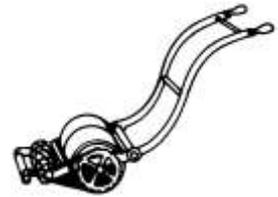


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 39

Winter 2002

NEW YEAR, OLD MOWER

Regular readers of this section (I know most of you skip straight to the adverts page) will be aware of my occasional diversions on the availability or not of old mowers. Some people think that most of the mowers worth collecting have already been found. So it is reassuring to report either side of Christmas I had conversations with Club members who have been lucky enough to find some really good machines at reasonable prices close to their homes.

No one seriously doubted there are still plenty of mowers to be found, and I guess more than a few readers are working on some gems as their Winter restoration projects.

One thing clear is that being a bit more creative with your searching and keeping your ears to the ground will often get results. Oh and by the way, reading the advertisement sheet with Grassbox helps too. There were some excellent mowers for sale in the last edition and I know that one or two of them were still unsold some time after the newsletter was sent out. The moral of the story? If in doubt it pays to call and ask for more details.



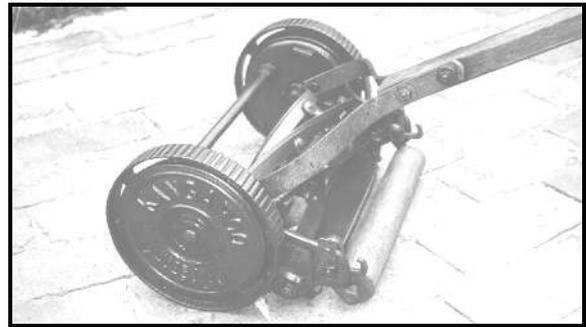
This appears to be a Greens horse mower in use at Rustington House near Littlehampton. As always with these old photographs it is very difficult to give a date but it looks like the early part of the 20th century.

GET THE AUCTION ACTION

For the past few years many members of the Club have attended the twice-yearly auctions held by Cheffins at Sutton in Cambridgeshire. There is usually a good selection of mowers on sale and the bidding for the more unusual models is often quite brisk although it is still possible to pick up larger motor mowers and "modern" machines for a few pounds. For example, Atco Standards normally only make £20 or so. Although the auction presents a good opportunity to add to your collection, most of us simply go to meet up with each other and see what is going on. The auction also includes stationary engines, tractors, steamers, implements and ephemera.

We have recently begun to extend the day by retiring after the auction to a local pub with good food at very reasonable prices. The next auction will be held on Saturday 27 April, starting around 9am, a bit early if you are travelling but worth the effort if it is within striking distance. If you do come along, make sure to say hello to the other Club members and ask for directions to the pub! Incidentally, the next edition of Grassbox will include a report of the Cheffins auction held last October.

MORE DOWN UNDER MOWERS



The "Kangaroo" sidewheel was probably made during the 1940s, according to owner Anthony Conroy whose collection was featured in the last edition of Grassbox. Anthony says the 14" mower was made in Australia to an American design and that it is very rare.

HEALTH & SAFETY - AN ILL WIND?

I have heard, writes Tony Hopwood, that some local HSE Hitlers are making local authority parks and works departments and private sports clubs get rid of their big old mowers because they do not meet current health and safety diktats. The problems they cite are lack of cutting cylinder brakes, emergency stops and inadequate guards around cooling fans on machines such as post-war Dennises. This presents an opportunity for OLC members to acquire well maintained old grass cutting machinery at disposal sales and by personal contacts. The most likely result is that lots of decent mowers will quietly go for scrap in part exchange to machinery dealers because the paperclip counters and county hall will reckon they are not worth selling separately. Be alert! Britain needs lerts!



Among the many different Ransomes mowers on show at the Club's event at the Museum of East Anglian Life last year was this Centenary from the 1930s. The mower was produced to celebrate the centenary of the lawn mower. It is a conventional roller mower and perhaps the most notable feature of the design is an unusual name badge that incorporates a couple of flags. Look out for a special report on the Stowmarket event and the museum's new Ransomes display in the next Grassbox.

DIARY DATES

MILESTONES MUSEUM

Each year some of the Club members try to organise a visit to a local museum as an excuse to meet up over the long Winter months. This year we have chosen the new Milestones Museum in Basingstoke on Sunday 3 March. We have heard many good reports about Milestones and I am sure that it will be an excellent day out. It's all very informal and everyone in the Club is welcome to come along, either on their own or with friends and family. We will be getting there from 11.30am but there is no official start time. Just come into the museum when you arrive rather than waiting in the car park for people who might already be inside! Details from Keith at the usual places (details P4).

Milton Keynes 2002: Saturday 18/Sunday 19 May 2002. Our Annual Rally will be held on the third full weekend in May. As always, the Annual General Meeting will be on the Sunday morning. Everyone is welcome. There is plenty of space to camp at the Museum but if you want more comfortable accommodation, please let Keith know well in advance so that he can suggest a suitable place to stay. Details from Keith at the usual places (details P4).

Banbury Rally 2002: Saturday 29/Sunday 30 June 2002. The event is back after last year's cancellation for "foot & mouth" and promises all of the usual fun. Details from Robbie (details P4).

RALLY REPORTS

Cutting The Grass, 15 Sep 2001

Dave Meredith reports that the event at Derby Industrial Museum included a good selection of mowers provided by Club members. Machines on display included examples from 1900 to the 1960s as well as Mike Tomkins' collection of toy and model mowers. A number of visitors had connections with the Qualcast factory, formerly in the town, and were happy to swap stories with the exhibitors. Dave says that the museum has recently revamped its mower display to include a number of photographs. He hopes to organise a similar event later this year and we will publish details in a future Grassbox.

Malvern Autumn Show, 29/30 Sep 2001

There was a strong OLC turnout for the Malvern Autumn Show with Keith Wootton, Andrew Grout, Alec Hillyar and Tim Durant making the trip from further afield. The oldest machine was brought by Andrew Grout who also put on a fine display of Victorian framed catalogues, photographs and mowers which set the scene for Keith, Alec and Tim's further varied selection of ornate Victorian cylinder machines plus later sidewheel mowers.

The Williams families brought their colourful array of Shays as well as a collection of vintage garden power tools. Paul Channon showed a wide spectrum of machines including the now rare Brott ride-on and a newly acquired unrestored 24in 1947 Dennis which ran well. Tony Hopwood added weight to the proceedings with four more Dennises ranging from the 1924 Bradbury engined model to a 36in 1947 mower with a trailer seat which he used to mow the plot at the beginning of the show, depositing a big heap of cuttings nearby.

This year the OLC display was next to the VHGM exhibit and with some exhibitors being members of both clubs a friendly exchange of ideas and contacts took place, invigorated by numerous cups of tea from Pam and Tony Skingley's motor home. The Three Counties Agricultural Society has already confirmed an invitation to next year's Autumn Show so make a date for the end of September in your diaries.

Are you organising an event this year? Let Keith know and we will include the details in a future edition of Grassbox. Don't forget that you can also borrow one of the Club's special banners by prior arrangement.

HIS FINEST HOUR!

By Tony Hopwood

They are making a film of Churchill's life in the political wilderness before WW2, and wanted a working vintage ride-on mower for the Chartwell outdoor scenes. I sent the company photos of several machines and they booked my 30in Dennis FEA (1925) with the Dennis trailing seat. This meant travelling to Kent to be dressed up as a scruffy early 1930s gardener. The machines was scheduled for two scenes, so they used me as a gardener extra for other scenes as well.



The first scene was on a sloping meadow below the house which now belongs to the National Trust, so I was ordered not to run the blades. Actually the meadow was too long to cut with Dennis and the slope was too steep and wet for the machine to climb, so it was downhill across the slope or nothing.

They made a big fuss about making me up with dirty face and hands and taking my watch off even though I was wearing an old tweed jacket. It did seem a bit pointless because the camera was 200yds away on the other side of the lake. Getting the machine to the start point was quite exciting as I had to travel down a long wet tarmac slope where I discovered what every steam roller driver knows - that smooth steel rollers don't grip wet tarmac very well. I got safely on to the grass and after a lot of hanging about, set off on the first take. Halfway across there was a mighty splutter and the engine stopped. A screw plug on the top of the cylinder had blown out (never happened to me before). Very fortunately it landed in the grass box, so with a small adjustable spanner from my pocket, it took minutes to get the show back on the road. I then had to get help to push the machine back to the start point as there wasn't enough grip on the wet grass. There were three more runs before the scene was in the can. I saw the video rushes of the mower scene. In the foreground you can see the Churchills talking by the lake, and a blob crawling across the grass below the house in the distance. Let's hope the shot escapes the cutting room floor and gets into the film.

My time as an extra was enlivened by Ronnie Barker, playing the butler who kept everyone amused during the endless retakes. The film has a strong cast with Albert Finney playing Winston and Vanessa Redgrave as his wife. As well as Ronnie Barker, the only other notable was Celia Imrie who played WSC's secretary. The film is called "A Lonely War" and should be out in 2002. They never got round to the second Dennis scene because it rained...



Taken from the 1897 Samuelson of Banbury catalogue.

THE HALL & DUCK OPEN DAY

It is not every day that there is an opportunity to see the world's largest lawn mower collection so it was with great excitement that around twenty club members travelled to Somerset last July to visit the Hall & Duck Trust.



The last time Mike and Andy had held an open day was back in 1992 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the collection. Since then the Somerset section has grown quite a bit and been relocated to a bigger storage building in Mike's home village.

Andy and Mike naturally wanted to put on a good show and planning for the open day started the year before. They decided to make it "invitation only" although in reality this meant that virtually everyone they met in the preceding 12 months had been asked along. Despite this planning there had been some concern about the event. The storage building is on a local farm and there was a slight possibility of cancelling due to nearby foot and mouth restrictions. But in the end this was not a problem.

It was no surprise that so many people made the trip. A number of people travelled down to Somerset on the Friday while others preferred to get up early on the Saturday and travel in the early morning sun.

Those of us who had arrived on the Friday spent the early part of Saturday helping Andy and Mike to move as many mowers as possible out of the shed onto the surrounding grass. We managed to move well over 100 machines in about an hour. Most of these were hand and small motor mowers but Andy and Mike were keen to exhibit some of their larger machines as well (below). It is hard to appreciate how heavy these are until you try to move them but a gang of four or five people seemed to be enough to shift even the most obstinate of machines (above).



The mowers were set out by manufacturer and with so many different models and variants from companies such as Ransomes, Shanks and Greens it was a highly impressive display. There were also special sections on overseas mowers and oddities such as lawn edgers, turf spikers and lawn sprinklers. Even with so many mowers moved outside there was still plenty to see inside the shed. People started to arrive at about 10am. Prize for the longest journey would have to be shared between John Dyer and John Everitt from Norfolk who travelled together and Steve Smith from Manchester. Both journeys involved round trips of over 400 miles.



The day was spent milling around the mowers and taking the opportunity to pore over some extremely rare machines at close hand (including the Wimbleton mower above and the early Shanks Caledonia below).

A few visitors made detailed notes to help with their own restoration projects while others were content to simply admire the collection and chat in the sun.

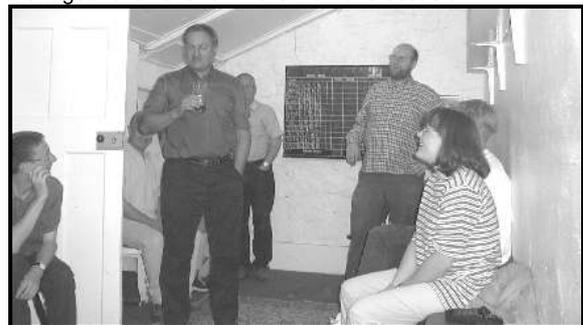
This turned out to be just about the hottest weekend of the year but luckily Andy and Mike had arranged a good selection of cool beers and other refreshments.

As is all too often with these sorts of event it was all over far too soon. By early evening we were putting the mowers back in the shed. We did such a good job in packing the mowers in that at one point it looked like a few had gone AWOL because there a bit of a gap on the shelving. But at least this meant there would be more room for new mowers when they are acquired by Andy and Mike.



The day was rounded off by a visit to the local pub where Andy and Mike had arranged for a buffet supper. They had also arranged for a short firework display at the end of the evening to entertain not only us lawn mower enthusiasts but most of the locals - whether in the pub or not!

A number of us retired to the pub's bowling alley for a bit of friendly "round robin" rivalry. I cannot remember who won, although I know I was last and Richard Jones managed to fall over on more than one occasion!



Anyone who missed the event may have to wait some time for Mike and Andy (above, standing) to hold another one in Somerset. But who knows, if enough people ask they may be encouraged to do something soon!

