

Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 29

Summer 1999

ANOTHER BUSY YEAR

Another Summer has flown by and most of the events looked forward to in the last Grassbox have been and gone. Maybe it's me, but time really does seem to go faster every year. The Club's Annual Rally (see inside) was a great success. But so are most of the other events organised by the Club or attended by individual members. I have been to quite a few of these this year and met many members for the first time. Club events are attracting more support, but it would be great if even more members could come to at least one event a year.

Despite the lack of Grassboxes, the Club has been busy since the Annual Rally. We have attended some special one-off or occasional events, including the Bedfordshire Millennium Festival where it was a surprise to see more motor mowers than hand mowers on display for once. A special report on this event, and some of the others, will be in a future Grassbox. We have also mailed out all of the directories and leaflets mentioned in the previous newsletters, and I really hope that everyone appreciates the effort that has gone into them.



The Ransomes Patent Chain Automaton was a prop for the Edwardian actress Miss Marie Studholme in 1904/5. The photograph was produced as a postcard although it is unclear whether this was to promote the mower or the actress.

SHIRE BOOK REPRINTED

Shire Publications has recently reprinted its popular "Old Lawnmowers" by David Halford which, following its first publication in the early 1980s, was for many years the only readily available history of the mower. More has since been learned about mower history and the book is now seen as an introduction to the subject rather than a definite history. The book (ISBN 0 85263 607 5) is available (or can be ordered) from large book shops, priced around £2.95.



This Grays Inn 9" sidewheel, part of the Hall & Duck Collection, was made in about 1915. Despite its London-sounding name, the mower was in fact made in North America.

NO MORE LEAD IN YOUR PETROL

Some years ago, the Government announced that leaded petrol would be removed from the market on environmental and health grounds from the end of 1999. Although the decision is sensible in many ways, many vintage enthusiasts have been concerned that they may not be able to operate their machinery without paying high prices for special fuel additives or conversions to valves and cylinder heads. The main impact will be on the thousands of vintage car owners of course, but many club members have old motor mowers in their collections and the lack of leaded petrol will also affect these.

The next edition of Grassbox will include a special article on the potential effects of using unleaded petrol in old mowers. It will aim to cover all of the major points, including whether or not this is a problem and the different options to avoid any serious damage to engines. However, finding information relevant to old (mainly) single cylinder engines is a bit of a problem, and I would be grateful if anyone who has read articles in magazines or has any views on the subject could contact me with their information. I suspect that owners of vintage motor cycles may have access to a lot of the information needed to produce a definitive article.



Stan Hardwick's Shank triple gang mower, dating from the 1920s, was demonstrated at Banbury Steam Rally with a contemporary tractor.

ANNUAL RALLY AT MKM

It was good to see so many new and old friends at the Annual Rally and AGM this May. For once the weather was good to us, warm and sunny on both days.

The event was attended by more than 50 club members at some time or other during the weekend and at one point on the Sunday afternoon there were more than 120 mowers on display on the Museum's lawn, a new record for the event. What made this even more surprising was that there were very few duplicates, although there were inevitably a few Atco Standards, Silens Messors and JP hand mowers to be seen.

I have always felt it was unfair to pick out specific mowers to mention in reports of the Annual Rally because of the diversity of machines and the fact that what appeals to one person is of no interest to others, and vice versa. Perhaps the choice is best left to the rally exhibitors, who this year chose John Barnard's 1920s Greens motor mower as their winner of the Andrew Grout Plate (the photo shows John and Andrew with the Greens).



What is clear each year is that club members always seem to pull out the stops for this event and always manage to bring their most recent acquisitions, latest restorations or most unusual machines to the show.

The Museum's own display was also open properly this year, although there is still some work to do in adding to the decoration in the building. Hopefully this will be achieved in time for the 2000 event.

The prize for the longest distance travelled to this year's event was 'won' by Donal Flynn, who had made the trip to MK all the way from the west coast of Ireland - a journey that involves a ferry crossing and driving almost the whole length of the ancient Watling Street roman road. Donal arrived on the Friday and was almost last to leave on the Sunday, having filled up his car and trailer with new additions to his collection.

The event also saw the first appearance 'in use' of the Club's new Atco Standard transfers, as used by Richard Dent from Leighton Buzzard. The transfers really helped finish off Richard's restoration of the mower, and helped sell a few more sets in the Club shop open during the weekend.

A major part of the Annual Rally is that everyone staying overnight at the museum on the Saturday evening goes to a local pub. This was great fun, as always, but the time may have come to arrange an evening party at the Museum instead - there are enough people to make it worth doing and the Museum has the facilities. A party to mark the Club's 10th Anniversary in 2000 would be a good place to start.

Another popular feature of the rally was the souvenir beer, a bottle of which is given to each club member attending the rally. This year's 'Clipper Ale' proved just as popular as last year's brew, and seems to be better received than a brass plaque or similar type of souvenir.

Inevitably of course the event came and went too quickly, but everyone seemed to have a good time and I am sure that next year will be even better.

A selection of photos taken at the Annual Rally and other Club events during the year will be appearing in this and future editions.

AGM REPORT

The AGM was held on the Sunday morning, with reports from the principal officers and election of the 1999/2000 committee. Keith gave a report on the Club's activities in the past year, outlining the events attended and some of the other projects that have been completed, most of which have been covered in Grassbox. Robbie said that membership was up on previous years and that this was a good sign. Gremlins somehow managed to get into the printout of the Club accounts which seemed to show a large deficit until it was realised that a figure had somehow been moved to the wrong column. The following is a very brief summary of the accounts (amounts in £):

Income		
Membership	1684.30	
Publications	519.50	
Other	250.44	
Total		2454.24
Expenditure		
Grassbox/Leaflets/Stationery	807.96	
Postage	538.75	
Regalia etc	978.31	
Other	309.10	
Total		2634.12
Income over Expenditure		-179.88
Closing Balance		1903.48

The Committee for the present year was elected as follows: Chairperson, Keith Wootton, Secretary, Bernard Robinson, Treasurer, Martin Stephenson, Committee Members, John Barnard, Tim Durant, Andrew Grout, Les Harrison and Alec Hillyar. There was very little 'other business' and the meeting was concluded after around thirty minutes. A full copy of the minutes and the accounts is available from Keith on request.



Donal Flynn (centre) loads up ready for the trip home!

DIARY DATES

Bedfordshire Steam Rally, 18/19 September: Details from Alan & Dick Hardwick on 01462 816018 (Beds).

The date of the 2000 Annual Rally will be either 13/14 or 20/21 May (to be confirmed in the next Grassbox). This will of course also be the Club's Tenth Anniversary Rally, so please put the dates in your diaries now and help make it the biggest and best yet!

SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS

Members should now have received their subscription renewal reminders for the year 1999/2000. We are sending this Grassbox to all members from the last year, but future editions will only be sent to people that have renewed their membership. Please return subscription renewals to Robbie at the usual address as soon as possible.

Members who joined the Club after 1 January this year should not have received reminders as their membership automatically runs until May 2000.



The Folbate J2 sidewheel was produced in the late 1950s and early 1960s and was available in 10" and 12" versions priced around £5.

FINDING THE BITS

By Tony Hopwood

30 years of using vintage mowers has given me lots of experience in finding bits to keep my machines going, so here is a distillation of sources of spares that may be helpful. Apart from the OLC database of collectors and information service which should be the first port of call to find out what you need or what it looks like if it's missing, there are other places where that elusive spare part can be found.

Old motor mowers and vintage motorcycles have a lot in common. Major makers like Ransomes, Dennis and Atco all used slightly modified motorcycle engines - something that vintage motorcycle enthusiasts have known and profited from for years so there's every reason to return the compliment. Where should you look?

Firstly, any classic motorcycle event with stalls. Specialist stallholders are a goldmine of information on tricky spares like piston rings, gudgeon pins and bearings. Even if they don't have the part in stock, they can usually tell you the correct size, part number and equivalents and may suggest other sources not at the show. I got new piston rings for my mid 20's Blackburn engine Dennis this way, plus correct dimensions for the gudgeon pin and bearing rollers so I could get them made locally. For those who want to machine their own plain bearings, chunks of bearing metal are usually for sale, so take a sample or size gauge. Other specialist items like magnetos can often be found. The cheap ones are usually open circuit, but worth buying for spares or rewinding if they are the right sort. Other new or reconditioned ignition parts are usually on sale - 18mm plugs, HT cable, terminal nuts, carbon brushes, contact breakers and condensers - even spare coils for Villiers and Wico magnetos - but take a meter to test them before you buy. Then there are autojumbles - not only motorcycle, but at car and steam rallies. With luck you may find a complete engine. You will certainly find carburettors, floats and magneto sprockets and valves, so take a sample to match. I looked for an oil pump to repair a 1926 Blackburn engine for over 15 years, and found one in a box of junk for £2.50 last year. There are often specialist stallholders who will make up control cables to sample or supply new drive chains to length, as well as half links, so it's worth taking a sample with you. If you ask around you may even find mowers to add to your collection. Many stallholders have sheds full of stuff they don't bring to the show. Another source is auctions - not only collective sales at steam rallies, but local farms as well. Ancient mowers are often to be found at farm sales when there's a clear out of 40 years of clutter from the barn. Such sales are also good for tools, particularly spanners and boxes of assorted nuts and bolts. I got a sound mid 30's Dennis mower engine complete with working magneto for £4.00, so your only competition could be the scrap man or other OLC members! Good hunting...

GODIVA LAWN MOWERS

By JR Baldwin

Godiva mowers were first made by Barford and Perkins, Queen Street, Peterborough. This company joined Agricultural and General Engineers Ltd (AGE) in 1920. This could be when the lawn mower manufacture moved to Nene Engineering Company, Chapel Street, Peterborough. At the Royal Show at Derby in 1921 Nene Engineering Company displayed a selection of items, including lawn mowers: The New Godiva, 10in (£8/19/6d), 12in (£9/18/6d), 14in (£12/17/6d), 18in (£16/16/0d).

The company also sold lawn edge clippers at £2/17/6d each and a horse or motor mower "GODIVA" 36in cut, fitted with a patent side delivery system.



Nene Engineering Company was featured in an article in 'Implement And Machinery Review', August 1921:

"The New 'Godiva' Motor Mower, of quite a relatively medium price, viz £60, is the new machine being made by the Nene Engineering Co Ltd, Peterborough whose 'Godiva' pattern hand lawn mowers are of excellent design, workmanship, and finish, with dependable cutting agents in the form of best steel spirals. The motor driven type possesses all these recognised 'Godiva' features which include adjustable ball bearings and steel land rolls. The engine is a three and one quarter HP two stroke 'Orbit' which delivers ample power and to spare for a 22in machine under ordinary conditions, and will propel the mower under the most exacting circumstances. Of the two separate clutches working on the countershaft, one controls the drive of the land rolls and the other the cutting cylinder, so that each can be worked independently of the other when desired. The tank is fitted with an automatic drip-feed pump which gives such flow of oil as may be required."

Godiva Mowers were later made by Godiva Engineering Limited.

Editors Note: The mechanism employed on Godiva mowers to adjust the cutting height, involving the bar from the handle to the front roller, was known as the Wansbrough Patent and was pioneered on these mowers in 1902. Godiva Engineering Limited was trading in mowers by 1925.



Early Greens motor mowers are not as common as either Ransomes or Shanks. In 1910, the company was offering four different motor mower models, the smallest of which was the 24", pictured. This had a 3½hp air cooled engine and was available with either standard high tension or magneto ignition. Priced at £75, the mower appears to be little more than a Greens pony mower with a motor attached.

ATCO-QUALCAST MILESTONES

3: ATCO

1921: The first 900 open framed 22" petrol powered lawnmowers were produced, now known as the Standard Oval Frames. These heavy machines were sold at £75 each by salesmen using specially modified motor cycles and sidecar combination.

1922: Nationwide network of Service Agents was set up following up following the successful launch - the first such company to do this.

1926-1935: The Atco Standard range was launched using a malleable iron cast chassis (produced by Qualcast).

1935: Steel chassis introduced, reducing prices such that medium weight machines were now retailing at under £15.

1939: Atco training car was launched in July to improve road safety awareness through schools and colleges. Following the outbreak of World War II, production was halted after 250 had been sold.

1939-45: 100,000sq ft of floor space at the company's Birmingham factory was given over to munitions production. The contribution to the war effort was highly commended by the Ministry concerned.

1946-60: Under peace time normality, the Birmingham sites grew four fold. Full time mower production and servicing heralded the beginning of a boom period for domestic lawn mower manufacturing.

1951: By this time, several types of product from powered auto scythes to boat impellers had been introduced. The latter found extensive sales opportunities in the marsh lands of the Far East.

1955: Royal warrant was granted by Queen Elizabeth II for our tractors and lawn mowers.

1965: Charles H Pugh Ltd became part of the Qualcast Group.

1966: Atco Royale, a prestigious sit behind lawn mower was introduced.

1975: Lawn mower production moved from the West Midlands to the Stowmarket site of Suffolk Iron Foundry (1920) Limited. The Birmingham site became the spare parts centre of the entire Qualcast organisation in the UK and was later renamed Serpar.

1981: In the early hours of 5 November a fire destroyed the old Charles H Pugh site and stock, resulting in a complete closure and move to East Anglia as Atco Limited.

1984: Webb (mowers and cycles) was acquired by Atco.

1986: A second Royal warrant by HRH Prince of Wales was added to the portfolio.

1988: The entire Group was acquired by Blue Circle Industries and foundry divisions were sold off.

1991: All manufacturing operations were transferred to Stowmarket and the consolidated company was renamed Atco-Qualcast Limited.

1992: Successful management buy out heralded a new beginning.

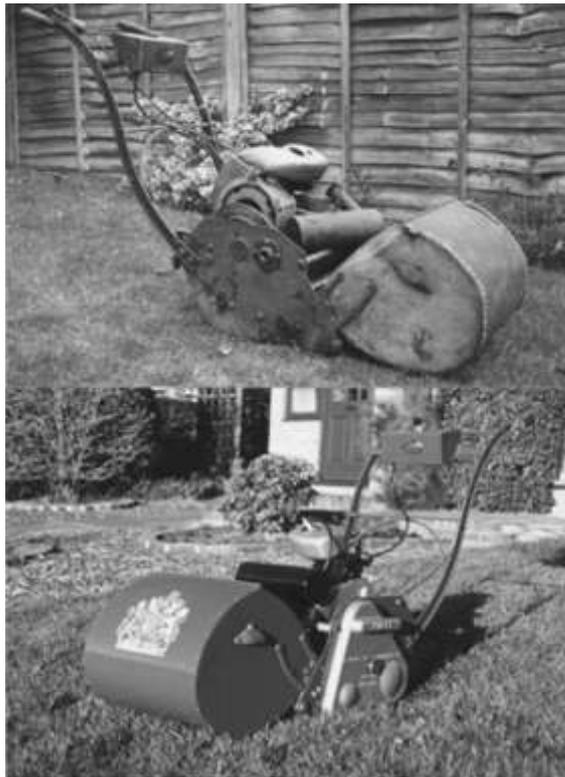
1995: The new company was acquired by Robert Bosch GmbH, a leading German engineering company. The Atco Royale rose appeared at the Chelsea Flower Show to celebrate 30 years of production.

1996: Atco celebrates its 75th anniversary and launched the QX, an innovative quick exchange cassette system.

Based on information supplied by Atco Qualcast Group Limited during the Club's visit to the company factory in Stowmarket.

CLUB LEAFLETS

All members should now have received their copies of the 1999 club information booklets. These booklets have been revised and updated this year thanks to the splendid efforts of: Tim Durant (Books & Articles), Andrew Grout (Services) and Alec Hillyar (Museums). We are aware of a few minor errors in some of the leaflets, especially the Directory of Members, and plan to issue corrections printed on the advertisement page normally inserted with each Grassbox. In that way, you can cut out the amendments and stick them into your directories to keep them up to date. If anyone has any corrections that they should like to be included, please send them to Keith at the usual address. Members who have received their subscription renewal reminders will have noticed that we have asked for some additional information on this year's forms. Our aim is to revise the format of the Membership Directory from next year so that it contains more relevant information about individuals and is easier to read.



Crawford Stirling has recently completed the restoration of a 1931 Ransomes motor mower, shown here in "before and after" settings.

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>

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