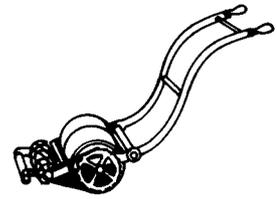


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 44

Spring 2003

NOT THAT TIME AGAIN?

This is the time of year when attention at "Club Central" turns to the Annual Rally and AGM at Milton Keynes in May. We held the first rally at the Museum in 1989 so this will be our 15th event and some of our die hard members have been to every single one! It is also the tenth anniversary of the first AGM but not the formation of the club which was a few years before that!

This year's rally promises to be as good as ever. There will be all the usual stuff of course but we are planning one or two extras to add to the fun and there are lots of new things to see at the Museum as always.

So do come along and see what all the fuss is about. There will be plenty of people to meet, most of them quite friendly I believe, and loads of mowers. As always there will be a chance to wheel and deal to add to (or perhaps reduce) your collection. But don't forget to bring some mowers to display as well. A few people commented last year that the dealing side was growing at the expense of the displays. I am sure there is a happy balance somewhere.

As in previous years you can read more about the event in the separate advertisement sheet.

A big thanks to everyone who took the trouble to write in or call with ideas on how we might improve the club. These suggestions were very welcome and we will do our best to carry out the many useful ideas.

A theme I have touched on in the past was mentioned by some correspondents. As time goes by, mowers that were only a few years ago barely considered "old" are now becoming interesting to more collectors. Younger members probably already feel that 1960s, 70s and even 80s machines are just as prehistoric as the Victorian hand mowers and worth collecting. Who are we to disagree? I will certainly try to include more information on mowers from this period in future editions although it may take a while to build up a collection of suitable images. Perhaps you have something you can send or email? Let me know.



Rotary mowers are not often featured in Grassbox but they are well worth a look. These Rotoscythes were displayed at the Malvern Autumn Flower Show last September by the Williams family. The Rotoscythe was introduced by Power Specialities of Maidenhead in 1933. At least six different models were available during this period. They all featured small, lightweight motors and used "modern" materials such as aluminium for many of the castings. The company relocated to Slough in the mid 1940s and was taken over by Shay of Basingstoke a few years later. The Rotoscythe models were amalgamated with the Shay range and the name had all but disappeared by the end of the 1950s.



David Lumsden found this photograph of what appears to be a 12" Silens Messor (it has the draw bar at the front which was common on the 12" and above). The straight handles suggest late 1890s or later. The box, which has the usual dent, is a bit different because it made from smooth metal rather than the more common corrugated sheet. The photograph comes from a book called "West Sussex, A Century Of Photographs" written by the Sussex Federation of Women's Institutes and published by Countryside Books. Incidentally, we have recently posted a new page on the club's website that contains information about a number of lawn and mower-related books that can be purchased online through Amazon. Visit the site to find out more and let the club know if you have any suggestions for additional books to list.



This bloke looks a bit stern. Perhaps he is worried he'll run over the electric cable and have to push the mower back to the shed! This is one of the first Ransomes Electra mowers, first made in 1926.

DIARY DATES

Milton Keynes Museum: Saturday 17/Sunday 18 May. Our Annual Rally and the biggest event of the year. As always the Annual General Meeting will be on the Sunday morning, but **this year it will be 11.30am**. Everyone is welcome. For additional information, please see the special article on the advertisement sheet enclosed with this issue. If you have any queries, please contact Keith at the usual places (see p4).

Talylyn Railway Vintage Rally: Sun 25 and Mon 26 May. Details from Anthony Coulls. Tel: 0161 606 0116 (daytime). E: a.coulls@msim.org.uk (Manchester)

Chignall Village Hall Vintage Rally: Saturday 7 June. This event takes place near Chelmsford in Essex and is popular with our many members in the area. Horticultural exhibits, including mowers, and related items such as literature and hand tools wanted for this rural one day event. Details from Norman Wastenev on 01245 440947 (Essex).

Banbury Steam Rally: Saturday 28/Sunday 29 June. Club members have been exhibiting at this show for many years and it's always popular. This year the theme is "overseas mowers" but all old mowers are welcome. Details from Robbie (see P4).

West Dean: Saturday 28/Sunday 29 June. This event is now a regular for many club members in the south of England. It is part of a large garden show held in the grounds of West Dean College, a great setting with lots to see. Details from Richard Jones on 023 925 98601 or 07759 785869 (Portsmouth) or Jim Buckland on 01243 818209 (West Dean).

Farm Machinery Preservation Society Annual Rally: Saturday 5/Sunday 6 July. The event is held at Gosfield, near Braintree, Essex. Exhibits to include mowers and horticultural machinery as well as all the usual stuff. Closing date for inclusion in programme, 20 May. Details from W Preston on 01245 420168.

Welland Steam Rally: Friday 25 - Sunday 27 July. For the first time this year there is a special section for mowers and horticulturals. A big turn out would help get things off to a really good start. Details from Tony Hopwood on 01684 592134 (Upton on Severn).

Bedfordshire Steam Fayre: Saturday 13/Sunday 14 September. Details from Dick Hardwick. Tel: 01462 816018 (Shefford)

DAY OUT IN DERBY

John Roberts

Saturday 21 September was a fine day in Derby and ideal for a quickly arranged display of lawn mowers on the green in front of Derby Industrial Museum. There was a total of 25 machines from the 1930s to 1960s displayed by four club members and two non-members.

Arthur Booth and Robert Hanson from Nottingham brought a very large trailer with 10 machines. These included Arthur's 20" JP Mark IV and a 1960s Ransomes Marquis. Robert had a Greens Silens Messor in "just found" condition and a variety of Ransomes with Sturmev Archer and Blackburn engines. Daryl Snow brought his just-completed 24" Ransomes Mk8 with Sturmev Archer engine which after a few adjustments worked well. He later lent me his trailer seat so that I could experience my brother Edwin's 24" Dennis. There is now a mysterious closely cut oval in the middle of the green! Edwin's other machines included Pennsylvania and Qualcast sidewheels, Drummond Willing Worker in original condition which cuts a treat and a 1922 12" JP.

We are hoping to be invited back again in 2003, possibly in May and September as in previous years. If any other members would like to be involved they are welcome to contact me using the details in the club directory.

INSURANCE CERTIFICATES

Members in the UK with numbers up to 632 should by now have received their 2003 public liability certificates. If you have not received yours, please contact Keith at the usual address and we will sort it out as soon as possible. Members numbered over 632 will receive their certificates in the next few weeks.

MALVERN AUTUMN GARDEN SHOW

Tony Hopwood

The fine weather held for the Malvern Autumn Show with two dry warm days at the end of September. As in previous years we were on grass by the Harvest Tent with its yard long carrots, football onions and wheel barrow pumpkins. We had over 70 machines on display.



This year we had a tent, where early and tender items and ephemera were set out. We were joined by Pam and Tony Skingley who brought a wide range of mowers and horticultural machines and provided hot drinks from their camper van as well as linking with the VHMGC display next door.

Andrew Grout brought a selection of tasty early Ransomes mowers and ephemera and Keith Wootton as many early machines as would fit in his sports car. The Williams family brightened things up with their Shays, accessories and working Tilley lamps. Paul Channon brought a rusty but running 30 inch Dennis which Tony Hopwood took home at the end of the show. John Jackson brought a Presto from his home town of Preston and a rare and complete 1920s Greens motor mower. Andrew Hall and Mike Duck added weight to the proceedings with two large Ransomes machines, a 1905 motor mower in working order and a 1909 pony mower.



Tony Hopwood showed his 1925 "film star" Dennis and possible the oldest genuinely working mower in the land, a 1924 Dennis FE which cuts an acre a week in the season. Also on display were his Excelsior, Emery Clipper, Ransomes Antelope and potentially lethal Lawnrider. Tony Edwards brought a fine selection of Atcos and was much in demand from visitors with his service sheets. Numerous leads were obtained from visitors and a case of beer kindly provided by Andrew Hall lubricated lively discussions about next year's show with a hope that we would use some of the spare space close by for vintage mowing demonstrations, including a pony mower as the showground is ideal. It is hoped that the tent and more space will be forthcoming in 2003 so we can get over 100 machines on display.

JP SERIAL NUMBERS

By Henry Ellis

JP serial numbers covered all models with the one numbering system and used a code letter or letters to indicate the particular model and size (see listing below). There is no way of determining the date of manufacture from this numbering system. The information on the coding letters is taken from original JP documentation but the serial number system as set out below, is based on my observations and is therefore, to some extent, speculative. If any member has looked into this subject (or thinks I am off the rails), please get in contact. With one exception serial numbers contain two elements: one element is the actual serial number (letters and numbers) and the second element a code letter or letters to indicate the model and size. (These code letter(s) also prefix the part numbers in the parts list of particular models.) Early machines have the code letter at the beginning of the serial number, later machines have it at the end of the letter sequence and before the number.

There seem to be four consecutive numbering sequences that I've identified (there may be earlier ones):

1. code letter followed by the number
2. code letter(s) followed by a letter followed by the number
3. code letter(s) followed by two letters followed by the number
4. '2' followed by two letters followed by the code letter(s) followed by the number

Sequence 1: This covers the era of the Supers. 12" models do not have a code letter; 14" models are coded F and 16" models are coded X. The earliest number I have recorded is 203 and the latest is 9139 (both 12" models); it is not clear if the numbers went beyond 10,000 - can anyone help? Dates are probably 1920s.

Sequence 2: Covering the Supers, the 12" Major coded JR and the Minors, coded M for the 9" model and XM for the 11" model. The letter after the code letter(s) started at A and went through to Z followed by a number which started at 1 and went to 999? So we have A1 to A 999 ending with Z 1 to Z 999. Dates are probably 1920s-1930s.

Sequence 3: Together with the Supers and Minors, production now included the Monarch (coded H for 12") and the Maxees (coded G for 12"). There was also the sidewheel model, the Matchless, which came in two sizes, 10" (code W) and 12" (code XW). The code letter still came first but is now followed by AA 1 to 999?, then AB 1 to 999, through to ZZ 1 to 999. Probable dates are 1930s to early 1950s.

Sequence 4: The Majors and Matchless were no longer produced but the Supers, now only in 12" and 16" size, continued and also the Minor in Mark 2 form (11" only) keeping the same code letters; the Maxees 12" continued in various forms all coded G, and the 14" model coded FG. The Monarch also came as a 14" model coded FH. When Minor production finished the new small mower was the Minimower (built with a lot of Maxees parts) in 10" size coded TH and in 12" size coded H (the same as the 12" Monarch which by then had ceased production). This last sequence started with a '2' followed by two letters, starting with AA, then the code letter(s), then the number, again 1 to 999? (2I and 2O should not be read as 21 and 20.) The latest number I have recorded is 2T A G 175 (Maxees 12" Mk3). Dates are early 1950s to the early 1970s when JP went out of business.

Apart from the first sequence I have not recorded any serial numbers for the push mowers above 999 (highest 612).

Location of serial numbers

(Left and right is as the machine is pushed)

Supers: Stamped on the top of the left hand side casting at the front.

1930s Minors: (early models) Stamped on the flat aluminium casting on the right-hand side; (later models and the Major) stamped on the transmission cover on the left-hand side.



Maxees: First model, with the centre worm drive adjuster - stamped near the top of the right hand side frame and on the top cross bar of the cutter unit between the adjuster and the chain cover. Second model, usually with aluminium rear rollers and back plate - stamped near the top of the right hand side frame and towards the back edge of the right hand side frame of the cutter unit.

Maxees Mark 2, Maxees 12 and 14 and Mark 3: Stamped on the left hand side frame near the front rollers handwheel and repeated on the left hand side frame of the cutter unit.

Maxees, later Mark 3s (from approx serial 2P onwards): had the number on an aluminium foil label on the right hand side frame, repeated on a foil label on the left hand side frame of the cutter unit.

Minor Mk2, Monarch, Minimower: Stamped on the left hand side frame near the front rollers handwheel.

Matchless: No information as I have not seen one! Can anyone help?

16" Sports Green (1964): On a brass plate on right hand side frame and also stamped on the left hand side frame of the cutter unit. These serial numbers do not fit the patterns described above but seem to follow that of the 1960s power mowers; they start with SG.

Coding letter(s) summary:

| | |
|----|---------------|
| G | 12" Maxees |
| FG | 14" Maxees |
| M | 9" Minor |
| XM | 11" Minor |
| JR | 12" Major |
| TH | 10" Minimower |
| H | 12" Minimower |
| H | 12" Monarch |
| FH | 14" Monarch |
| W | 10" Matchless |
| XW | 12" Matchless |
| -- | 12" Super |
| F | 14" Super |
| X | 16" Super |

Often serial numbers are hard to see due to overpainting or the ravages of rust. Sometimes the numbers were not stamped squarely or forcefully enough with perhaps only the top half imprinting fully on to the side plate. I use a magnifying glass and ensure there is some oblique lighting, and use petrol or steel wool to get off rust or accumulated grime but even then it is hard to make out some of the numbers. If I can collect enough serial numbers I hope to be able to date machines and to get some idea of production numbers of the different models; it would be nice, for example, if there was an original dated receipt for a particular machine. To this end I should be grateful if club members would let me know the serial numbers of JPs in their collections - my main interest is the push mowers but power mower information will be gratefully received.

As I have only just joined the Club, my contact details are not in the Directory of Members. I can be contacted on 01923 678657 or dianah.ellis@virgin.net

Editor's Note: there are plenty of JPs about and it would be great if lots of members joined in with this project by providing the details for which Henry has asked.



Badge engineering - where one company manufactures a product for another - was relatively common in the heyday of the hand mower. The normal practice was for one company to manufacture products for another using the second's name or "branding" (Ransomes producing the range of Suttons mowers to the Automaton design is a good example). The practice was most often employed for mowers made for sale by mail order or well-known stores (much like "own label" products in today's supermarkets). Very occasionally, both companies would agree to use both of their names on the product, perhaps as a way of endorsing each other. In this example, an 8" Greens Silens Messor has a specially produced name plate that also bears the name of Gamage, the leading London store. Examples such as this are much less common than conventional Silens Messors. The mower is now part of the Hall & Duck Trust Collection.

MOWERS IN THE MOVIES

Andrew Mussett spotted what looked like a heavily disguised British Anzani Lawnrider in a recent transmission of the 1966 Michael Bentine film "The Sandwich Man". There is also a famous scene in a Norman Wisdom film when he creates havoc with a rogue Atco motor mower. Has anyone else seen any old films that feature mowers? It might make an interesting piece in a future edition.

CHECK OUT CHEFFINS

We say it every time but why not come along to the next Cheffins Auction on Saturday 26 April starting at 9.30am? Many club members go and usually there are plenty of mowers in the sale so there will be lots (excuse the pun) to talk about even if you do not bid. Afterwards we normally decamp to a local pub (usually the Prince of Wales in Bluntisham) for a pint and something to eat. So make a day of it and see what all the fuss is about.

TIM'S TOP TIP!

If your mower has been laid up for some time it is a good idea to drain the crank case before starting it. This will remove any oil that has settled at the bottom of the crank case. In addition to, hopefully, making it easier to start your mower it will also mean there is less smoke when it runs.

OLC EVENTS CLARIFICATION

We have decided to clarify what constitutes an "official" club event. The question arose last year after some confusion about who was responsible for organising an event and whether any club member was automatically entitled to attend.

The mower sections at many of the events attended by club members are run by an individual on behalf of the main organiser (such as the local steam society or garden show etc). These events generally conform to the guidelines laid down by the main organisers. Most are run "by invitation" so that section organisers can retain some discretion when choosing who attends. This is usually designed to prevent people turning up with what most people would consider "inappropriate" exhibits or to stop gatecrashing where extended groups of people bring too few exhibits.

In an ideal world it would be possible to for anyone to turn up on the day and exhibit whatever they liked. However, the club committee felt that this would be too impractical and would not allow section organisers to run their event in line with the "by invitation" wishes of the main organisers.

The committee did feel however that any club member should be allowed to attend any official club event. In effect this means that we will now have to designate whether an event is "official" or "by invitation". For the time being, the only "official" club event will be the Annual Rally at Milton Keynes Museum. All other events where there are mower sections that the club supports be "by invitation".

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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>

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