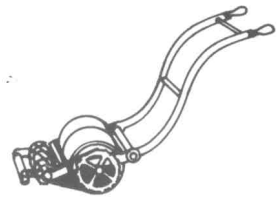


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 22

Autumn 1997

WHERE DOES IT GO?

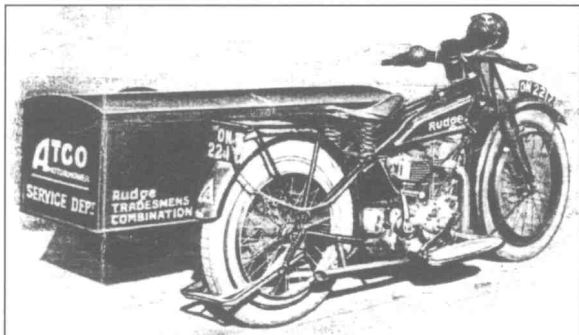
One of the joys of mower collecting is never knowing what will turn up next. It does not matter what particular type of mowers, manufacturers or eras you are interested in, there is always something new to discover. At all the events I have attended this year, almost everyone has tales of their latest finds to relate. And some unusual finds there have been too.

Two topics of conversation seem to be a consistent theme this year. First, everyone seems to notice how quickly time passes, especially in the Summer and particularly at the events we attend as individuals or as a Club. The reason for mentioning this is by way of apology for the delay in producing this issue. Long standing Members already know to take my 'Next Issue' comment on page four with more than a pinch of salt, but this is no excuse. The gap between the Summer and Autumn editions is always a bit longer than normal, giving me more time attend events for the Club and Museum. But there are now always four editions a year, so hopefully no one will feel too aggrieved.

The second theme is a perennial favourite of mower collectors: have we found all of the mowers? I am sure the answer is no (see my first comment), but you may have to look a bit harder than before. I am sure there are more mowers (and collectors) to discover, and the Autumn and Winter present the ideal opportunity to start looking. Go for it!

Finally, as many readers will be aware, I have been trying to improve the content and reproduction quality of Grassbox during the past year. The increased contributions from Members is a great help. With this issue, I hope to introduce better photographs, but I also trust that people will appreciate that the decisions leading to these changes (and my writing about them) are taken before the effects are seen (KW).

ON YER BIKE



In the 1920s, Atco ran a fleet of Rudge motor cycles as part of its service operation. Each motor cycle was equipped with a side car which contained a range of spares for the repair and service of the Atco Standard mowers. One of the clever parts of the original Atco motor mower (subsequently known as the Standard) design was that many parts were common to the whole range, unlike machines from other manufacturers. This meant relatively few spares had to be carried, hence the use of a side car. Has anyone ever seen one? Incidentally, the choice of Rudge was not a surprise - a director of Charles H Pugh (which made Atco mowers) was also a director of the company.



Andrew MacMorland demonstrates his MP mower pusher with a Ransomes Patent Chain Automaton mower. The machine could, according to the manufacturers, push mowers up to 24 in cut, and mow 1000 sq yards in 15 minutes using less than one pennyworth of oil and petrol. A roller could be towed during mowing if required.

The MP was supplied with a special conversion kit for the mower which included a special bracket to raise the handles slightly and move their mounting position forwards to allow more leg room and enable better control. A foot bar and link to the pushing unit was also supplied for the mower.

The MP was manufactured at the Ransomes factory. It had a Villiers 269cc two stroke engine, as used in the Atco Standard oval frame, Ransomes MkII and Shanks Jehu, and sold for £38 in 1925 (CGA Catalogue), although it was available for a number of years in the 1920s.



The Shanks Britisher was a popular sidewheel mower in the early part of this century, available in 10", 12", 14" and 16" cuts. In William Wood and Son's 1909 catalogue, the price for the 10" was 20/6, with grass box and front delivery plate an additional 3/10. A long handle for mowing banks was another 5/-. By 1925, the same machine was priced 45/- in the CGA catalogue, with grass boxes an additional 13/-. The 16" was apparently no longer available.

EVENTS NEWS

RANSOMES VISIT, 6 JUNE

Around twenty five Club Members visited the Ransomes factory in Ipswich on Friday 6 June.

The first thing to see on arriving at the factory is the extremely old 'Budding' Patent Ransomes lawn mower in the entrance lobby. The mower is one of the first made by the company in the 1830s. Just inside the door is a display showing many of Ransomes prizes and trophies acquired over a 200 year period making agricultural machinery and mowers. I am sure anyone passing the factory would be welcome to call in and see these or the mower.

Following a presentation about the history of the company, its involvement with mowers and a preview of the latest machines in the range, the guests were taken on a tour of the factory. Manufacturing is now somewhat different to the 19th century, but it was interesting to see how modern production methods and technologies are employed. The automatic cutting and welding machines and CNC machine tools fascinated the visitors.



The morning passed all too quickly and it was soon time to leave. A few of us had decided to spend the afternoon at the Museum of East Anglian Rural Life in Stowmarket, just up the road. It did not take long to track down a small display of Ransomes mowers, but not before Tim Durant had managed to acquire a rabbit to take home.

On the Friday evening there was a highly enjoyable get together with Crawford Stirling and family for a barbeque and private viewing of his mowers and stationery engines. Many thanks to Crawford and his wife for their generous hospitality. The weekend was spent in various locations, with myself and Alec Hillyar calling in to see some of Andy MacMorland's collection. Embarrassingly, I managed to break the clutch cable on Andrew's MP mower pusher, which resulted in a swift acceleration across his lawn until he was able to stop the engine. Many apologies later we headed off to meet some of the Club Members attending the Aldham Rally (see report). Meanwhile, Andrew Grout, being more intrepid, was hunting a pony mower in Norfolk. We await developments.

It was indeed a busy, but highly enjoyable, weekend (KW).

ALDHAM RALLY, 7/8 JUNE

The 21st Aldham Rally was held on 7/8 June 1997. As this popular north Essex event followed the Club's visit to Ransomes at Ipswich, even more members were able to attend.

Club exhibitors included Chris Armour, Les Harrison, Tony Houghton, Andrew MacMorland, and Chris Stoneman, as well as 'yours truly'. On the Sunday no less than 33 mowers were on display with virtually all types being represented from a tiny Webb child's mower to the magnificent 1909 Ransomes 'Orwell'-engined monster recently restored by Andrew (which incidentally won the 'best mower in show award'). This number of machines would indicate that the organisers need to allow more space for mowers next year, as the enclosure available was somewhat over crowded by the Sunday afternoon.

A personal word of thanks must go to all those Club members who extricated the defunct Thompson van from the long grass and manhandled it onto the MacMorland trailer for its ignominious journey home. *Chris Thompson*

BANBURY RALLY, 28/29 JUNE

Banbury Rally started wet, got muddy, then muddier still and finally ended up being a warm and pleasant weekend. Plenty of mowers to see, of course, with over 70 on show in the marquee. Normally this provides protection from the Banbury sun, but this year it was better for keeping dry and warm. Robbie had arranged for a number of Greens, Ransomes and Shanks hand mowers to be on display, and there was a great deal of interest from the public. Thanks to Robbie's sterling efforts it was a really successful event, despite the mud (KW).

TRERICE, 2/3 AUGUST

It is always great to get down to Trerice and have a look at the mowers there. This year's event, following on from the first in 1995, was a great success, albeit somewhat dampened by persistent rain on the Sunday.

Half a dozen club members made the trip, including Tim Durant, Andy Grout, Mike Duck, Andy Hall, Keith Wootton, Richard Jones and Ian Pascoe. Being from Cornwall, this was Ian's local event and he did it proud with an immaculate example of a 1920s Dennis (what is it about Dennis mowers that bring out the best in restorers?). The mower display at Trerice has been reorganised this year, and there were a few new machines to see as well. If you have not been to see them, you really should go! (KW)

EREWASH, 16 AUGUST

It's always hot at Erewash Museum for the annual lawnmower rally. As usual, the local radio and press turned up to see the eccentrics, but once they had been sorted out it was business as normal. In addition to the usual suspects, a couple of new exhibitors were in attendance. Some new mowers were also unearthed from visitors and soon acquired by the exhibitors in return for modest amounts. We will be back next year.

DRUSILLAS, 7 SEPTEMBER

The Rally at Drusillas in East Sussex on Sunday 7 September was well attended with over 60 mowers on parade.



Among a wide variety of machines, Christopher Proudfoot, shown on left of the group photograph, included an 18" Ransomes Bowling Green and lovely little Excelsior; Jonathan Cruse, next to him, had a 14" Keynsham and a 22" Shaw's Governor; Charlie Jones provided a very attractive 6" Mulum in Parvo, chain driven, and a supply of membership forms; Michael Neale showed a beautiful Trojan; Sylvia Tuckett had a Greens Centenary; David Lumsden a Greens 16" London and Dublin and Andrew MacMorland, on the extreme right, brought his 1905 Ransomes 24" and a very impressive mower pusher. On Andrew's right in the photograph is Coin Huggett, chief engineer at Drusillas, who was responsible for inviting us and is a great support. In all a happy and enjoyable day, with perfect weather. *David Lumsden*.

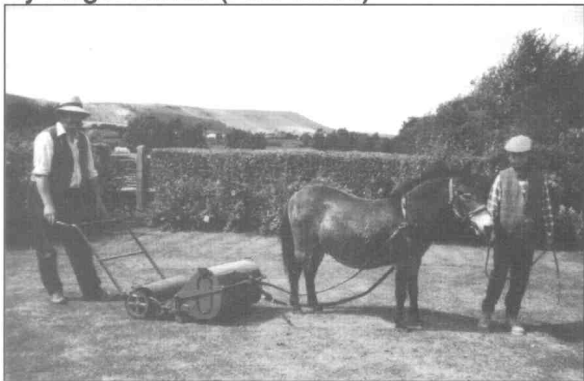
Reports of events held later in the year will be in the next edition, space permitting.

1998 EVENTS

It's already time to think about next year's events. During this year, the Club has supported, promoted and attended more events than ever before. But it would be great to find some new venues to promote next year, particularly in areas where we have not held events before. If anyone has any ideas, let me know and it can be considered (KW).

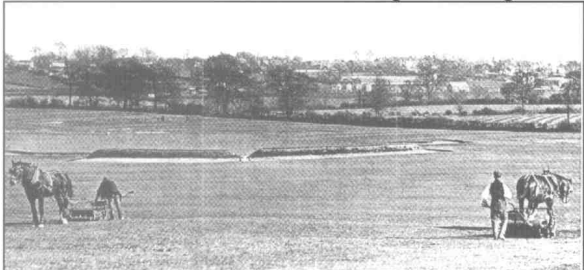
HORSES FOR COURSES

By Roger Evans (Part Three)



David Lumsden with 22" pony mower, photographed earlier this year.

For large-area mowing in the 1920s and '30s, horses were being steadily replaced by first converted motor cars and then agricultural tractors. These mechanised power units had, of course, many times the pulling ability of a horse and hence allowed the use of 5-unit quintuple and 7-unit sextuple gang combinations. Quintuple gangs were made for horse-draught, but required a team of two horses which diminished manoeuvrability and added to feed and stabling costs tractors ultimately proved much more economical and led to the abandonment of the horse for grass cutting work.



Casiobury Golf Course, probably 1905, showing two horse mowers.

Single horse quintuple and sextuple gang mowers were made by Berrigan Qualcast in Australia, but their individual units were tiny and the 7-gang set-up had a cutting width of only 71/2ft.

RESTORING AN OLD LAWN MOWER

By Alec Hillyar (Part Three)

Having removed the handles you can now put the machine on the bench. I normally undertake a complete strip down even if it is to be part reassembled before painting. It is much better for cleaning purposes. The more you take to bits the more bits you get. If you have a good memory, fine, but if you are like me, well there's no chance of remembering what goes where. I either put nut and bolts back on where they came from or save empty ice cream containers, in these I put internal workings such as cogs or loose bearings, etc.

It is best to have an empty bench or table to start with so jobs don't get mixed together. Beware when removing gears or cogs, the nuts holding these may have been of a left hand thread in other words you will need to go clockwise opposed to anti-clockwise to undo it.

JUST FOR FUN

Thanks to Crawford Stirling for this puzzle. Simply unscramble the mower related anagrams listed below and insert in to the grid to reveal another well-known mower word in the grey column (Solution on page four).

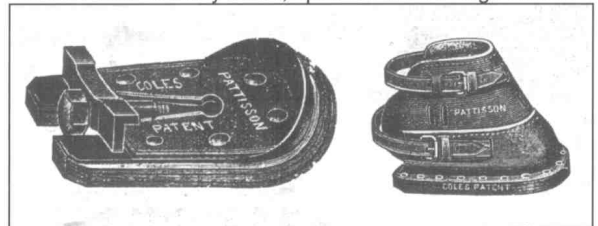
ROSXEECLI	NEFLIED	EFBREAER
CATO	SMASRNOE	ETOSORTYH

The era of the horse-drawn mower did not quite come to an end in the 1930s however. Fuel shortages in the Second World War encouraged a brief revival and it is interesting to note that

Bracknell Forest Borough Council in Berkshire is currently maintaining its grassed areas with the aid of two shire horses pulling an especially modified Lloyds 'Leda' 5-gang mower.

HORSE-BOOTS

As a footnote (if a pun may be excused) to the story of the horse mower, it is worth recording that boots were an essential accessory for the well turned out animal. Designed to prevent hooves damaging smooth turf surfaces, the typical horse-boot consisted of a leather upper, which strapped around the hoof and a wooden, leather or rubber sole, which spread weight and hence minimised hoof or horse-shoe scars. Greens of Leeds sold a 'union lawn boot' for donkeys, ponies and horses in various sizes and Harrods Stores offered a range in 1895, 10/9d. for four donkey boots, up to 28/ 6d. for large horses.



Pattisson's Cole's Patent Horse Boots were made in three styles, two of which are shown here. The simplest version was for horses already wearing iron shoes

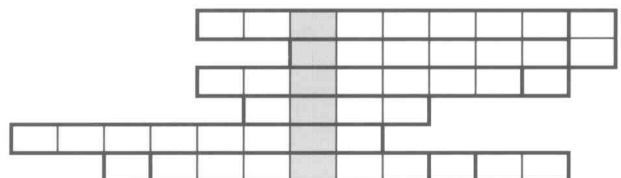
Priest's Patent India Rubber Pads were also marketed and Pattisson's of Streatham (later Stanmore) a firm of course still very much in existence sold Cole's Patent horse-boots, offering both the conventional type and a variant which could be clamped onto the horse-shoe. F. Mitchell of Nottingham revived horse-boot manufacture to meet the fresh demand which occurred as a result of petrol shortages in World War II.

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The next problem is it may be keyed on to a tapered shaft, so don't just hammer the cog as it may break. You will need a sprocket puller of the correct size. Getting together a tool kit for this kind of work can be expensive so it's always worth asking friends or neighbours.

Some mowers are easy to dismantle where others seem impossible. Again, don't just knock it to bits, take care and make sure you have removed all the nuts and bolts. If you need to knock the end of a shaft, put a nut on it first as this will reduce thread damage. Once it's in bits you can decide how far you want to go with restoration. Getting it to AI working order can be expensive. I normally get them to look good for show as most machines of this age have pitted or damaged cutting parts and a costly visit to the mower man is avoided.

In the next issue we will discuss how best to clean down and paint your mower.



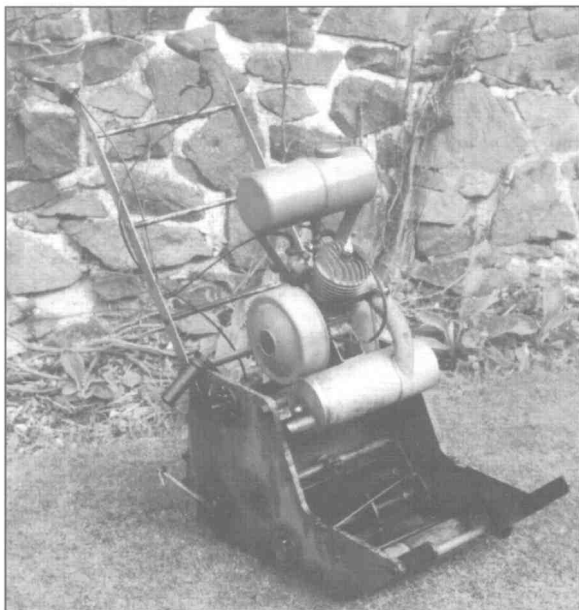


Ian Fewtrell, with sons and mowers, having won the trophy for the Miscellaneous Section at the Chester Festival of Transport earlier this year. Ian says that most of the rally was spent on the tarmac because of a waterlogged rally field. Ian's mowers include a Greens Centenary, Ransomes Ajax and JP Super.

LATE SILENS MESSOR DATES?

Charlie Jones has recently acquired a 12" Greens Silens Messor. Nothing unusual so far, perhaps, but Charlie found what he thought might be the date stamped into the brass cutting cylinder bearings. These suggest a date of 1921, which is plausible, but does anyone know if this is likely to be a date or a part number? Charlie says the number is unlike any of the other part identifiers found on the machine.

ANY IDEAS?



Tony Garratt sent in a picture of a mower he acquired recently. But what is it? Tony says the 12" machine looks a bit like a Qualcast, but there are no identifying markings, which would be strange for that company. The machine is grey, for the Forces perhaps? The clutch arrangement is certainly like a Qualcast, but Tony also reckons the mower looks a bit like Presto. The silencer is similar to those fitted by Automower, and models from this company were similar to Qualcasts. As it happens, I saw a similar mower last year and it did not have any clear markings either. Can anyone shed any light? (KW)

Solutions to puzzle: Excelsior, Enfield, Ferrabee, Atco, Ransomes, Rotoscythe (Hidden word: Certes).

STATESIDE MOWERS

The American Lawn Mower Company/Great States Corporation has supplied more information on its products following the article in a recent Grassbox. The company included some helpful information about the benefits of using a reel mower, which is the name used for a cylinder mower in North America. Some of the facts were:

- A well maintained lawn 50ft by 50ft produces enough oxygen for four people.
- Grass clippings are 85-90 per cent water. One effect of this is that it takes more energy to burn new grass clippings than the combustion produces.
- Over 10 per cent of the waste burned annually in US landfills is grass clippings.
- The grandson of one of the founders is the current president.
- The company exports to Canada, South America, Australia and Japan.
- The company manufactures nine models, 14 to 20", with 4, 5 and 7 bladed reels. It has over 95 per cent of the US market share for push mowers.
- The company was founded in 1895.

CARRIAGE RETURN



Hot on the heels of the photo in the last Grassbox of Tim Durant's Green's mower carriage, comes this from Chris Thompson. The 30" Silens Messor pony mower, found in Essex, included a large mower carriage, just visible by the grass box. Chris is currently working on the restoration.

HELP!

Please keep potential Grassbox contributions coming in. Photographs are particularly useful. It is best, but not essential, that machines are shot against a clear background. It would be nice to include more information about mowers from the post 1945 era. Many people in the Club are interested in this period.

NEW MKM BUILDING

The work on the new lawn mower display building at Milton Keynes Museum is progressing well. This follows a busy weekend at the beginning of September when a number of Club Members and friends helped with the main construction. A longer report of progress made will be contained in a future edition of Grassbox, but in the meantime a big thanks to everyone who has helped so far. The building should be open in time for the 1998 Annual Rally at the Museum.

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