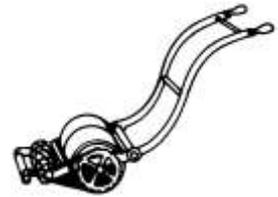


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 34

Autumn 2000

WHETHER IT IS NOBLER IN THE MIND

A perennial point of discussion at our events is whether all of the old mowers have been found, but equally interesting is whether or not a mower should be "restored".

There is no doubt that for many members of the Club, the dismantling, refurbishment and repainting of an old mower is a big part of the enjoyment they get from collecting.

I have always held the view that a mower in original condition should be kept as it is. Mowers not only look more authentic in some ways but there are other reasons why it is important to preserve original paintwork and transfers. Not least of these is that we and future generations may learn something important about the techniques and materials employed in the past to produce the items we revere. If we all routinely destroy the evidence there is an argument that we are damaging an important part of our industrial heritage.

Having said that, the decision to restore is a matter of personal choice and no one here is saying do one thing or the other.

Clearly there are occasions when a mower is so rusty or damaged that there is no option but to go for the full on restoration. Part of the role the Club can fulfil is to offer some support and advice to members when deciding the best approach.

Inside this edition I have included what I hope will be the first in an ongoing series of 'Handy Hints' to help with preservation and restoration. The aim of these brief items is to impart some of the tricks that members have learned over the years.

There is also the first part of a short series that follows the restoration of a 1920s motor mower. It is filled with interesting anecdotes and useful tips that many people will not only recognise from their projects, but perhaps more importantly will inspire or help them with their own machines.

Chances are that this will be the last Grassbox of the year, so I would like to take this early opportunity to thank everyone for their support this year and to wish you all a happy Christmas and successful New Year.

THE NEW PATENT
"CHAIN-TENNIS" LAWN MOWER.
The BEST and LATEST Chain Machine.
New and Simple Method of Adjusting the Chain and Front Roller.
BEST STEEL CHAIN RUNNING ON MACHINE-CUT WHEELS.

Fitted equal to a High-Grade Bicycle.

MADE IN ALL SIZES, FROM 8 to 36 inches.

CARRIAGE PAID. See Illustrated Lists.

Patentees and Sole Manufacturers—
FOLLOWS & BATE, LIMITED, GORTON, MANCHESTER.

Advertisement from "The Ironmonger", 29 March 1902.

RAISE YER GLASSES!

The Club has produced some souvenir pint glasses with a suitable inscription to commemorate our Tenth Anniversary. These have been given to attendees at our events during the year as a way of saying 'Thanks'. However, we still have a few left and these can be bought by anyone for just £2.00 (including post and packing) by writing to Keith at the usual address. Cheques payable to "The Old Lawnmower Club".



Another of Chris Thompson's postcards, showing a young boy with a Ransomes Lion in about 1910.

HO HO HO!

A vicar was making his rounds to his parishioners on a bicycle, when he came upon a little boy trying to sell an Atco Standard.

"How much for that wonderful mower?" asked the vicar.

"I'm just trying to make enough money to buy a bicycle," said the boy.

"Will you take my bike in trade for it?"

"It's a deal," said the boy.

The vicar took the mower and tried to crank it. He turned the handle a few times but with no response.

"I can't get the mower to start," he said.

"That's because you have to swear at it to get it started," said the boy.

"But I'm a minister and I can't swear. I don't know if I even remember how to swear."

"Just keep turning the handle. It'll soon come back!"



Roy Mitchell with his 1926 Dennis 30".

DIARY DATES

MKM 2001

Next year's Annual Rally and AGM will be held on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 May. Please make a note in your diaries now and let's make it a good one! Details of this and other events scheduled for 2001 in Grassbox 34.

Banbury Steam Rally, 24/25 June

This year's Banbury Rally featured a number of machines on display for the first time, the largest being Stan Hardwick's 36" Atco DeLuxe motor mower with a 500cc water cooled JAP engine dating from the 1930s. The paint must have been barely dry before Stan and Jonathan set out from Filey as they told everyone they were up half the night before putting the finishing touches to the machine.



As in recent years the display was in a large marquee although this year the weather was good enough to allow the space outside to be used properly by the motor mowers. One of the most interesting parts of the display was Tim Durant's selection of gardening tools. Complementary exhibits such as these really help put the mowers on display into a better gardening context. As always Robbie had put in a tremendous amount of work to co-ordinate the display and make sure everything ran smoothly over the weekend. Also in attendance were Keith Wootton, Barry Sowerby, Paul Channon, Richard Jones, Andrew Grout, Alec Hillyar and Dick Hardwick. Next year's event will be held on 23/24 June.

Malvern Autumn Show, 23/24 September

The event was well supported with some new names helping us reach a total of about 50 machines. Keith Wootton and Tim Durant brought a selection of early push mowers and Tim's pony boot display was much admired. Mike Tomkins brought his amazing collection of toy and model mowers and had over 100 tiny machines on display during the beautiful weather on Saturday, but a reduced number of more robust machines on the Sunday which was showery.

Paul Channon brought a fine selection of machines ranging from a Silens Messor to a big Lloyds and a British Flexa, while Jon Jackson travelled all the way from Lancashire to show his Atco Standard and a rare Presto motor mower which he could not resist starting on the Sunday! The Williams family put on an eye catching display with their original brightly coloured Rotoscythe and Shay rotary mowers and accessory cable-driven chainsaws and hedgetrimmers as well as a nicely restored 1935 Rotoscythe. Tony Hopwood had his trusty 1926 Dennis 30in workhorse and the 1925 Shingler alongside the latest Dennis 17in cassette (JP designed) mower to show 75 years of mowers from the Derby based mowing.

The beautiful weather on the Saturday evening tempted exhibitors to indulge in some cutting in front of the display area, with Tim Durant's mowers showing how well a properly set up early machine could cut. It's hoped that grass cutting will form a part of next year's display if we can get the space!

Despite the wet end to the show on Sunday evening, a good time was had by all. Tony Hopwood.

Keith adds: Pam Skingley and family attended the show with colleagues from the Vintage Garden and Horticultural Machinery Club. Among the mowers on display in their area were hand mowers and an unusual Rendle mower pusher.

SAW THEM AT SALTEX



Members of the club were out in force at this year's Saltex, the annual exhibition for the sports, amenities and landscaping professions organised by the Institute of Groundsmanship. Held at Windsor Racecourse in September, Saltex is the major exhibition for turf care equipment in the UK.

Andrew Hall & Michael Duck of the Hall & Duck Trust had been invited by the IoG to prepare a display of vintage mowers and chose a theme of "Gardening in 1900."

As with their previous visit to Saltex in 1998, Andrew and Michael were assisted by Andrew Grout. This year they were also joined by Jim and James Ricci, who were visiting from the USA to help.

Pride of place was taken by the recently restored 1902 Ransomes motor mower restored during the past year. This is believed to be the oldest motor mower in existence and was run for a short while each day. The other major attraction was a display of pony mowing with one of the Trust's Shanks pony mowers. Antony and Kim Parkes, friends of Andrew's, brought one of their prize-winning Welsh Cobs to Windsor and attracted a lot of attention with their demonstrations. Antony is one of HM The Queen's horsemen and the combination of a restored mower and immaculately turned out pony was great.



A number of club members visited the display during the three days of the exhibition. One of these was Andrew MacMorland, who had done some of the engineering repairs on the Ransomes motor mower.

The display also featured hand mowers, gardening tools and other items from around 1900. These included a selection of American mowers and a selection of line markers.

There was a great deal of interest in the display from visitors which helped to promote interest in vintage mower collecting and preservation.

On a separate stand, Tony Hopwood was helping Dennis promote their latest models by displaying his Shingler Dennis (as featured in a recent Grassbox) and talking to visitors.

WELL DONE CHARLIE

Charlie Jones attended the vintage rally at Little Green in Essex on 19/20 August with 16 hand mowers from his collection. Tony Houghton was also there with some of his Allen Scythes and Chris Thompson displayed some mowers. Charlie was awarded the "Best in Show Shield" for his display against stiff competition from a range of steam engines, vintage cars and motor cycles. It is good to see another lawn mower display receiving recognition from event organisers in this way. Well done Charlie!

RESTORING A RANSOMES

Crawford Stirling's latest restoration has some lessons for us all! In the first part of his new series, Crawford explains phase one of the project.

Roughly two months had passed since I completed a restoration on a rather fine old Bentall hand mill and I had nothing "in stock" that needed my attention except an old Atco. Last year had been a rather frenetic year for restorations and catching up on bits and pieces so I was in a position I rarely find myself in - nothing to do!



I had been contemplating something I could get my teeth into. Nothing turned up in Grassbox so I turned to another collector to see if he had anything. He had recently acquired a 1929 Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies motor mower that he was humming and hating about. It was a 20" Mark 4b, very original and just what the doctor ordered as far as I was concerned (see above).

A suitable figure was agreed on and I collected it a few days later in the back of my LWB Land Rover with about ½in either side to spare! I made space in my garage by moving my Farmall M to a local farm for the Summer and rearranging some stationary engines. I now had a good space in which to tear it apart!

I expect my method of restoration is very similar to most people. The first couple of evenings were spent studying it in detail and working out my plan of attack, pinpointing areas that I knew would be more testing than others. Having a rough idea of my method of approach, I got out my trusty camera and set about taking as many photos as possible to create a reference for reconstruction. I visited the local library but strangely enough was unable to locate the requisite Haynes manual!

Once satisfied that I had a good reference I set about the fun bit! First to be removed was the fuel tank and the relevant plumbing and stays, followed by the handles and cross members. This dramatically reduced the machine in size so I now had even more room to work in - fantastic! Next to come off was the cooling fan and housing. By now the mower had lost its shape and I was at the point of no return. At this stage I normally try to convince myself that a good pressure wash could suffice, after all, the original rusting paintwork and general grime has a certain patina about it. Knowing how much work lay ahead if I were to fulfil my original intentions gave fuel to the patina argument! However, succour for punishment that I am, I decided to press on!

On a lot of motor mowers of the pre-war period, the engine and drive train are suspended on two cross members intersected by differing length spacers (see opposite). These cause the most trouble as they do not necessarily go back in any logical position. Been there, even got the tee-shirt - many times! So I had taken great pains to get a couple of good photos prior to disassembly. Even so, paranoid as I am, when I did remove these cross members, I took great care to replace the spacers on the cross member bars in exactly the same positions. As each one came off when the bar slid through the side plates, I placed them on the workbench in order and slid them back on to the bar once it had been totally removed from the mower.

As I was nearly at the last, disaster struck and the whole drive train assembly slipped and delivered a hefty blow to my hand. This I could live with, but there was a metallic clunk and at least three spacers made their bid for freedom and ran off under my Bamford Mill. I am sure I heard them laughing loudly as they went! Mower: One, Crawford: Nil.

This well and truly mucked up my little plan so after grovelling about on the floor with severely grazed hand and rounding up the offenders I was forced into guess work as to which position they might go. No matter, with the engine and clutch removed I felt that I was perhaps winning the battle.

I was accumulating a fair pile of bits, not to say nuts, bolts and springs. Time for a tidy up, so I pinched a microwave dish from the kitchen under cover of darkness for the small pieces and carefully stacked the other components over the garage floor! I always seem to struggle a bit with the next part of dismantling, the splitting of the mower by removing the rear roller and cutting cylinder. I generally manage to get one side off alright, but am nearly always thwarted by the other. This one would be different though. I knew the other nuts and bolts had come off with minimum fuss, so with confidence I set about the task. Sure enough, the roller's nut on the left hand side required a gentle touch with the socket, the bearing on the cutting cylinder responded in largely the same considerate manner. The right hand bearing on the cutting cylinder (looking from the front) that allows the central shaft to pass right through to the drive sprocket gave no resistance whatsoever which only left the left hand rear roller. I placed the socket over the retaining nut and gave it a blasé tap with the palm of my hand to loosen the nut. Nothing. I gave it a slightly less blasé tap, still nothing. Never mind, nothing that a sharp tap with a hammer wouldn't solve. Nothing again. Oh well, a slightly more aggressive tap would get me out of trouble. This delivered I was no further forward. By now, I was beginning to feel once more on familiar territory and cursed myself for being as naïve to think that the mower would relinquish its final component. Undeterred, I administered more blows to the socket bar with increasing ferocity. All of a sudden I felt movement. Great I thought, I've got you, you bugger. Another knock with the hammer to finish off and I would be home in time for tea. Holding the bar steady I delivered the decisive blow. The socket ricocheted off taking my hand with it (same hand as before) and spread a good helping of skin over one of the protrusions on the side casting. I was greeted with a nicely burred nut. Mower: Two, Crawford: One.



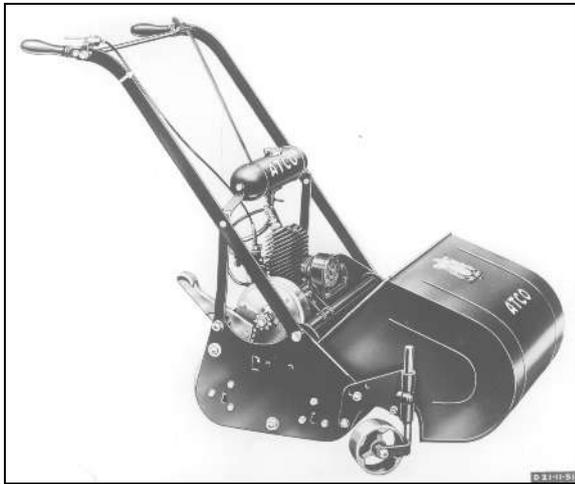
By now, I had missed tea anyway so I sat down and had a good head scratching session. Perhaps it was a left hand thread, I hadn't thought of that. With the speed of the rear roller, I doubted whether that would have been advantageous. Anyway, my socket would no longer fit so any further resistance on my part was useless. I left my workshop feeling frustrated and a little sore that evening and went to sleep on it.

Find out how Crawford solved his problem in the next edition!

ORDER EARLY FOR CHRISTMAS

If you are planning to order any of the Club's special items for Christmas (eg sweat shirts, polo shirts, badges, glasses etc) please allow us plenty of time to receive your order and send everything to you. Also, if we run out of any items it gives us time to reorder before it's too late.

A full list of items available is included on the Advertisement sheet sent out with this edition.



In the 1950s, Atco offered its motor mower with these unusual front wheels that were designed to cope with longer grass. Photo courtesy of Tony Edwards.

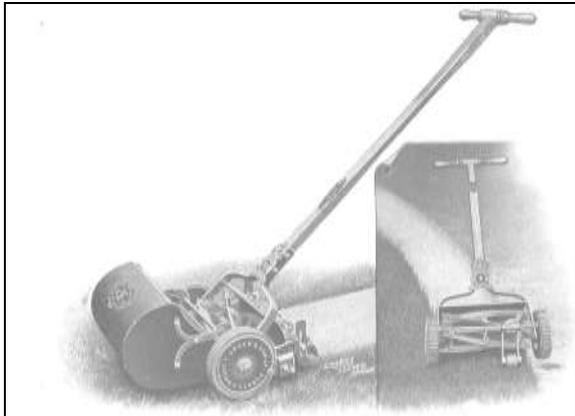
THE GRASS IS GREENER

We do not often have a chance to review a new book that is relevant to the Club but "The Grass Is Greener" by Tom Fort certainly fits the bill. Subtitled "Our Love Affair With The Lawn", the book traces the history of the lawn back to ancient times focusing on how it became a peculiarly English (possibly British) obsession. While covering many historical topics, the book is not at all dry or heavy. Tom Fort has clearly done his research, and the book is filled with many little anecdotes, unusual snippets and character sketches that really bring the subject to life.

The historical parts of the book are interspersed with the author's personal recollections of a large Dennis mower in the 1950s that demonstrate an affection not only with lawns and gardening but also the mower itself. There are lots of interesting illustrations and the overall design of the book is very reminiscent of the 1940s or 50s. There is also an interesting section on the development of the lawnmower that finally begins to give credit to Budding and Ferrabee that many in our Club feel is long overdue.

But perhaps the most interesting sections of the book are those that Tom Fort has based around the interviews he conducted with Club members and modern mower users. For readers who know some of these characters (I won't spoil the surprise by telling who they are in case you haven't read the book), Tom Fort has somehow managed to put on paper the mannerisms and ways with words that bring out their enthusiasm and dedication as collectors. This really is an excellent book that I can thoroughly recommend, and not just because it mentions me!

The Grass is Greener, Our Love Affair With The Lawn by Tom Fort. Harper Collins. ISBN 0-00-257064-5 RRP £12.99



Slatter's Patent Front Roller was advertised in Green's 1910 catalogue as an extra for "New Century". Priced 4s, the roller was designed to allow the mower to operate right up to the lawn edge. Has anyone ever seen one?

TIM'S TOP TIP!

People new to preservation and restoration often ask about how to clean oil and grease off their mowers. There are, as always, a number of options.

Steam or pressure cleaning can be effective for large parts such as the mower frame and the engine, although metal parts will need to be dried quickly afterwards to help prevent rust forming. If you do not have a pressure cleaner to hand, you could try taking the mower to your local garage forecourt as many now have them installed alongside the tyre pumps and vacuum cleaners.

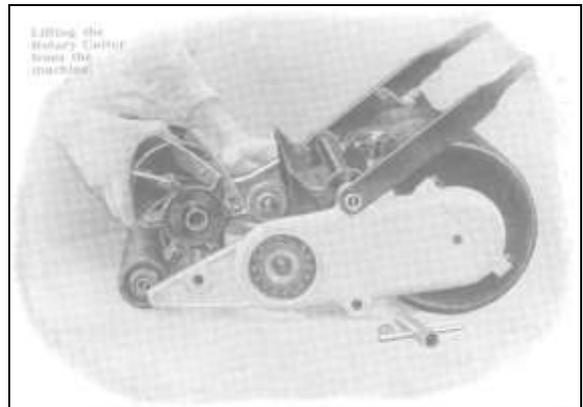
Many people swear by soaking parts in diesel or paraffin to free seized parts and remove the thickest deposits of crud. This has the advantage of being relatively inexpensive, which means you can submerge parts for a long period, and is reasonably effective. However, diesel can leave an oily film on the cleaned part which (while protecting bare metal from rust) will need to be removed if the part is to be painted.

A better option, especially for smaller and delicate parts, is to use one of the proprietary degreasers such as Gunk or Jizer. These are designed to penetrate the oil deposits and then be washed off with water.

Both are effective, although personally I find Jizer is easier to use and washes off more easily than Gunk (which has a tendency to cling to metal in my experience). They can give better results than diesel alone, although a combination of diesel to remove or loosen really heavy deposits followed by Jizer or Gunk to remove the diesel and residual deposits may be cost effective and sensible. Either way, you will need to make sure the part is dried quickly to prevent rusting.

In the old days, Gunk and Jizer were available in cans although in recent years they have also been available in aerosols. Although this is supposed to be more convenient, you get the best results when using the degreaser with a brush which can be used to work it into the deposits.

We'll be featuring more of "Tim's Top Tips" in future editions. If you have any ideas for inclusion, let us know.



Modern manufacturers like to think their idea of the removable cassette is new, but this shot from a JP brochure of the 1930s shows that the concept was around then too. The objective was to be able to replace the cylinder without removing the chains or bearings.

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