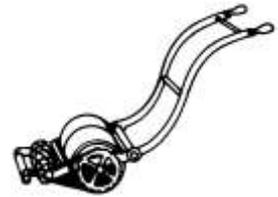


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 26

Autumn 1998

DISAPPEARING MOWERS?

Where have all the mowers gone? That has been a recurring theme of the year. A number of Club members have mentioned that they are finding fewer and fewer mowers on their travels, and there is perhaps some truth in this. But I suspect that a more accurate reflection of the situation is that collectors have mopped up the readily available machines and now need to be a bit more creative in their searching.

This year has seen more mowers on display at more events than any previous year. Mowers are becoming accepted at not only the traditional 'steam rally' events, but are also attracting attention at gardening and museum exhibitions as well. The diversity in types and the high standard of the majority of machines on display makes mowers an ideal attraction for many events, but I guess I am preaching to the converted on this one.

It already looks like 1999 is going to be busy. The Club has been invited to a number of new events to add to the regular dates, and details of some of these are contained in the regular Diary Dates inside.

Long standing Members will be relieved to hear that after some years thinking about it, I have finally managed to produce some transfers for the Atco Standard.

Finally, I should like to offer a big thank you to everyone who has contributed to the running of the Club in any way this year. Happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.



This 6" Drummond Willing Worker from the Hall & Duck Trust collection was made specially for the Drummond family and is the only known example this size.

MORE 15 MINUTES OF FAME

Old mowers are back on the telly! Andrew Hall and Mike Duck appeared on the BBC2 "Antiques Show" in October, giving a glimpse of their large collection. Later the same month, the inventor of the mower Edwin Budding was featured in the BBC2 show "Local Heroes". Look out for more appearances in the future, and a possible whole programme about the increasingly famous Mr Budding!

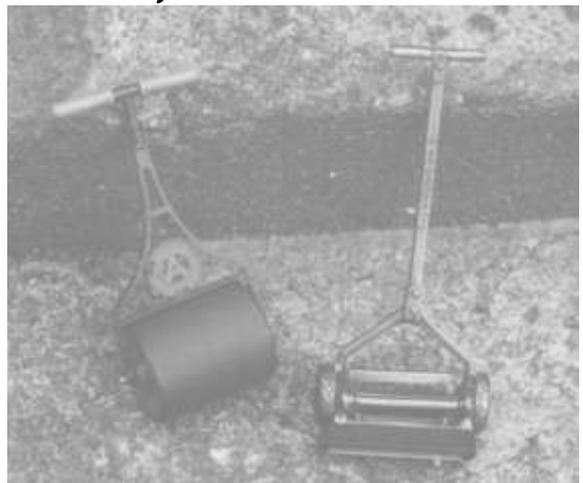


A 10" JP Matchless sidewheel mower, from the Hall & Duck Trust collection, dates from the late 1930s to 1950s.

GETTING CONNECTED?

Are you on email? If so, and you would like to communicate with the club electronically, please let Keith know by sending a message to: olc@artisan.demon.co.uk Perhaps we could include interested Members' email addresses in the next Membership Directory. Any thoughts?

YAWN, YAWN!



Looking for an unusual last minute Christmas gift? Why not try the 'Yawnmower', as suggested by Richard Jones (and also used by yours truly on the odd occasion that I shave). The Yawnmower is basically a razor handle (made from strong die-cast silvered bronze metal) which can be used with any standard detachable blade (the double type). It costs £29.95 and can be ordered from Windrush Mill Limited, by telephone on 01993 770456.

STOWMARKET STOWAWAYS

On Friday 3 July around 20 Club Members visited the head quarters of Atco Qualcast in Stowmarket, Suffolk (formerly the home of Suffolk Iron Foundries). The company's only UK factory, this is where it produces Atco, Qualcast and Suffolk Punch petrol and electric mowers as well as a range of electric tools for Bosch, the parent company.



Roger Tombs (with tie) of Atco-Qualcast, with Tony Edwards, Steve Smith and Robbie outside the Atco factory.

Following a brief introduction to the company and its history (which encompasses not only Atco, Qualcast and Suffolk Punch, but also Follows and Bate, Webb, Valor and others) there was a tour of the factory to see how the modern mowers are made. Interesting facts emerged, such as the top of the range mower in the Atco range is still made by hand, and that the company can no longer manufacture a hand roller mower for a price that the public is prepared to pay! Visitors had an opportunity to view a selection of older Atco and Qualcast machines owned by the company, including some Atco Standards and HYS, Qualcast 16s and a Royal Blade. There was also a chance to look through some of the company's archive of photographs and brochures. These included designs for a second 'Atco Car' which was planned in the 1940s, but never produced.

The factory is still busy and, under the ownership of Bosch, appears to be enjoying a period of relative stability and success. The visit made for a highly enjoyable afternoon which I am sure will be remembered by those who were able to attend.

During the visit we discovered the company has spares going back to the 1950s or earlier. Atco offered to help find spares for old machines, but only if requests are directed through the Club. If anyone is trying to track down spares for an Atco or Qualcast, in the first instance please contact Keith for more information.

BANBURY STEAM RALLY

Another muddy year at Banbury Steam Rally on 27/28 June did not dampen the spirits as much as the 1997. Robbie had arranged the usual marquee to house the display, and a good selection of machines was on view. As usual, Robbie supplemented the mower display with a selection of exhibits from his ephemera collection including leaflets and brochures.

KNOWL HILL STEAM RALLY

Knowl Hill Rally took place on what was probably the warmest weekend of the year in the UK, 8/9 August. Half a dozen members took part, displaying mainly hand mowers. The display comprised the usual selection of Silens Messor, Multum in Parvo and Ransomes Automaton in various shapes and sizes. The event also boasted some excellent steam exhibits, rare breeds animals, special fireworks display and a good beer tent. Event organiser Tim Durant had championed the idea of a mower section at the rally for a couple of years, and this first visit was an unqualified success. We'll be back next year!

DIARY DATES

MK Museum, including AGM, 15/16 May 1999: Our Annual Rally will be held on at Milton Keynes Museum. The AGM will be held at 12noon on Sunday 16 May. Further information from Keith.

Dittons Nurseries, Stone Cross, Near Eastbourne, July 10/11. Contact Colin Huggett. Tel: 01323 761868 (Note: the replacement for the Drusillas event).

ALL WELLAND GOOD

Over the weekend of the 25/26 July, the Club was invited to put on a display at the Welland Steam Rally, organised by the Ross-on-Wye Steam Engine Society. Tony Hopwood had done a splendid job of arranging a roped-off enclosure for the exhibition of around twenty machines. A cross section of mowers that would have interested most club members could be seen. From a Greens 8" Multum in Parvo chain drive, through to Tony's 1926 24" Dennis, a machine that's still in regular use, no mean feat at 72 years of age. Other machines of interest included a 25" Shanks pony mower, belonging to Martin Briggs, and the 'Vantage', a wheeled cylinder mower with cast aluminium chassis, built by DAP Ltd of Dudley. I have to confess to knowing little of this machine, or the company. Perhaps other readers can enlighten me? Finally, can I thank all the members who helped make this a successful show.

Andrew Grout

ATCO 'STANDARD' TRANSFERS

The long awaited Atco Standard transfers are now ready. Club Members from the early days will know this is something I have been trying to organise for many years, although for various technical reasons it has only just become possible. Two designs have been produced, enabling restoration of virtually any Atco from the 1920s and early 1930s to be completed.



The first is the round CHP logo which was used on Standards, HYS and the next generation of Atcos in the early 1930s. The second design is the one which says "The Atco Motor Mower", used on the same mowers.

The transfers are as authentic as possible, and have been produced for the Club by a company with many years of experience in producing replica motor cycle and stationary engine decals. They work by the 'water slide' principle, and need to be soaked in water to detach the transfer from the backing paper (anyone familiar with the transfers used in Airfix kits will understand).

For convenience, we have produced the transfers in sheets of five, each containing two CHP and three Atco Motor Mower designs. This should be enough to complete one mower, complete with grass box. Full instructions are included with each set.

There is some debate over where the 'Atco Motor Mower' decal was used. It was certainly on the fan guard and on the grass box, but opinions differ on the fuel tank. Drawings and diagrams in period mower handbooks suggest a third design was used on the petrol tank, but unfortunately no-one in the Club (as far as I know) has a mower with this decal intact in good enough condition for us to contemplate a copy. Having said that, some Standards did have the Atco Motor Mower decal on the tank. By the end of the 1920s, however, there is no doubt that Atco itself was already using the later ATCO logo (which it still uses) in this position.

For the time being, the new transfers will only be available to Club Members. Price for a complete set is £12, with individual transfers also available at £3 each, available from Keith Wootton at the usual address. Please make cheques payable to 'The Old Lawnmower Club'. If these transfers prove popular, the Club will investigate the potential for a further design for a different mower.

The 'new' style ATCO logo transfers, as used from the late 1920s onwards, are available from Andrew Hall.

THE TALE OF A CORNISH MOWER COLLECTION

By Fred Werring

Since before leaving school in the 1970's, I had begun buying selling and collecting vintage tractors and classic cars. Hundreds of interesting vehicles had passed through my hands by the late 1980s, but despite having been involved in the sale and repair of modern lawn mowers throughout the same period, no garden machinery found its way into the collection. Old lawnmowers came and went through the business, but they were simply sold on as cheap second hand mowers or (heaven forbid) scrapped.

Even the chance acquisition of a fully restored 1921 Atco Standard in 1985 (which I still have) didn't start the ball rolling.

It wasn't until 1990, whilst clearing 'rubbish' out of one of the firm's storage sheds that it suddenly struck me that some of the 'old wrecks' I was throwing out for the scrapman were actually very interesting works of engineering - every bit as technically unique and intriguing as agricultural tractors and old cars.



Half a dozen machines were retrieved from the scrap pile and put back in the shed. Interest now having been aroused, other sheds around the place were searched for more interesting discoveries. By the end of the day, the shed I had started clearing out to make space was full again - of old mowers. Slack time in the workshop during the winter allowed restoration work to take place in various selected machines from the shed - a kick-start Atco, an early Merrytiller, a Teagle Jetscythe, a Homelite C5/63 chainsaw, a Danarm DD8F saw, and a Shay Rototiller were completed by the next Spring.

RESTORING AN OLD LAWN MOWER

Part Four (Alec Hillyar continues his series)

Cleaning a mower for painting seems straight forward enough but the painting itself can give many problems.

To clean the mower I first scrape the old caked on oil and grease off with a screwdriver or even an old wall paper scraper, providing the area is big enough, make sure you clean up the mess so as not to grind it into the workshop floor then walk it indoors! I then buy Gunk or Jizer degreaser and apply it with an old paint brush about fit for the bin, the stiffer the better as it also acts as a scraper.

Once the parts are soaked and the oil etc is dissolved, a strong flow of water is needed (eg a pressure cleaner, but a hose and brush is just as effective), leave to drain, or dry with compressed air and put parts by a warm air supply, it is necessary to dry the parts as soon as possible as rust will form on machined surfaces. The next job is to clean off the rust (on paint tins it usually states to apply to surfaces clean from grease and loose rust), I think we need to do better than that. It is after all a restoration project not just a garden gate.

MOWER DIRECTORY

A number of Members have purchased a copy of the new Director of lawn mower models and manufacturers, as edited by Chris Thompson. The first edition is currently being revised to incorporate even more information about a wider range of machines, some of which has been suggested by members of the Club. Copies of the Directory are available from Keith at the usual addresses, priced £5 for either a printed booklet or a 3.5in floppy disk.

Intended primarily and an advertisement for the business, the collection was exhibited at a local vintage rally. It didn't produce any extra business for the firm, but it did result in some interesting acquisitions to add to the collection.

Further exhibitions lead to more purchases, as well as a few sales, and wintertime allowed restoration of products as diverse as a Landmaster L150 rotavator, a JAP engined lawn edger, a Shay Countryman, a Wrigley Motor Hoe and a Loyd Autosickle.

Like Topsy, the collection has grown and grown to the point where, with over 100 machines, it has gotten too big to handle.

So a rationalisation has to take place, with a large number of machines (and spares) being put on the market, to enable the core collection of 50s and 60s garden machinery (which are the ones which really interest me) to expand at a more sensible rate. So if anyone out there would be interested in buying about 40 bits of motorised garden machinery, please give me a ring for the list!



Latest restorations include a shaft drive Teagle Jetscythe, a 36" Dennis, an Anzani 'banana mower' and a Brott ride-on flail mower. Hopefully, my Unihorse tractor will also be ready soon.

My contact number (phone or fax) is 01566 777694. Hopefully my tale will encourage a few readers to rescue or restore more old garden equipment before it all gets scrapped by these mercenary lawn mower dealers!

Ed's Note: This article was held over from the last edition, although the list of machines for sale by Fred was included in the advertisements. The list is repeated in this edition.

One member I know takes his mower bit by bit to work and puts it in a sand blaster, this is OK but it needs the attention of the paint tin ASAP as even the shortest trip home in damp conditions can cause rust to start to form and the object of the exercise becomes fruitless.

I use a wire brush on the electric drill for the bigger bits, beware the smaller parts in one hand and the power drill in the other is not the answer, bullet size objects catapulted across the workshop and skinned fingers on contact with a speeding wire brush head is almost sure to be the result, I have even caught the brush in my jumper, it either blows the fuse or in my case I couldn't find the chuck key through idleness and with it loose I was able to retrieve the situation without injury, it gives you a 'that was lucky' feeling.

There is an attachment available for most drills which enables you to clamp the offending mechanism to the bench, then, once the work is retrieved from its hiding place across the other side of the room, hold it tight in a pair of mole grips or pliers at least and proceed with caution, another option is to take a grind stone off a bench grinder buy an arbourless wire brush attachment (one without a spindle) these are available from any DIY or hardware store along with the powerdrill version for very little money, here you also have a hands free machine. In the next issue we will continue cleaning and start to paint.

THE LONG GRASS

In the Autumn of 1996, when staying at Kilrenny in Fife, I was taken to the churchyard to see a Lumsden tomb which was under restoration. Next door was another, much larger, mausoleum, securely locked and in a far more run down state. In the middle of the stone floor however, under a hole in the roof, I spotted in the gloom a very rusty and dilapidated side wheel mower.



As luck would have it, we knew a descendant of the incarcerated and we met up with her at a party in London in December that year. She had no knowledge of this distant monument nor, of course, its contents, but she agreed to look into the matter with our Kilrenny friends, and as a result undertook to restore her family tomb. This was done in 1998 and the mower came to me and is now looking its old self. The Shanks catalogue for 1929 particularly mentions that the Long Grass is very suitable for cemeteries.

David Lumsden



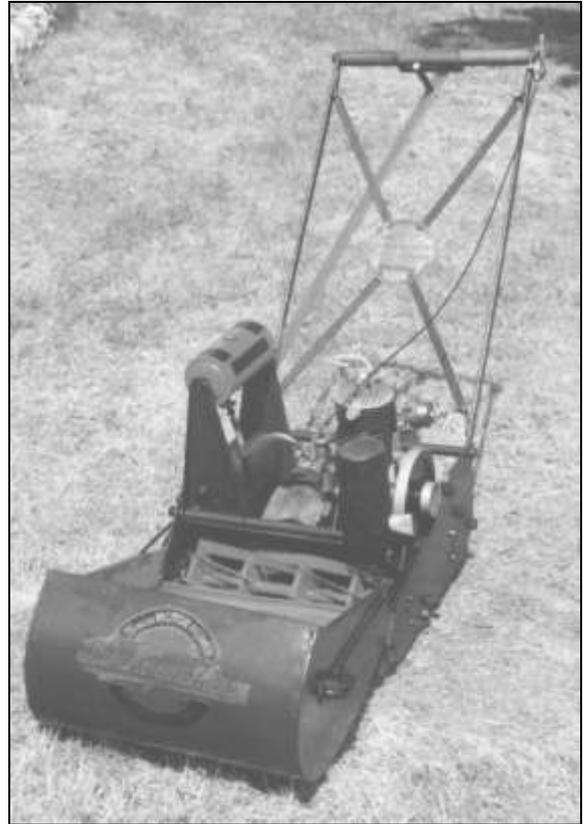
In its 1953/4 catalogue, Webb advertised four basic hand mowers. The Witch was an 8 blade, 12" cut model in the middle of the range. Other models were the 10" Whippet, 12" Wasp and the top-of-the-range 12" Two Speed Deluxe. Price of the Witch was £12-14-4, including taxes. A transporter was available for an extra £1-6-0.

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Edited and written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton

TONY'S TOP TIP

By Tony Hopwood

Here's a useful tip I have found effective over the last 30 years of running stationary engines and vintage mowers. The proper brass or crimp or soldered terminations for plug leads are expensive to buy new, and difficult to recycle. I have found the screw eyes for fixing plastic covered spring curtain rail ideal. They cost a few pence and can easily be screwed into the conductor of high tension ignition cable after it has been cut off flush with the insulation. If you use old style spark plugs with terminal nuts, the combination is tidy, reliable and authentic looking.



The Keynsham motor mower (this one belongs to Richard Jones) was manufactured in the late 20s and early 30s by H Bricknell & Sons of Keynsham, Bristol. It had a 15-inch and sold for around 25 guineas.

VILLIERS FACTLET

Did you know that 100 years ago, in 1898, Sir Charles Villiers died? He was a Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton for 63 years. The company founded by him started making engines in 1911. In 1898, the wage for an engineer in Wolverhampton was £2 for a 54 hour week. Ale was 9d a gallon.

Tony Edwards

Keith Wootton can be contacted by post at Milton Keynes Museum or at 7 Church Lane, Cold Higham, Towcester, Northamptonshire NN12 8LS. Tel: 01327 830675 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 or via the web at <http://www.artizan.demon.co.uk/olc>