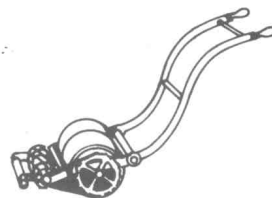


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 23

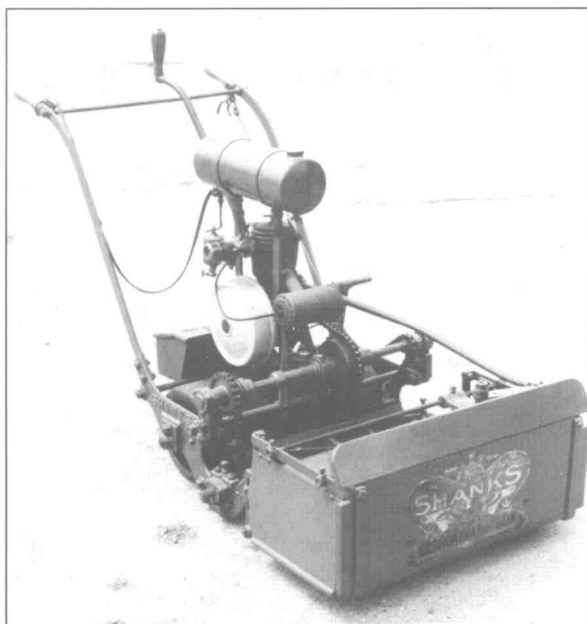
Winter 1998

ROLL ON 1998

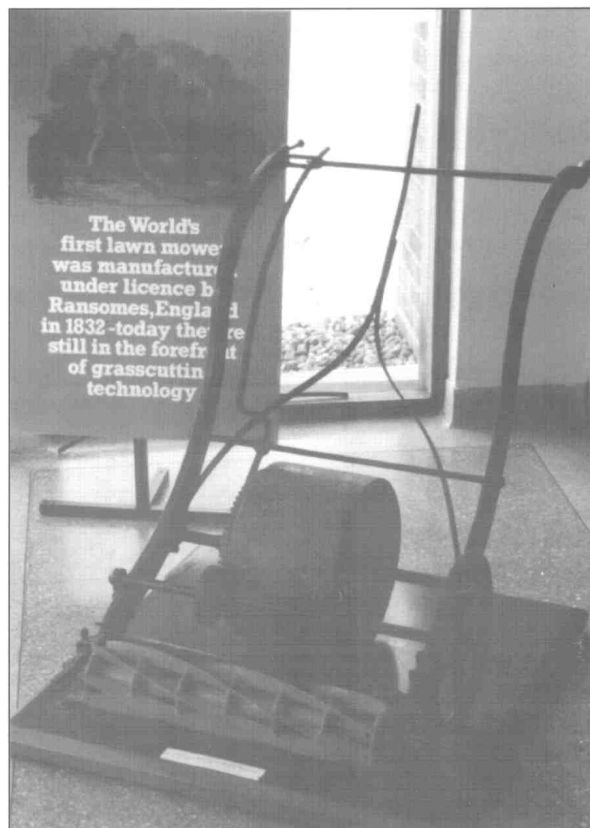
By the time this newsletter reaches you it will be 1998. My original intention had been to produce a Grassbox in time for Christmas, but I am afraid that events overtook me somewhat. There really never is enough time to do everything, is there? This edition was basically ready in time for Christmas, but I had not allowed enough time to get it printed and posted before the holiday period, so I decided to leave it until the New Year. This means that you will probably be reading this towards the end of January, rather than at the beginning.

I would like to wish everyone in the Club a happy and successful New Year and to thank you all for a really memorable 1997. I hope that this year we all find that extra special mower for which we have been searching for years and years.

1998 of course promises much. Not only will the Club be organising its regular events (more inside) but there will no doubt be some special one-off rallies and get togethers too. I hope to see many as of you as possible at these.



This Shanks 20" Jehu from 1921/22 is part of Andrew MacMorland's collection. The Jehu is a very simple design with the chassis very similar to the smaller Shanks pony mowers, but with an engine fitted on top. The engine is the same Villiers MkV 269cc two stroke unit as used in the Atco Standard 'Oval Frame' and the Ransomes MkII dating from the same period. One interesting feature of the Jehu is the grass box mechanism. Inside the box is a large paddle, mounted on runners, which can move from side to side. When the box is full, the operator simply swings the large lever (which pivots on the engine mounting on the frame across to the opposite position. The paddle moves across the box and pushes the grass out of the door on the end, which swings open. According to Shanks' own 1922 catalogue, the Jehu weighed 2½ cwt and was priced £70. In 1931, the price of a 20" Jehu, a slightly different design, had fallen to £52-10-00.



This Budding Patent lawn mower is in the foyer of the Ransomes factory in Ipswich. It is one of the oldest mowers in the world and, although an exact date is not known, it was probably made between 1832 and 1850.

Since the Club's visit to the factory in June 1997, Ransomes has announced that it will be taken over by an American company, Textron Corporation of Providence Rhode Island. Textron is a very large company which also owns the well known Jacobsen lawn mower business, which itself bought out Worthington in 1944.

While not the last remaining British owned lawn mower manufacturer, Ransomes was of course the longest established and biggest. Another piece of lawn mower (and agricultural/industrial) heritage therefore passes into overseas ownership. However, it may be that the new owners will be able to increase investment in the company and secure a long term future for the employees at Ipswich and elsewhere within the Ransomes group.

HELP

The 1998 versions of the Club's four main directories (Members, Museums, Book & Magazine Articles, Services) will be published with the next edition of Grassbox. If anyone has any additional information which may be of use for these, please let Keith Wootton know during February. In particular, the Services Directory could benefit from more and better information, so if anyone has any suggestions... Also, please keep sending photographs of mowers in your collection to Keith for use in future editions.

DIARY DATES

Milton Keynes Museum: 15/16 May

AGM at 12noon on Sunday 16 May. Event will include official opening of the new Lawn Mower display building. Everyone welcome, no need to 'book', but please let Keith Wootton know if you are planning to stay at the Museum on Saturday night.

Enfield Pageant: 23/24/25 May

Details from Charlie Jones on 0181 804 1677 (London).

Banbury Steam Rally: Saturday 27/Sunday 28 June

Details from Robbie

Erewash Museum: Saturday 15 August

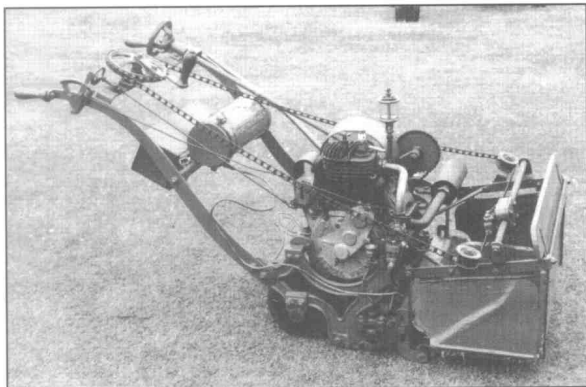
Details from Keith

Bedfordshire Steam Rally: Sat 19/Sun 20 September

Details from Alan & Dick Hardwick on 01462 816018

PROPOSED TRIP TO ATCO QUALCAST

Tony Edwards recently visited the Atco Qualcast factory in Stowmarket on business. While there, he asked about the possibility of a Club visit/tour sometime during 1998. This resulted in the Club being invited, at a date to be decided, but sometime during early Summer. If you are interested, in the first instance please contact Keith Wootton at the usual address.



From Andrew MacMorland's collection is this 24" Ransomes motor mower, made in September 1905. The mower is believed to be the oldest motor mower in existence. It is powered by a four stroke Orwell engine, so called after the River Orwell which runs through Ipswich, the home of the manufacturers.

ATCO DATING INFORMATION

Tony Garratt supplied this information, taken from Atco Depot Service Index Cards from the 1950s/60s. The engine details and date of manufacture may help Members to date their machines. Tony advises, however, that the date is that of sale, not manufacture, and it is also possible that the engine may have been changed during the life of the machine.

Model	Year	Engine No.
16" Standard	1932	H27183
16" Standard	1933	H26730
22" Standard	1926	J5111
22" Standard	1928	J6346
22" Standard	1932	J9637
30" Standard	1928	KY/C/14567
20" Deluxe	1932	TZ381
14" Lightweight	1935	CYB5192/5043
14" Lightweight	1936	CYC3951/9701
14" Lightweight	1936	CYC2640/11682
17" Middleweight	1937	BXF2516/A
28" Middleweight	1939	CXF583/P329
20" Middleweight	1940	BXF3636/5719

Therefore, from the dates given, you can make an approximation of the date of sale for a given serial number and make a 'sold before/sold after' estimation for the age of a different machine.

PROGRESS ON MOWER DIRECTORY

During my conversations with Chris Thompson it has become apparent to me that some members of the Club have perhaps misunderstood what Chris is trying to achieve with the directory of mowers and manufacturers that he is compiling. Not least of these is that some people do not realise Chris is compiling this directory on behalf of the Club. This confusion is I am sure due in no small part to my not making it clear in previous Grassboxes.

The intention with the directory is to compile a handy reference guide to as many mower manufacturers, models and personalities associated with the history and development of these machines as possible. It is not intended to be an in depth history of each mower or a fully fledged encyclopaedia. Extensive cross references will allow readers to locate basic information about similar machines.

Once the an initial edition of the directory is ready, it will be available to all members of the Club, although as yet we have not decided how this will be achieved without making it too costly. By the very nature of these things, there will obviously be improvements that can be made. However, this directory is the first attempt by anyone (to my knowledge) to compile in one place (and then make available) a list of all the major makes and models of mower down the ages.

I know that many people in the Club have given Chris help and advice with the project, for which thanks are due. However, I realise that some Members may not have time to help Chris with his project, or may even feel reluctant to pass on information which they have either paid for or spent many spare time hours collecting for their own use. This is understandable, and of course no one would wish to criticise this attitude.

The directory will I am sure be of great use to many members of the Club who find an old mower and wish to know just the basic facts about its origins and age. There is not room to provide the level of information that is often available using the Club's or the Hall and Duck Trust's information services. Even if we wanted to provide this level of information, how could we publish it in a readily useful format at an affordable cost?

It is hoped to have a first edition of the directory ready in time for the Annual Rally and AGM in May.

Keith Wootton



This 12" Dronsfield Brothers DB Swallow is part of the Hall & Duck Trust Collection. The company was based on Oldham. The mower is dark blue, except for the blades which are, of course, red. Michael Duck says that the mower was found at a farm sale in Somerset and cost just £5.

TRANSFERS

The saga of the Atco Standard transfers rolls on. Extremely long standing members of the Club know that this has been an idea for many years. It now looks like the two transfers will be available soon. More details in the next Grassbox.

CRAWFORD TELLS ALL

Crawford Stirling writes about his collection

Having being a recipient of Grassbox magazine for nearly three years, I thought it was about time that I made a contribution. I thought it would be a good idea to tell the story of my modest collection of lawn mowers and how it all began for me.

I suppose the seeds of doom were sown at preparatory school, when at the tender age of 11 myself and two other fortunate boys were put in charge of mowing the very exclusive grounds come playing fields. The armoury consisted of two Dennis - a 24" and a 36" (the smaller being pre war, mid thirties I should think, and the 36" being of plastic box variety.) and a venerable old Hayter rotary. The rotary mower was assigned to a farmer's son (of whom there were many) and myself and the other chap had the Dennis's. Both had trailing seats and went like the clappers. Remember, we at the age of 11 were in sole charge of these machines and as can be imagined, some fun was had. I should think that many schools nowadays would entrust such potentially lethal machines to ones so young - it was a sad day when we changed schools.

Apart from cutting the grass, as home we had a 20" Atco, again with trailing seat, specially adapted. I had nothing further to do with mowers, except for a Mountfield that was used on the long grass by our hen house and orchard. I still have this one and with 25 years under its belt, still runs like new.

My collection of old mowers started by pure chance. My elder brother, who incidentally had been in charge of the Dennis at school before me, phones me up one evening and said that he was looking for a mower and had seen a Ransomes for sale in his local paper. He, like me, knew very little indeed about old mowers and an inspection of this Ransomes noted that it was a crank started - common place for us now, but it was quite something then, as we remembered how the Dennis was crank started, this sold the mower as far as he was concerned and he uses it all the time now - it is a Minor MkVI which the chap had from new and had its original handbook and receipt of sale in the early 1950s. About a week later, I was taking some refuse down to out local tip and happened to see a fellow with a Ransomes Ajax box full of rubbish in the process of dumping it. I very quickly cornered him and enquired as to whether he had the mower that went with the box. He said he did and that it was in the boot of his car, and that he was going to trash this as well! On opening the boot, I saw a small petrol mower which he gave to me. When I got home, I took about inspecting my new gift and assumed it was a Ransomes Ajax (because of the box) remember that I knew nothing about mowers then. I noticed that the engine was a JAP and the frame had Qualcast stamped on it. A phone call to Ransomes ensued where I told the chap that I had a Ransomes Ajax with a JAP engine - no you haven't I was told! Start again.



The 1933 15" Excelsior Monarch motor mower in Crawford's collection. An interesting feature of this machine is the dual exhaust port, similar to a motor cycle but very unusual on a mower. The petrol tank is built into the tool box between the handles. Can anyone help Crawford with a grass box?

I phoned Qualcast where I was told that it could be a Commodore because of the CD markings on the side frame, however this proved only to be a part number - eventually I received a copy of the handbook in the post and discovered that I had a powered Panther - I was well chuffed that I had found out what it was.

This was subsequently restored and I was looking for a stable mate. A kick start Atco followed - it hadn't run for many years, however once I had got it home, had it running in less than half an hour - I was beginning to enjoy my new hobby.

My next mower was a 14" Ransomes Minor MkVI which received similar treatment. I cannot remember what came next, but I bought an Atco Standard from Andrew MacMorland, whom I had visited when I first became interested in mowers - and it was then that I felt that I had really arrived. I cannot remember quite how I got hold of Andrew's phone number, but I was amazed that someone lived so close who collected mowers. I wasn't sure in fact if anyone at all collected them.



Crawford's 1950's British Anzani Easimow. Although the earlier Ferring-made machines of the same design had tubular frames, when Anzani made them they had a pressed steel frame. But this is definitely an Anzani machine, perhaps making it a bit of an oddity.

I have had a few mowers off Andrew, including a rare Excelsior Monarch and a JP Super Simplex, this I think being my most expensive restoration project to date as it involved a lot of re-chroming and polishing of Aluminium - the result was well worth it, as it now looks quite good. It has been to the MK rally for the last two years, so you might know it.

My collection is quite varied and consists of about 20 machines. I am not particularly knowledgeable about any one make, but enjoy having a diversified collection. They are all fairly run of the mill and nothing is older than mid 1920s - I quite openly admit that early hand mowers or pony mowers do nothing for me (hate mail c/o Keith Wootton please - don't blame me - Keith)

At the moment, I am restoring a Ransomes MkII Midget c1933 which is going well and will be ready by Christmas. I believe this to be a fairly rare machine - Andy Grout has very kindly supplied an exhaust and grass box (this will be used as a pattern as it is fairly ropy) Thanks Andy!

Finally, I would like to say that if anyone is passing through North Essex and has a spare hour or so, they are more than welcome to drop by and have a look.

Would anyone else like to write a short article on their collection and how they got involved with old lawnmowers? It would be nice to make a series out of the articles, so thanks to Crawford for starting things off. Please send potential articles to Keith Wootton at the usual address.

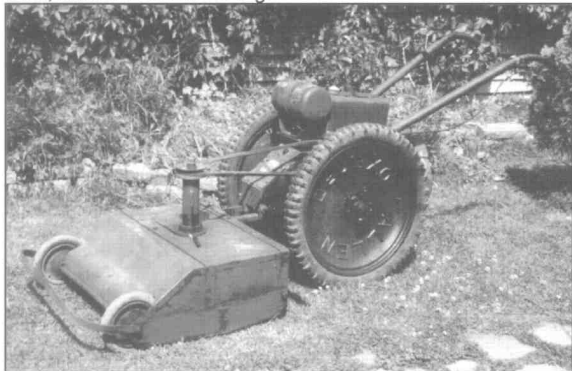
A BRIEF HISTORY OF ALLEN SCYTHES

By Chris Stoneman

There are various types of reciprocating knife mowers, the more popular designs being Lloyds, Teagle and Mayfield. The best reciprocating mower manufactured was by John Allen & Sons of Oxford. This machine was known as the Allen Motor Scythe.

Between 1935 & 1973 over 250,000 Allen Scythes were produced. Allen proved that it was the world's best cutter bar mower for over 40 years.

Just about everybody has heard, seen and used an Allen, but did not really appreciate what else they could be used for. Various implements made jobs easier around the farm, estate or smallholding.



There were an amazing 27 implements and 13 optional extras available for the Allen Scythe, which turned this versatile machine into a real workhorse.

A basic Allen Scythe comprised of two large diameter wheels (either rubber tyred or iron) with ratchets in the hubs, driven by a worm, wheel and a pair of reduction gears. The cutter bar is driven from the worm shaft through enclosed crank to an oscillating spring steel arm. This is protected from overload by a safety clutch.

Mk1 Allen Scythes appeared in 1935 and had a 3-piece fuel tank (facing forward), brass handle grips and was powered by a 147cc Villiers 2-stroke engine.

Mk2 machines also had three-piece tanks, but later versions had a one-piece tank (also facing forward). Handles were also brass but later on were covered in black celluloid. Controls on both the Mk1 & 2 were cable operated. The crankcases were aluminium and brass (depending on the year of manufacture).

1943 was when the "T" appeared. A Villiers Mk25c two stroke engine powered this model, but optional engines were Villiers Mk 25 & Mk 15 four stroke. The clutch was just a basic control, which when released, engaged the drive.

1952 saw the launch of the "TS". This model is very similar to the "T", differences included that it was wider, fitted with forestry guards and servo clutch mechanism and two-piece fuel tank. This machine also had optional 4 stroke engines.

1957 was the model "F". Many people say that it was introduced in 1955, but original Allen records state that the model "F" was launched at the Smithfield show in 1957. This was to be the last model to be produced by John Allen & Sons up until 1973. "F" was different from the rest due to the fact it had a power take off shaft running at 2500 rpm designed to drive various implements. This too had servo clutch and forestry guards. A range of engines was also included with the optional extras.

In the last years of production, few model "F" machines were fitted with gearboxes, giving three forward and one reverse speed. This model was only fitted with a Villiers Mk 25 four stroke, giving a power output of 1.9hp.

The range of use an Allen Scythe had was extreme. Implements included a sawbench, horticultural plough, generator, hay sweep & rotary broom. Some of the rarer implements seen today are carrier, rotary broom, centrifugal pump, sheep shearer, hay rake, gang mowers and compressor. Have any other members ever come across these?

This article is just an outline of the Allen scythe, and was designed to give you a brief description of the different designs. If any body has any Allen related material for sale e.g. implements, advertising literature etc then please let me know on (01702) 354112 and remember "WHEREVER A MAN CAN WALK, AN ALLEN WILL CUT!"

WHAT'S THIS WEB THING

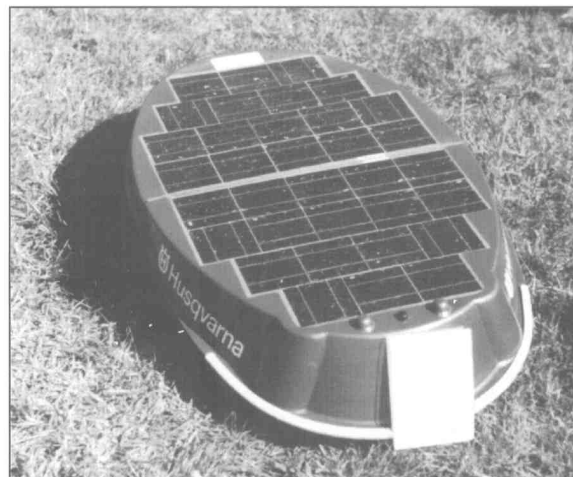
In the last edition, I mentioned that the Club had now produced some pages on the World Wide Web, the global computerised information system. The OLC pages include information about the Club, history of the lawnmower, details of events and links to other sites. The pages can be viewed by any suitably equipped computer. Since June almost 1000 people have 'visited' the site from around the world. The pages are at:: <http://www.artizan.demon.co.uk/olc>

This won't mean much to people who have not used the Web, but if you are able to have a look, please do, and let me know what you think. Incidentally, you can now email the Club on olc@artizan.demon.co.uk if you wish.

CHANGE OF TELEPHONE NUMBER

Keith's telephone number has changed to 01604 631192. This is the same as the old number, but with an additional 6 at the front. All other contact details are the same as before.

Keith Wootton can be contacted by post at Milton Keynes Museum or at 92 Artizan Road, Abington, Northampton NN1 4HS. Tel: 01604 631192. **Robbie Robinson** can be contacted at 10 Burchester Avenue, Headington, Oxford OX3 9NA. Tel: 01865 450899.



The most modern mower we have ever featured! This Husqvarna solar powered mower is from the early 1990s. Solar panels on top power small electric motors, and the mower roams the lawn during the day, self guided. This machine is from Brian Radam's British Lawnmower Museum.

Next Edition: Mar 1998

Grassbox

Edition 23 - January 1998

Edited and written

(except where stated)

by Keith Wootton