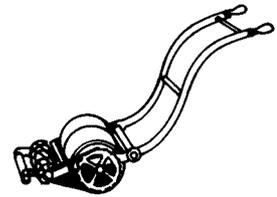


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 45

Summer 2003

FUNNY OLD TIME

This is the Grassbox that always seems to me to be the strangest of the year. Preparing newsletters never feels like a Summer job. Somehow the long Winter evenings when there are fewer temptations in the garden or the shed (well mine is too cold for much work anyhow) are better.

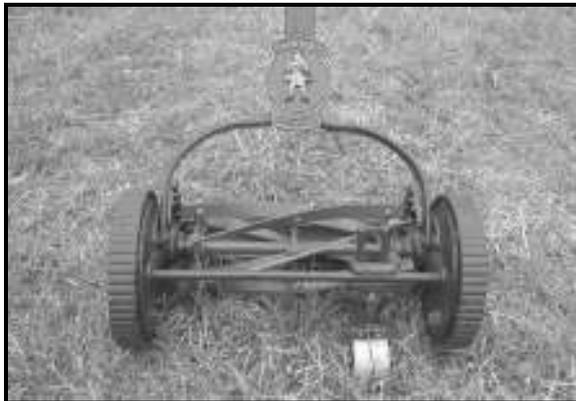
By now the rally season is in full swing and many of you will be looking forward to events in the second half of the year. We have already had our Annual Rally at Milton Keynes Museum, of course, and there is more about this inside this edition. It was good to see so many members there, some for the fourteenth year in succession!

A perennial discussion that I return to all-too-often is that interesting and unusual mowers are still being found. Many of these were being displayed for the first time in Milton Keynes and created a great deal of interest. As mentioned in the last Grassbox not everyone wants the oldest or rarest machines but it is great to know that there is probably something out there for any interest, ability and budget.

We are still looking at ways of improving what we do so please keep the ideas coming. I am keen to do more to help with preservation and restoration, whether it be with advice or more practically. I am sure that there is much more we can do by working with other clubs, some of whom are bound to have experience that we are lacking. And vice versa as well, of course.

Finally, by now you should have received your membership renewal reminders for the coming year. I do hope everyone will rejoin so that we can continue to develop as a club.

SLATTERS FRONT RUNNER



We featured Slatter's Front Runner in Grassbox 34 and asked if anyone had ever seen one. Well, now we have! Robbie Robinson picked up this example at Milton Keynes last year and has now fitted it to his Shanks Scot sidewheel. The Front Runner allows a sidewheel to work right up to the edge of the lawn. The wheels on the sidewheel are alongside the cutting cylinder which means the mower cannot cut right up to the edge of the lawn. By mounting the Front Runner on the front cross bar the mower can be used up to the edge of the lawn because the small wheel supports the frame when the main wheel is overhanging the flower bed. The Front Runner was offered by many of the leading manufacturers as an accessory for their sidewheels from the turn of the last century through to the end of the 1930s. The cost was just a few shillings and one might assume that quite a few were sold considering the device's usefulness and the amount of advertising produced for it. But this is the only one we know of so far.

MOWERS IN THE MOVIES



Our list of mowers in the movies continues to grow following the brief item in Grassbox 44.

Ian Wallis remembers that in the feature film version of "Bless This House" dating from the early 1970s, Sid James struggles to start an Atco motor mower. Well, haven't we all! Brian Kirby, formerly Property Manager at Trerice and now at another National Trust property at Broadclyst in Devon, says that the Atco Standard on show at Trerice appeared in one of the Peter Sellers Pink Panther films.

Our picture shows Norman Wisdom in a publicity shot taken by Atco for the film Up In The World. This is the one where Norman is dragged through the garden by an out-of-control Atco mower.

So there are lots of Atco mowers in the movies but what about machines from other companies?



This shot was taken in Durban, South Africa in about 1910. It shows a Greens 36" horse-drawn mower. The show was found by Chris Thompson who has a mower very similar to this in his own collection.

DIARY DATES

Enfield Steam & Country Show: Saturday 24/Sunday 25 August. A relatively new event that is trying to build up its displays, held at the Whitewebbs Museum of Transport. Further details from the Museum on 0208 3671898

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

Malvern Autumn Show: Saturday 27/Sunday 28 September. This is now an established event on our calendar and very popular with members and the public. A great way to round off the year. Details from Tony Hopwood on 01684 592134 (Upton on Severn).

Cheffins Autumn Sale: Saturday 25 October. We've said it before but come along for a great day out and perhaps even pick up a bargain or two. The sale is held at Sutton, Cambridgeshire.

ANNUAL RALLY REPORT

Our Annual Rally at Milton Keynes Museum on 17/18 May drew the biggest ever attendance - despite the almost perpetual rain - in the event's 14 year history. More than 80 members displayed well over 200 machines during the weekend. This is significant because it represents over one fifth of Club membership. Members who are also in other clubs tell me that participation levels are generally much lower for them so we must be doing something that works! One of the joys of the Annual Rally is that members always seem to bring their latest acquisition or restoration to the event. This means that there is always something new to see, even for the regular attendees. It is always slightly unfair to select individual items to highlight as virtually every mower on show is worth a mention of some sort.



But among the more unusual motorised items this year were an unusual Course & Carne motor mower (above), probably dating from the 1920s and made in Bedford, being shown for the first time by Alec Hillyar, and 1920s Greens motor mowers exhibited by Steve Smith and regular Grassbox contributor Tony Hopwood (who is much better known for his Dennis allegiance of course). Big beasts were in evidence too, especially a chunky Automower shown by Alan and Dick Hardwick and a massive 1930s Atco brought by Stan and Jonathan Hardwick. There was also a nice selection of Atco mowers from across the years including many in excellent restored condition courtesy of Richard Durrant. There were of course more hand than motor mowers on show and the variety of these was consequently even wider. Among them was the usual impressive selection provided by Andrew Hall and Mike Duck.

The variety of mowers on show illustrates yet again the diversity of interest among members.

As I have said before older does not always mean rarer, more valuable or more interesting. A 1920s motor mower can be relatively common compared to a 1950s hand mower. 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. Many collectors prefer to leave machines in the "as found" state and there is much to be said for this. The Annual Rally always presents an opportunity to meet old and new friends, reveal acquisitions and discuss restorations.



One of the highlights of the event is the awarding of the Andrew Grout Plate. Exhibitors vote for the mower they would "most like to take home" and the owner receives the silver plate for a year and a specially engraved tankard to keep. This year's winner was Stan Hardwick of Filey (seen above, centre, with his son Jonathan, right, and Andrew Grout, left) for his Ransomes "Reversible" hand mower. This usual mower features a handle that allows the mower to be used from front or rear simply by swinging it from the front to the back.

The trading side of things has grown steadily in recent years and this year there were plenty of interesting machines on offer. Prices were realistic and affordable which meant that most machines found a new home. Items changing hands included complete hand and motor mowers, engines, grass boxes and any number of bits and bobs.



This year we also instigated a new award in memory of Charlie Jones who sadly died last year. The inaugural award was made to John Bloxham (above left, seen with Keith, centre, and David Jones, right) one of the club's founding members, in recognition of his long standing support, and was presented by David Jones, Charlie's son.

The Annual General Meeting of the Club attended to the formal business and elected the committee for the following year: Keith Wootton (Chair), Bernard "Robbie" Robinson (Secretary), Martin Stephenson (Treasurer), John Barnard, Tim Durant, Andrew Grout, Alec Hillyar and Richard Jones. This was the first "wet one" at Milton Keynes for some years but the rain did not seem to spoil proceedings too much. Inevitably the display side took a bit of a beating but this perhaps allowed more time for banter and barter. This edition of Grassbox features a number of images taken at the Annual Rally and we hope to produce a special supplement in the very near future.

KEY TO DOOR FOR H&D

Coming of age at 21 used to be a special event but it is now largely symbolic. But for Andrew Hall and Michael Duck there is significance this year because it marks the 21st anniversary of their unique mower collecting partnership.

Andy and Mike first started collecting together in 1982. They had been collecting independently for some years before this and, so they say, had often competed with each other when trying to acquire new machines. At the suggestion of someone from Ransomes, the pair made a joint exhibition at Saltex in 1982 and decided that it would make sense to work together from then on. Their collection has since grown to be the largest of its type and, in addition to their many newspaper, radio and TV appearance, they have also been listed in the Guinness Book Of Records.

I have known Andy and Mike since the earliest days of the Old Lawnmower Club. They were not at our very first rally in 1989 but they made a big impression the next year by turning up with a large selection of mowers.

In fact I first heard of Andy & Mike in 1982 when they formed their alliance. An item on my local "Look East" news programme featured a lot of Ransomes mowers that were off to an exhibition in Windsor, which I later found out was Saltex. This was the day before I went to University and it was some years before I finally caught up with them! I also saw an item about Mike on a TV station in Bristol while I was a student there. I even went as far as getting his number from the station but never got round to calling him! By the time I finally got to meet them at Milton Keynes in 1989 they had already been operating their joint collection for nearly eight years. Long time members may recall that we featured their 10th anniversary celebrations in one of the first Grassboxes. A number of us made the trip to Somerset for what turned out to be a rather bleak weekend weatherwise. But the rare opportunity to see their large collection was too good to miss.

This year to mark their very special partnership Andy & Mike have decided to put on an extravaganza at the Great Dorset Steam Fair in August. They reckoned this was the ideal venue to celebrate their joint collection as it will allow thousands of people to see some of their massive collection.

Andy won't allow us to reveal too many of the details to avoid spoiling the surprise but I did manage to get out of him that the display will be one of their largest ever. There will be three sections with British and American mowers and garden tools all included. So expect a really varied selection of mowers, hand and powered, from down the years, presented with the usual H&D style. Anyone who saw their previous display at Dorset or their last visit to Saltex in 2000 will know what to expect.

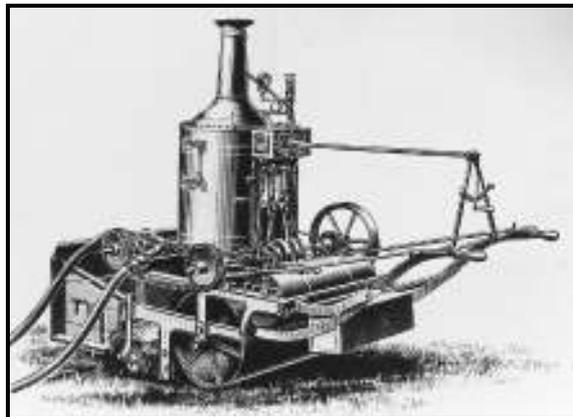
It would be great if as many OLC members as possible could get to Dorset to help Andy and Mike celebrate their 21 years of collecting. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity to see mowers taking centre stage at this massive event.

The Great Dorset runs from 27 to 31 August and is held at Tarrant Hinton, Blandford, Dorset.



Andy (left) and Mike (right) always put on a good show. Here they are doing a Laurel & Hardy impression for the crowds at Saltex! Only joking guys!

FULL STEAM AHEAD



Here's the one they all want! The steam mower enjoyed limited popularity in the late 1800s but was soon superseded by the petrol motor mower. The first successful steam powered mower was designed James Sumner in 1896 and produced by the Leyland company that eventually became British Leyland. You won't find many today however, and the only two examples that can be seen are at the Rural History Centre in Reading and at the Leyland Museum in, er, Leyland. The mower in Leyland is a copy of the one in Reading and was made by British Leyland apprentices some years ago.

CHECK OUT MOWER ENGINE SETTINGS

Over the past few months I have added some new sections to the Club's website. Among these is a section on mower engines where site visitors can check the correct ignition timing settings for a number of mowers, especially those with Villiers engines. I would love to add to this so if anyone has any relevant information, ideally taken from mower or engine operating manuals, please let me know. All we need is the name of the mower, the date of manufacture, the engine model and capacity, the ignition timing (eg 5/16" before TDC), and the ignition points gap.

During my research I came across a very interesting booklet on the History of the Villiers Engineering Company and its Industrial, Stationary, Horticultural and Agricultural Engines" by Jack Sizer. This has lots of really useful information on Villiers engines and is well worth the small investment of a few pounds. Further details and copies can be obtained from Jack Sizer at 780 Cleckheaton Road, Oakenshaw, Bradford BD12 7AB (01274 416392).



Harry Day sent this photo of his Ransomes Ajax Mk5 to show the design of the handles. These feature a plate between the cross over with the name of the make and model. Notice also that this mower has been fitted with the outer jockey wheels on the front roller. The idea is that the mower can cut through longer grass than normal because the grass is left upright as the front roller passes over. A full-width roller would flatten the longer stems as it passed over and these would then not be caught and cut by the blade mechanism.

LAWNMOWER PACKAGING

We all collect old lawn mowers but how often do we think about how those mowers were delivered in the first place? Back in the Victorian and Edwardian eras it was commonplace to see advertisements in magazines stating that the price included "carriage to any mainland railway station", but how were the mowers transported? Just like today the mowers were packed in boxes, originally made from wood but later cardboard.

Jim Ricci from America sent in some pictures of mowers he had recently acquired, each with the original shipping cases or packaging. The first is a Penn Continental which, as well as the box, is complete with instruction booklet and toolkit.



The second is a 1947 Coldwell "Bantam" which Jim thinks may never have been used because the original paint is still on the edge of the blades. The box is marked "Portable Products Group" which bought Coldwell in the mid 1940s.



This reminded me that we had featured a couple of British mowers with packaging in earlier editions of Grassbox. The wood for the Qualcast Model E box (GB13) at Milton Keynes Museum had earlier been used for packing fruit as can be seen clearly from markings on the inside of the box. After the second world war, wood was in short supply and packaging was often recycled for other uses. Packaging is an unusual aspect of mower collecting. Certainly for collectors who want to show more than just the mowers themselves the original boxes must be of some interest.

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>

GOODBYE TO PETROL JELLY!

Following an article in a recent Grassbox on jelly deposits in old petrol, Geoffrey Brooks called "mower central" to tell us about an additive called Stabil that he uses to prevent just such a problem. Geoffrey says that Stabil is only really required when you need to store a mower. In addition to preventing the jelly it also helps prevent corrosion. It can be bought by mail order from Central Spares (01903 732576). From what I can find out on the web it looks like local bike or car spares dealers will also be able to get it for you.

CHEFFINS PRICES

Bidding for the mowers at the Cheffins sale on Saturday 26 April was keen with many of the lots being knocked down to Old Lawnmower Club members.

Among the more affordable motor mowers on the day were a complete 1920s 18" Atco "Standard" motor mower at £12 (others sold for £5 and £28), a 24" Dennis motor mower (£20) and a couple of 1950s Greens Masters (£10 and £7). Hand mowers, sidewheel and roller, are generally smaller and tend to attract more attention. Prices reflected this but were reasonable considering the number of potential buyers present if slightly higher than a year or so ago. It was, however, still possible to pick up a couple of Ransomes Patent Chain Automotons requiring a fair bit of work for £10 and £12. A 15" Ransomes Lion (£15), British Flexa (£5) and Qualcast Model E (£30) represented good value with slightly more obscure models such as Shanks Britisher (one at £30, one at £50) and a Trojan (£40) fetching more.

One of the major surprises of the day was the British Anzani Lawn Rider that finally went for £270, somewhat more than the people in the galleries had been expecting. It was obvious during viewing that the star lots would be the early 8" Greens Silens Messor with the highly curved handles and the 6" Greens Multum In Parvo which was additionally unusual in having its original grass box. Hammer prices for these mowers were £210 and £420 respectively, which may appear high but was broadly in line with the predictions made earlier in the day.

TOP TIPS!

Richard Jones and I had a real struggle freeing a very seized-up Bradbury engine on a 24" Dennis, writes Dusty Miller.

We tried the usual methods, including Malcolm Hemley's idea of putting hot oil into the cylinder. That didn't work and neither did any of the other methods.

Geoff Christopher brought his spark plug with the centre core out and a brazed grease nipple put in and said "This will work I'm sure".

After many attempts the pressure was such that the grease we inserted through the nipple was coming through the valves and out of the exhaust etc. So one night Richard re-ground the valves and with all the grease we had started to pump with his brand new grease gun with a flexible pipe. It was nearly dusk, and with him standing on the bench and me holding it, believe it or believe it not, to our complete amazement, and after a lot of pressure, the piston began to move. The pressure was so great (which I never imagined you could get with a grease gun) that it split the pipe and small amounts of grease were coming through the nipple. But it did the job.

I believe that something on these lines was printed in a very early Grassbox but I am sure our experiences would be interesting to all the members.

Editor's Note: Yes, we featured this idea in GB6 (coincidentally the same issue as the H&D 10th Birthday article).

Next Edition: Oct 2003

Edition 45 - Jul 2003

Edited and written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton