

# Grassbox



*The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club*

Number 24

Spring 1998

## IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN

Depending on when one starts counting, it could be argued that this year is the tenth lawn mower rally at Milton Keynes. This event of course has developed into the Club's Annual Rally, and is attended and enjoyed by more and more Members each year. I hope that as many people as possible will be able to make it to this year's event, with or without their mowers!

This Grassbox contains the usual mix of features and news. A big thanks to everyone who has helped out with contributions of one kind or another - it really does help. See you in May or, if not, at some other event this year!



*Andrew MacMorland's Shanks Jehu, late 1920s. This model superseded the Jehu produced in the early 1920s, as featured in the last Grassbox. Although the frame and engine are basically the same, the newer model had different petrol tank, silencer, grass box and drive train.*

## MOWER DIRECTORY

Chris Thompson has now completed the first edition of the Old Lawnmower Club Directory of Mowers and Manufacturers. In more than 50 pages of information, the booklet alphabetically lists companies and their machines, with basic information, dates, sizes of cut, original prices and any other interesting or unusual features. The booklet is designed as a ready reference guide to mowers made between the 1830s and the 1960s (it only contains details of British mowers made after this date). It is not designed as a complete history of mowers and their development.

Some people in the Club have already seen a copy of the first edition and have been impressed by the content and the amount of information.

Inevitably with a project of this size and scope, there will be omissions and errors. However, the current idea is to update the booklet constantly and include new information whenever it becomes available. Copies will be printed off individually when a member orders a booklet, ensuring that copy contains the latest information.

Copies of the first edition will be available at the annual rally in May, after which the booklet will be available for sale to Members for a modest price to cover printing costs. Full details will be given in the next Grassbox.



*Multim in Parvo from the Hall & Duck Trust Collection, dating from 1895-1905.*

## ATCO VISIT

As mentioned in the last Grassbox, the Club has been trying to arrange a visit to the Atco factory in Stowmarket. At present, the date is likely to be either Friday 3 or Saturday 4 July, although this has still to be confirmed. A Saturday was suggested so that more Members might be able to attend, although of course this may mean that some people are unable to come due to rally commitments. Please contact Keith Wootton if you are interested in the visit, and to confirm the date. Please do not assume the visit is going ahead and turn up on the day unless you have checked with the Club first.



*Robbie Robinson's Shanks Eagle mower dates from the 1930s. The Eagle was available in 10, 12, 14 & 16" widths, with prices from £7.2.6d to £9.12.6d in 1939.*

# EVENT & RALLY NEWS

**MKM Rally 16/17 May:** The event will include the official opening of the new Lawn Mower Pavilion. Everyone is welcome, and there is no need to 'book', but please let Keith Wootton know if you are planning to stay at the Museum on Saturday night. AGM at 12noon on Sunday 17 May. **Please note - this is the correct date - GB23 had the date out by one day.**

**Enfield Pageant: 23/24/25 May:** Details from Charlie Jones on 0181 804 1677 (London).

**Uttoxeter Strawberry Garden Centre: Sunday 14 June:** A popular rally organised by the Uttoxeter & District Vintage Machinery Group. Details initially from Keith.

**Banbury Steam Rally: 27/28 June:** Details from Robbie

**FMPS Gosfield Rally: 4/5 July:** The Farm Machinery Preservation Society will be holding its annual rally at Gosfield (Nr Halstead), Essex on Saturday 4/Sunday 5 July 1998. Lawnmower entries are particularly sought. Entry forms may be obtained from Chris Thompson, 222 Panfield Lane, Braintree, Essex CM7 5 RJ Tel: 01376 320259. One or two OLC Members exhibit at this event, but Chris is anxious to promote the event among Club Members and increase the presence at this very pleasant show.

**Welland Rally: 25/26 July:** Is anyone interested in attending a rally at Welland, Upton on Severn, over the weekend of 25 July at the Woodside Farm Showground? If so, please contact Tony Hopwood on 01684 592134 (Upton on Severn).

**Bromley Horticultural & Farming Festival: 1/2 August:** Kelsey Publishing has invited the OLC to participate in its annual event this year with a view to establishing a lawn mower section for the future. Details from Keith.

**Knowl Hill Steam Rally: 8/9 August:** Details from Tim Durant on 01628 521953 (Bourne End).

**Erewash Museum: Saturday 15 August:** Details from Keith

**Old Kiln Farm Museum: 12/13 September:** Details from Richard Jones on 01705 598601 (Waterlooville).

**Stafford Chrysanthemum Rally: 12/13 September:** Popular gardening event held at Stafford Showground. Details initially from Keith Wootton.

**Bedfordshire Steam Rally: 19/20 September:** Details from Alan & Dick Hardwick on 01462 816018 (Beds).



*Barnard Bishop & Barnard of Norwich manufactured mowers from 1863 until the 1930s. This example probably dates from between 1900 and 1910.*

# NEW ARCHIVE SERVICE FROM THE HILL AND DUCK TRUST

**By Andrew Hall**

For a few years now we have successfully run a Dating Service in conjunction with the Old Lawn Mower Club. We now wish to extend this Service, as our archives have been extended and also catalogued. We feel that we can now make the information more accessible to the public.

Within the past year this country has had to come in line with European Law on copyright, in some cases certain Museums and Establishments have ceased copying documents which could affect the researcher. In fact copyright now covers the past eighty years, within certain areas. A full memo can be obtained from The Museum and Galleries Commission, London.

By introducing our new Service, we will be able to bridge this new law. Our original Dating Service will continue to exist (Photos are always helpful and will be returned). Now you can ask questions on all aspects of Lawn Mower history and Development. For example:

- 1 - Can you tell me what other companies produced mowers for the same task as my Atco 22" Cylinder Mower?
- 2 - Have you got a copy of a Sales Catalogue for my Atco 22" Cylinder Mower?
- 3 - I've a missing handle for my Atco 22" Cylinder Mower can you supply a picture?
- 4 - I wish to collect Lawn Mowers of late 1930s for fine turf, can you tell me what I should be looking for?
- 5 - Have you got a copy of an engine manual for my Atco 22" Cylinder Mower?
- 6 - Have you any thing on the first rotary mowers?
- 7 - Can you help me differentiate between different grasses?

You name it, on specific questions our new Archival Service will be able to help in 99% of cases.

We have carefully priced this unique service at £5 per item, which will include the posting of an application form to you, and also posting back the completed application with any photocopying which may be needed. All cheques are to be made payable to "The Hill and Duck Trust".

Our Archive Department now includes many books on Gardening, Horticultural Practices, Soil Science, Turf Culture and Agronomy. We have managed to collect early and sometimes rare additions, examples being an early copy of The Gardeners Assistant, 1859, The Blue Book of Gardening, 1938 by Carters Seeds, and an up to date copy of The Edwardian Garden. In this section we have upwards of 600 books.

Our Patent Archives are ever expanding, and at the moment we hold every UK Patent from 1830 to 1897, which equates to about 800.

We hold company records on all of the main producers pre-1940. Our Almanac section houses twenty five titles catalogued for each year 1830-1965.

Our titles include: The Gardeners Chronicle 1841-1955; Garden Flora 1855-1937; My Garden 1933-1955; The Groundsman 1934-Present; The Ironmonger 1861-1950; Implement and Machinery Review 1877-1940; Gossip of the Garden 1856-1863; For the French among us then perhaps Le Jardin 1888-1918.

We have sales literature on over 300 companies 1830-1970, including sales leaflets and manuals, trade Catalogues and Retailers' Brochures.

Our Budding section includes Death certificates, Company Deeds, Other inventions of Budding, Ferrabee-Budding, General histories of the Woollen trade and early industries around Gloucestershire (including maps).

For all enquiries, please contact: The Archivist, The Hill & Duck Trust, 84 Kenilworth Avenue, Wimbledon Park, LONDON, SW19 7LR

# RANSOMED!!

By Tony Hopwood

I've been a Dennis fan for nearly 30 years, but as a hardened collector of vintage technology, I could not resist a particular auction last summer. It was a sale of 90 years of clutter in the barns and derelict buildings behind a local ironmongery firm. All 800 lots of it! They wanted the cash and space for redevelopment and expansion.

There were a couple of interesting vintage radios (another obsession) and masses of old tools and ironmongery as well as stationary engines and a wide assortment of mowers. Two very old push mowers took my eye. One was a 12 inch Silens Messor, and the other a Ransomes 16 inch Patent Gear Automaton. Both rusty but free and lacking grass boxes after 50 years under the collapsed roof of a shed.

Ignorance is bliss- I liked the look of the Ransomes because it had a towbar at the front and was gear driven and tidy, so I bid up and got it for £42.00. One push mower was enough (the first and only) so the Silens Messor went to someone else for £46.00. I also bought a complete 1929 five valve 'portable' (luggable) radio for much less than the mower, so it was a good day.

Thanks to Robbie at the OLC, I found out how the missing grass box should look with the right handles...that was his problem - finding the ornate cast iron handles.

In late autumn, there was another sale of collected clutter about 30 miles away near Symonds Yat. The weather forecast was evil, predicting over an inch of rain. I got there early down narrow lanes running with water, and parked the car in a field pointing downhill so I would be able to get out. And rain it did, but it didn't put off the punters - there was a good crowd. Among the hundreds of lots of vintage machinery, was a lot of several push mowers including a Ransomes Automaton with grassbox and those handles!

It poured down, and as the lot number grew nearer, I was getting very damp and cold despite being well waterproofed. About 20 lots to go, there were several motor mowers. One took my fancy. It was a 20 inch Ransomes with a horseshoe shaped oil and petrol tank over the cooling fan. It looked complete except for a missing carburettor bowl and a rotten grassbox bottom. I decided to try for it because it was unusual and very restorable...In for a penny- in for - ten quid! Magic!

There was a lot more interest in the push mowers, so I didn't even bid. I was now very wet and cold, so I went home after paying for the mower.

Next day I returned with the trailer, and collected the Ransomes. It turned out to be in good mechanical condition, with a duff Lucas MA1 magneto and missing carburettor bowl and float.

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## SOME YOU WIN, SOME YOU LOSE

*An Anonymous Club Member Relates a Recent Experience*

As is widely recognised and accepted our hobby, like many others, is full of 'some you win, some you lose' situations. I am prompted to write by a recent experience, but have chosen to retain my anonymity to protect the vendor in question (they are a non-member) from any unease lest they should ever read or get to hear of this article. The machine in question was advertised in Grassbox - an accurate description of the model was given, however as usual no price was mentioned. On phoning the vendor, I was told that the machine was virtually complete, but no mention was made of the condition and described as best as he was able the shape of various components. So far, so good. He phoned me back with the machine number and enormous excitement ensued (though quietly fearful of a sudden price increase - you know the game). A cheque was despatched the same day to reserve the machine as it was some way off and I would not be able to collect it for a week or so. The price was low, especially for such a low numbered machine - maybe now I should become suspicious, but I did not. My fault I guess. So keen was I to collect the machine that I took a day off work and drove 160 miles to collect it.



I had no idea of the date except that it was 30s until the magneto repairers dated the MA1 as 1933/4, and the OLC Information Service confirmed the machine as a 20 inch MkVII made in June 1933. They also copied me the illustrated parts list which was incredibly useful. While the Lucas magneto was away, I jury rigged a Wico A magneto on the Sturmeys Archer engine, and tried to find something to replace the missing carburettor bowl and float.

As I stripped the machine down, I found it could do with a new bottom shear plate, so I contacted a local garden machinery firm who used to be Ransomes Agents to see whether they still had any Ransomes spares. I was lucky- they had a 20 inch bottom shear plate and special fixing screws in stock! Better still, they let me rummage in their scrap carburettor box where I found a modern Kohler carburettor with a bowl almost the same size as the Sturmeys Archer. The bowl was the same depth, but about .095" larger in diameter than the gasket groove on the Sturmeys, and the brass doughnut float centre hole was tight on the centre pillar. A few minutes on the Myford lathe with a fixed steady enlarged the gasket groove and skinned down the centre pillar so the float fitted freely. A gasket was carefully cut to fit the groove. The fuel and oil tanks and pipes were cleaned out, and the oil pump tested with clean oil by winding the engine on the handle. All seemed well, with good compression and no clunks or squeaks.

It was time for a test run! At first the engine ran very weakly and rich until I discovered that the sprocket on the magneto had slipped, retarding the ignition. That fixed, the engine roared into life breaking the fibre link fan belt which was rather tender. The lack of cooling fan limited test runs to a few minutes but all seemed to be well. Over the winter, 20 inch Ransomes No B 2106 will be cleaned, repainted and made ready for grass cutting in 1998 alongside the Dennises. I'm still looking for Automaton grassbox handles!

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As the tarpaulin was dragged off, I could not believe my eyes. Now as we all know, it could have gone either way; this time the gods of grass were not smiling on me. Apart from being totally derelict and damaged beyond salvation, the machine number did not match. It was not the elusive model that I had expected, but a considerably later one which I already have. Remember that I had not asked about the condition and never thought that it would be damaged beyond salvation. Condition is not important so long as it is not damaged. I believe the vendor should have disclosed the extent of the damage over the phone. He stated that he did not know anything about these machines and did not notice the damage.

I do not wish to apportion any blame on the vendor. It was just my misfortune, but I should like to take the liberty of suggesting some golden rules if a long journey is necessary:

- 1) Do not let your heart rule your head (or wallet).
- 2) Get an accurate description of the condition including any apparent damage.
- 3) Ascertain if anything is missing from the machine.
- 4) Try to ascertain the exact model offered.

These points may sound obvious. However, as we all know, we can get carried away. I travelled over 300 miles and all I had to show for it was a box of spares salvaged on site. I have learned my lesson (until next time!).

**Advance notice of the  
Annual General Meeting of  
The Old Lawnmower Club  
to be held at  
Milton Keynes Museum, Wolverton,  
Milton Keynes  
Sunday 17 May  
12noon**

Formal Business will include Selection of Committee & Officers for coming year, Ratification of Accounts for 1997/98, Consideration of any motions.

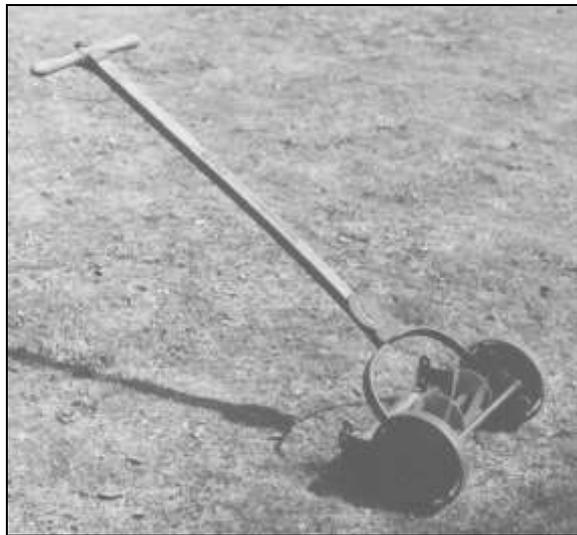
All Members are entitled to attend the AGM, which is on the Sunday morning of the Annual Rally. Exhibiting at the Rally is optional.

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.



*Qualcast Model C sidewheel, 1930s.*



*Ransomes Cub sidewheel, late 1930s.*

## Membership Renewals

Membership of the Old Lawnmower Club runs from 1 May to 30 April each year. There is no need to send any subscription to the Club until you receive a Membership Renewal Form from Robbie. This will be sent to you sometime after the Annual Rally but before the end of June.



*The Shanks Drake (as seen at Old Kiln Rural Centre) is a 1930s-1950s bowling green mower.*

## INFORMATION LEAFLETS

In previous years, the information leaflets that are produced annually by the Club have been circulated with the Spring Grassbox. This year it has been decided to prepare the leaflets and circulate them separately but before the publication of the next newsletter. This decision was taken to allow the workload involved to be spread out and to help smooth what are often known as 'logistical' reasons. Members should rest assured that they will receive their leaflets in due course.

**Keith Wootton** can be contacted by post at Milton Keynes Museum or at 92 Artizan Road, Abington, Northampton NN1 4HS. Tel: 01604 631192 or 0378 315966 (mobile). **Robbie Robinson** can be contacted at 10 Burchester Avenue, Headington, Oxford OX3 9NA. Tel: 01865 450899. The Club can also be contacted by email at: [olc@artizan.demon.co.uk](mailto:olc@artizan.demon.co.uk) or via the web at <http://www.artizan.demon.co.uk/olc>

**Next Edition: July 1998**

**Grassbox**

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