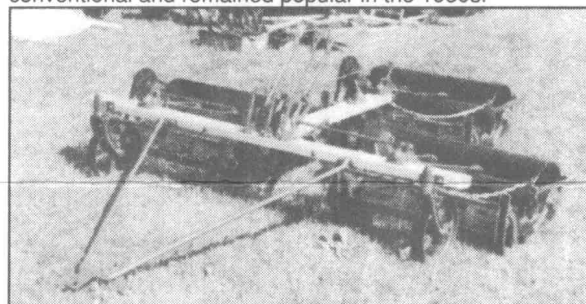


To meet these demands, a style of machine known as the High Side-wheel Horse Mower evolved, the market-leaders in this country being the 'Perfection' by Thomas Green of Leeds, the 'Ideal' by Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies of Ipswich and the 'Triumph' by Shanks of Arbroath. These gave a 32 to 36 in. cutting width and featured a cutting cylinder positioned behind two large iron land wheels and driven by a chain. The operator rode on a seat above the machine and the horse was attached by means of shafts. Cutting cylinders could be put out of gear and raised out of the cutting position for transport from site to site. Developed around the turn of the century, such mowers continued to see use until the Second World War.

GANG MOWERS

The third and final step in the evolution of horse-drawn grass cutting equipment took place across the Atlantic. Charles C. Worthington, a Pennsylvanian businessman, developed an improved side-wheel mower in 1910, a 30 in. horse-drawn machine which he used on his privately-owned golf course. Smaller and lighter than the high side-wheels described above, a horse pulling such a machine had power to spare, so in the 1913-14 period Mr. Worthington took the obvious step of linking several of these units (most commonly three) together to produce the first gang mower.

In Great Britain, the introduction of the horse-drawn gang mower was delayed by the 1914-18 War but manufacture of such machines commenced here in 1921 when Ransomes of Ipswich produced gang units under licence to the American patentee. The original Ransomes horse triple gang of 1921 gave a 7ft. cutting width, pulled by a single horse in shafts and with the driver riding above the frame connecting the cutting units. For each of the three units, small cast-iron side-wheels drove the cutting cylinders and even at the average horse's working speed of 3 mph, considerable areas of grass could be cut in the working day more than was possible with any previous design of mowing equipment. Ransomes Light Pattern Triple mower of the early 1930s was an improved version, its three units giving a 6 ft. cutting width and having studded pressed steel wheels. The Shanks 'Alliance' triple horse mower of 1923 was a competitor, as was Greens of Leeds' similarly named machine and the 'Pennsylvania Trio' gang lawn mower made by Lloyds of Letchworth. Gang units differed only a little in basic design and were fundamentally the same as those still in use today. Drive from the wheels might, however, be chain or gear type, with the drive on only one side or, alternatively, duplicated on both sides of each unit. Shanks, however, in the late 1920s produced an unusual roller-drive triple gang, which gave a very fine finish, and earlier made a side-wheel gang unit with the wheels oddly placed inside the frame, rather than outside as is usual. Their 'Doubledrive Triumph' triple gang was, however, more conventional and remained popular in the 1930s.



For ponies and smaller horses, which could not cope with the weight of a triple gang, a separate single gang unit, fitted with a seat for the operator, made a convenient mower for smaller areas. Known as 'Sulkies', mowers of this type were offered by manufacturers in the interwar period.

RESTORING AN OLD LAWN MOWER

By Alec Hillyar (Part Two)

Having collected our mower and taken a photo of it, we are now ready to start work. The first job is to take the handles off to make it stable on the bench (starting at the front will make it more likely to tip over backwards), being a machine of the 1900's it will most likely be formed in cast iron, beware cast iron is brittle and will break if mistreated or dropped.

Place the machine close to the wall, on the floor, with the end of the hand grips just touching it, get a large heavy object such as a breeze block or a sledge hammer and place it in front of the rollers, this will stop the mower rolling away or the handles falling as you loosen the retaining nuts, you could also mark the wall with crayon or chalk if the handles are at an ideal height, undoing the first nut will probably reveal how well the project will go, you may find some of these old nuts and bolts come undone with ease, if the mower was well oiled in its working life some of this oil may have spread round but then again if it has stood behind ones garden shed for forty odd years it will more than likely have washed off.

One little project I have been working on during the past few months has been to produce some Internet world wide web pages for the Club. The pages contain information about the Club and lawn mowers in general. The pages are at <http://www.artizan.demon.co.uk/olc/> and you can also send e-mails to the Club at olc@artizan.demon.co.uk

Use an open ended or a ring spanner rather than an enclosed socket, as you can see what is happening, so when you first turn the nut, it should move off the end of the bolt and not turn nut and bolt as one complete unit, I don't use any kind of oil if I can help it at this point as it has to be cleaned off before painting and is not always necessary.

If the nut starts to turn but then tightens so much that you can't undo it anymore, don't panic, oil down the back, then screw the nut back on a bit and then off and repeat this process and eventually the nut should come off.

If the nut turns the end of the bolt then it is starting to shear off; take a trip to your local DIY centre or hardware store and buy a plumbers blow lamp, which will cost somewhere in the region of £7 - £8. Carefully heat the nut trying to avoid the rest of the casting, don't overheat, the object being to expand the nut, as you oil it the oil should instantly boil or sizzle. As it cools you should be able to move it or even undo it.

In the next issue we will carry on dismantling and looking into further problems.

For about the first time ever I really did have too much for this Grassbox and was unable to include all of the articles sent in and ready to use. This is great for me as it means less work, and hopefully adds to the variety of the information. However, please do keep sending in the ideas, articles, photographs and illustrations. They will all be used eventually.

OWN BRAND MOWERS

By Christopher Proudfoot.

I am discussing only those mowers which were sold as 'own brand' models, not those which retained the manufacturer's badging but had a supplier's label as well. The latter were usually locally-made brass or celluloid labels, but in the 1930s a number of Ransomes roller models were sold with the supplier's name on a cast iron badge bolted to the handle-bar cross-stay, and their standard style indicates that these badges were supplied by Ransomes.

Many of these are well-known makes masquerading under the names of importers, wholesale agents or retailers. An early example was the Sutton, a Ransomes Chain Automaton sold by the famous Reading seedsmen. I do not know when it was introduced, but it was certainly being sold long after the Chain Automaton had given way in the Ransomes catalogue to the Patent Chain Automaton in 1897.

Badged mowers became commonplace in the Edwardian era, when many large stores offered them as a way of undercutting the major manufacturers' fixed retail prices. The more upmarket stores (notably the Army & Navy in Victoria Street and the Civil Service Supply Association in the Strand) were supplied by Follows & Bate, but many others used American mowers.

GAMAGES OF HOLBORN. 1908. BENEFITS OF CHEAPSIDE.

Lawn Mowers and Edge Cutters.

GAMAGE'S CHAMPION LAWN MOWER.

SOLID STEEL CUTTER BAR.

Adjustment for extra fine or ground.

Change 5 Lbs. Weight in the most perfect manner.

12 in. 14 in. 15 in. 16 in. 17 in.

Grass Boxes and Weighted Guide Plates.

Grass Boxes, all sizes for Choice of Cutter, 12 in. 14 in. 15 in. 16 in. 17 in.

The CHEAPEST and BEST MOWER in GREAT BRITAIN.

Five Blades.

Roller Mounted.

Workmanlike.

Edge Mower Wanted.

Grass Boxes, all sizes for Choice of Cutter, 12 in. 14 in. 15 in. 16 in. 17 in.

Gamages, that emporium for city clerks in Holborn, were at the forefront in this practice, and even applied their own name to the Coldwell 'Geared Roller' mower.

Gamage's 'Champion' came from various sources over the years. The earliest version I know of, from a 1908 catalogue, has knife-edge bottom-blade adjustment and a name-badge on the handle. It appears to be identical to the Millard's 'American Champion' which Millard Bros. of London were selling up to 1911, so the 'Champion' name was presumably supplied by the manufacturer rather than by Gamage's. Gamage's 1911 catalogue shows the 'improved Champion', a high-wheel machine with fixed bottom blade and adjustable cylinder. This looks similar, if not identical, to Millard's 'Milbro' of the same date - but a 12-inch Milbro cost 37/- (+6/8d. for a grassbox), while the 12-inch Improved Champion was yours for a mere 15/9d (+3/6d for the grass box). If anyone owns a Milbro, they might like to know that it was 'Handsomely finished in aluminium bronze with decorations'. Gamage's were silent on the subject of paint finish, but proud of their machine's 'maple wood handle and roller'. These mowers probably all came from the F&N Lawn Mower Company, of Richmond, Indiana. Perhaps the Internet could tell us all about them? (*Sadly not - Ed*)

The next Gamage's catalogue I have seen dates from 1925. By then, there had been a World War and consequent import duties, not to mention a home-based manufacturing industry with an awful lot of spare capacity all of a sudden; an American mower had to be a Pennsylvania to survive in this situation. The Derwent Foundry in Derby were one of many firms keen to fill the gap, and before their Qualcast mowers had achieved market leadership, they were happy to supply mowers under other badges.

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.

The Gamage 'Improved Champion No. 6' was one such, although neither its distinctive wheels nor its side-castings are identical with either the Qualcast 'C' or 'E'. Stan Hardwick's example, with its angular handle irons, must date from the late 1920s or early '30s; as in 1925 the irons on both the Champion and the 'E' had a more rounded outline.

By 1934, Gamage's had changed allegiance again, and the 'New Champion' No. 8 came from the Suffolk Iron Foundry. Suffolk would become a household name in the 4950s, but in 1934 SIF already had an extensive range of roller and sidewheel mowers. Gamage's were selling both kinds, one of the roller models retaining its Suffolk badge. Another client of Suffolk was the Gordon Tools firm. Better known for spanners; they had their name cast on the wheels and badge of a Suffolk De Luxe. The CWS, though, obtained their 'Invincible' from Qualcast - it's all at the Co-Op.

The Army & Navy remained loyal to Follows & Bate. In 1929 they were still selling the Speedwell and the Chain Tennis, now badged as 'Army & Navy' rather than 'Victoria' (Their name in 1907). By 1935, they were selling the Follows & Bate all-steel 'Magic' as the 'Ancos'. This machine was long a favourite of the own-badge market, although most seem not to have had a badge at all. The wheels usually say British Made, with some patent numbers (similar machines saying British Manufacture, with no patent numbers, come from Suffolk Iron Foundries). After the war, some 'Magics' were sold under Follows & Bate's own Folbate name, and others were sold in yellow livery as the 'Spinney' by the Littlewoods mail order business.

Jalell LAWN MOWERS.

British Made.

EVERY MOWER CARRIES OUR GUARANTEE.

Highst grade workmanship. Only guaranteed quality materials are used in its construction. Specially designed for easy and close cutting. Spare parts from stock.

The machines are attractively finished in Green and Red and packed in separate wood boxes.

Driving wheel 7 in. diam. by 1 1/2 in. tread. Cutting cylinder 5 in. diam. fitted with five blades of best Sheffield steel and specially hardened bottom blade.

Small jobs 8 10 12 14 in. 30/- 31 32/- 33/- each. One dozen lots taken in one delivery 28/8 29/4 30/- 31/4 .. Three dozen lots taken in one delivery 27/- 27/8 28/4 29/8 ..

Grass boxes, all sizes, 8/8 each.

"Hard Wear in Hardware"

Another Qualcast variant was the Jacem, from the Fulham wholesalers Johnson, Clapham & Morris Ltd. It was closer to the Model E than Gamage's version. The 12-inch model was priced at 32/-, compared with 37/6 for the Model E in the same catalogue (for 1927). The 1926 catalogue of another wholesaler, in London N.1 (the catalogue gives no full address, and coyly disguises the name as 'WBF&S Ltd'), prices the 12-inch 'E' at 42/3d., their budget model still being American - the 'Oulton' at 34/6d. Their 'Gray's Inn' high wheel models came from Canada.

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(except where stated)
by Keith Wootton