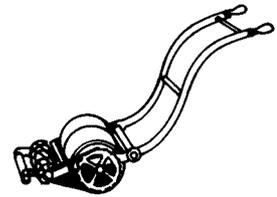


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 41

Summer 2002

BIGGER AND BETTER?

These Grassboxes come round pretty quickly don't they? It only seems a few days since I was getting the last one ready to send out well before the Club's Annual Rally. Well, that has been and gone, and there is plenty of information about what happened inside and on the separate sheet. We have also held some of our other regular events but there are still plenty of opportunities to join in with at least one event this year. So do take advantage of the hard work that goes into organising them and come along to see what all the fuss is about. Even better, as I always say, bring a couple of mowers to show as well.

As you will see from this edition there has been lots going on in the Club, not just at the Annual Rally and AGM. Yet again the advertisement sheet contains loads of mowers for sale and free to good homes. Do let me know if you pick something up as a result because it is always good to know that these mowers are being saved from the scrap heap and finding good homes. It would be good to feature a few of these stories in future editions as well.

One of the ideas that I am trying to get my head round at the moment is whether it is feasible to enlarge the newsletter in some way, either with more pages each edition or more issues each year. Either way will require a lot more written input from within the Club but I am sure there are plenty of you out there who could lend a hand once in a while to come up with some photographs and ideas for articles.



This young boy looks like he is having a jolly old time but does not look too pleased at having to pose for the camera.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Robbie has recently sent out all membership renewals. Remember that if you joined for the first time after December 2001 you won't need to rejoin again until this time next year, so don't worry if you haven't received a reminder. For those that have received renewal notices, don't forget that the information you supply when you return the form to Robbie will be used to compile the forthcoming Annual Directory of Members. We will produce this during August and will use the information that we have at the time, so if you want to amend your entry for this year make sure to get your renewal back in good time.



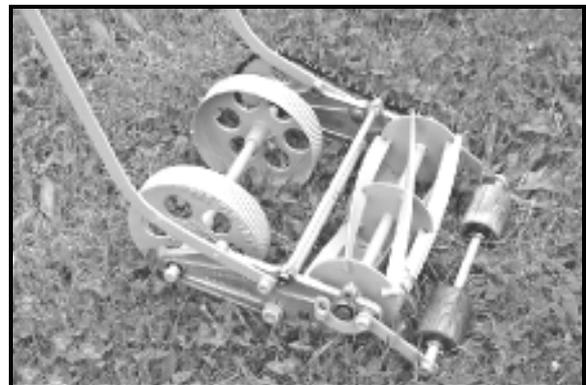
There seem to be more borders than lawn in this garden. It's not easy to identify the mower but it looks like a Ransomes Automaton of some kind.

YOUR "NEW" COMMITTEE

One of the regular parts of the AGM is to elect a committee to run the club. This year the AGM in its wisdom decided that the same people as last year should fulfil this important role for another 12 months. Chair: Keith Wootton; Secretary: Bernard Robinson ("Robbie"); Treasurer: Martin Stephenson; Committee: Andrew Grout, Tim Durant, Alec Hillyar, John Barnard. Details of how to contact them can be found in the Membership Directory. Please, please bear in mind that everyone is working for the club voluntarily in their own time. This may mean from time to time it can take a few days to return phone calls or reply to queries.

FOBBED OFF BY THE KEY RINGS?

Earlier this year the committee decided to invest in a special souvenir item that we could send to all members. After some careful thought, basically on what we could afford and what would fit in an ordinary envelope without adding to the postage costs, we decided on a leather key fob. These have now been sent out to all members up to the middle of June. Additional key fobs can be bought for £1 each. Details on the separate advertisement sheet.



Among the more unusual mowers on display at Milton Keynes this year was this Vantage from Stan Hardwick's collection. The mower is pale blue. More about the Annual Rally inside (Photo: Peter Blackmore).

DIARY DATES

Ransomes Weekend, Stowmarket

The Museum of East Anglian Life is holding a Ransomes weekend on Sat 18/Sun 19 August and has invited lawn mower collectors to attend on either or both days. The Club held attended an event there last year and it really is a great venue with lots to see. Further details can be obtained direct from Lisa Harris at the Museum on 01449 612229. Overnight camping by prior arrangement.

Bedfordshire Steam Rally: Saturday 14/Sunday 15 September. Our popular and regular event at Shuttleworth Park. Further details from Dick Hardwick on 01462 816018.

Malvern Autumn Show: Saturday 28/Sunday 29 September. A return visit to this excellent gardening event. Further details from Tony Hopwood on 01684 592134.

WEST DEAN REPORT



Seven members of the club attended the Garden Show at West Dean College in West Sussex on 22/23 June. The College has extensive grounds and maintains its formal and vegetable gardens in extremely high order. This provided an excellent setting for the event and the lawns were ideal for demonstrating some of the mowers in action. Visitors were extremely interested in the display.

The event was organised by Richard Jones who brought along some of his collection including a nice example of a Pennsylvania with grass box. Richard has helped West Dean by restoring a number of mowers now on permanent display, including an Atco Standard, and is currently working on a large Greens pony mower.

"Dusty" Miller (above) brought along some excellent examples of motor mowers, including a large 1920s Shanks, Atco "Oval Frame" Standard and early Dennis. David Lumsden (below) was showing some nice examples of small Ransomes and Greens hand mowers. Geoff Christopher brought along a nice selection of Autmowers and his Keynsham. Tim Durant gave a first airing to a newly restored Ransomes Anglo Paris which incorporated a new name plate. We will be telling more about how Tim produced this in a future edition of Grassbox. Alec Hillyar and I both took a selection of hand mowers that added to the display. Richard plans to continue organising the Club's participation at West Dean in future years. I can thoroughly recommend it to members in the area.



INSURANCE INFORMATION

By now every member up to number 576 should have received confirmation of the new third party public liability insurance. Anyone who has not received this can obtain an additional copy of the certificate by writing to Keith at the normal address (see page 4).

As members will recall from the previous edition of Grassbox we decided to introduce this new service because a number of people had encountered problems in obtaining cost effective cover through their existing broker or agent earlier this year. We also hope that by including the insurance with the annual membership this will help to encourage more members to participate in our events by removing the need to arrange their own.

Inevitably with a new scheme such as this a few members have raised queries about how the insurance operates, in particular what safeguards they should put in place when exhibiting mowers. In general, all exhibitors should adhere to the guidelines we sent out with the certificates. Motor mowers should always be roped off, whether running or not, and so should hand mowers. This is because the insurance provides cover against claims by third parties (ie other people) for injury and damage caused by exhibits at events. This might mean, for example, that someone tripping over a stationary sidewheel mower might have grounds to claim if they hurt themselves.

We all know that nothing is ever certain when it comes to insurance but the moral of the story must surely be, if in doubt err on the side of caution and good sense.

As mentioned above, the guidelines sent with the insurance certificates outline the main regulations for exhibitors. The NVTEC (through whom the insurance is arranged) has produced a more detailed set of guidelines in case anyone requires additional information. Copies of these can be obtained from Keith at the usual address.



Richard Dent gets mowing with his Atco Standard at Milton Keynes. Richard finished off his restoration using the Club transfers (Photo: Brian Yetts).

MEMBERSHIP CHARGE

The AGM at Milton Keynes Museum decided to raise the annual subscription from £7.50 to £10.

In my report to the meeting I had suggested that the time would soon come, if not this year then next, when we would need to look at the annual membership fee. Although the club's committee did not make a recommendation to the meeting a proposal was made from the floor to raise the subscription. This led to much discussion and opinions were divided. Many of those that supported the move spoke of the need to maintain a healthy income for the club so that it could continue with its current activities and have funds available to broaden these, for example by producing additional or bigger editions of the newsletter, and so on. Although fewer in number, speakers against the proposal felt that the fee was still about right and that it was not necessary to raise it this year. A vote of the 60+ members at the meeting resulted in a large majority in favour of the increase. This is the first time that we have raised the subscription since it was introduced in 1994 and I hope that the modest increase will not deter members from renewing again this year.

“BEST EVER” ANNUAL RALLY

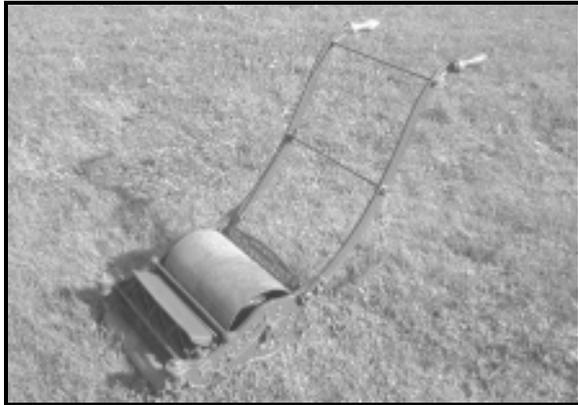
More than 70 members descended on Milton Keynes Museum over the weekend of May 18/19 for our Annual Rally. A number were making the trip for the first time and some had come quite a way. The prize for the longest journey must go to Jim Ricci from the US who was able to time a holiday to coincide with the event. Jim was not the only member from overseas as Al Petit from Belgium was able to join us for the third year. Although he lives overseas it is quite strange to think that Al is probably closer to Milton Keynes than our members in Scotland!



(Pennsylvania, complete with grass box).

As always the number and variety of mowers on show was impressive. We counted almost 250 machines on display at some time or other over the weekend. These ranged in age from the Museum's own "Budding" style mower which probably dates from before the 1850s right through to some examples of 1970s rotary mowers. Quite an impressive spread that illustrates the diversity of interest among our membership. It is good to see more people showing an interest in these recent machines that will gradually become the ancient examples for future generations to appreciate.

Of course older does not always mean rarer or more interesting. Although many of the mowers on display have been restored to original condition by their owners there was still plenty of room for those in original condition. Some collectors prefer to leave machines in the "as found" state and there is much to be said for this.



(Ransomes Bowling Green Mower).

The two days of the event each seem to have different atmospheres. Saturday is a bit more relaxed and this is when much of the wheeling and dealing goes on. Some people can only come on the first day so it is always a bit different. The Sunday is a lot busier, not only because more people come but also because the AGM takes places in the morning. This breaks the day up for those of organising things behind the scenes and it leaves less time to catch up with all the visitors.

The lawn mower cognoscenti present tend to gravitate towards the mowers they covet the most. This year loyalties seem to have divided between some of the more obscure hand mowers from manufacturers such as Vantage, Edgbaston and Barford & Perkins and the array of motor mowers from familiar and not so familiar names such as JP, Keynsham, Automower and Atco.

As regular Annual Ralliers know we have for some years produced a souvenir for members who attend the event. This year we came up with a specially printed half pint tankard which was popular with everyone. I am sure that a number of people who were at the event left without theirs, either because I forgot to give them one (on the Saturday especially) or for some other reason. If they contact me I will be sure to send them one.

The Annual Rally presents an ideal opportunity to meet up with old friends, reveal new acquisitions and restoration projects and engage in a bit of trading. The wheeling and dealing side of things has grown in popularity in recent years as more people bring something to swap or sell. Items changing hands included complete hand and motor mowers, engines, grass boxes and any number of bits and bobs. Robbie was lucky to spot a Slatter's sidewheel front runner (see previous Grassboxes) for sale and quickly bought it.



(Alec Hillyar, Tim Durant and William Proudfoot inspect a Shanks Caledonia).

We held what has fast become our regular Saturday evening party in the Museum's tea room and this was a lot of fun. It is amazing what people will talk about after a long day in the field!

The Annual General Meeting was held on the Sunday morning and was, like the overall event, the best attended ever. A brief version of my report to the meeting is included on the separate advertisement sheet and a couple of other items are mentioned elsewhere in this Grassbox.

A highlight of the weekend is the awarding of the Andrew Grout Plate, a special prize given by one of the Club's founding members. Members at the Rally select the mower they would most like to take home and the owner receives the plate for a year and an engraved tankard to keep. This year the popular winner was Tim Durant for his very early Follows & Bate Climax, an unusual example of the world's first sidewheel mower. As far as I can remember this is the first time that a hand mower has won the prize.



(Robbie, Tim, Andy and Keith with the winning mower).

As is the way with these events, the weekend went too quickly and it was soon time to pack up and go home. But don't despair, there are plenty of other events coming up this year and we already have the dates for 2003. The event will be on 17/18 May, subject to final confirmation but unlikely to change.

WORMS - A CAST OF THOUSANDS

Ivan Harrison should be pleased his lawn has lots of worms, writes Tony Hopwood. Worm casts are a sign of a healthy lawn. Each cast is a drainage hole letting air and water get down to the roots of the grass. The alternative is a tedious plod over the lawn with a fork making holes to fill with sharp sand as advocated by the media garden experts who probably have it all done for them!

Of course if you have heavy clay soil drainage can be a problem and aeration may be necessary. Moles are also a source of soil on the grass (you don't need to tell me, Ed). My garden has pasture on both sides so moles often come into the garden but thanks to my secret weapon they do not trespass under the grass but mine the flower beds and also the hedges and other rotary mower bits. The secret weapon is a heavy Dennis cylinder mowers which probably give the moles a headache but do not deter the worms, so compaction and water logging is not a problem with Severn Vale alluvial soil. Badgers also attack my lawn. They dig for worms and grubs and leave holes in favoured spots. Howe they decide where to dig is a mystery to me. Although they make a mess, the holes disappear over the summer without any further action other than regular cylinder mowing. Another good reason for using big vintage mowers!



This advert from 1930 shows an Atco Standard outside Hawarden Castle, Flint. The lowest price model was 21 guineas, well below the 75 guineas in 1921 for the 22".

CAPTION CONTEST

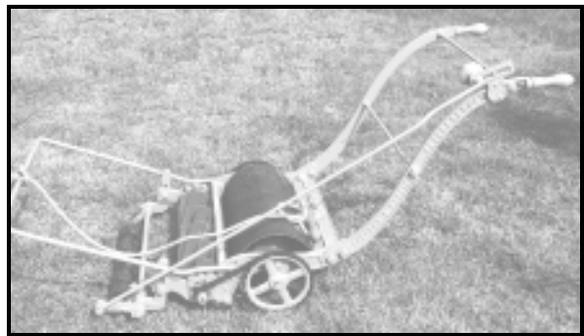
Many thanks for all the suggested captions for the picture in the last Grassbox. The best of the entries were: "Oh no Mr Grout, not another Ransomes Automaton," and "That's what you get for bidding off the Internet," both from Mike Duck. "Are you sure that's the bean slicer I ordered off the Web," from Tony Hopwood. "I'm not sure it will neuter your cat, Madam , but it sure as hell will take his fur off," from Henry Papworth. I will be presenting small prizes to each winning entrant in the near future.

NEW MUSEUM ADDRESS

Please note if you write to the Club at Milton Keynes Museum that the details have changed slightly to reflect the new official postal address. The Museum is in the same place but the post people now use a different entrance! The new address can be found at the bottom of page four.

Tim's Top Tips takes a short break this time but will return soon!

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 07778 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@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk or the web at: <http://www.oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk>

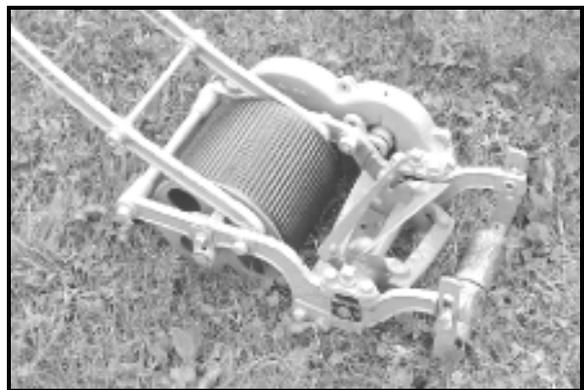


Christopher Proudfoot's Barford & Perkins Godiva, as seen at Milton Keynes Museum this year (Photo: Brian Yetts).

ODE FROM AN OLD MOWER

By Roy Mitchell

I am an old grass cutter
And with many a cough and splutter
I cut the lawns and trim the clods
And scalp the upstart grassy sods.
For he who walks behind me,
I blow smoke up in his face.
He gives a gasp or horse like rasp
And doubles up the pace.
With pansy's, flox or columbine
And if I gets it in my mind
He dare not near the flowering beds
'Cos I'll chop off their blooming heads.
(High speed dead heading it's called.)
When all is finished, done and said
I'm put away inside my shed.
A drop of fuel, a squish of oil
Is all I'm asking for my toil.
I've done my job for many years
I haven't caused too many tears.
An oily rag, a spanner too,
Have kept me running sweet and true.
But smart new fly boys crowd the scene
And I'm a creaky old has been.
So now that times are getting hard
I s'pose I'll see the knackers yard.



Close up view of a Shanks, as spotted at Milton Keynes, but is it a "small" or is it just small? The article in the last Grassbox suggested that, for a while, small versions of the Caledonia were known as "Small"(Photo: Peter Blackmore).

Next Edition: September 2002
Edition 41 - Jul 2002
Edited and written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton