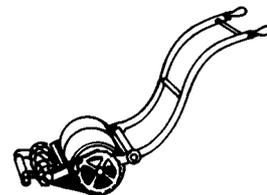


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

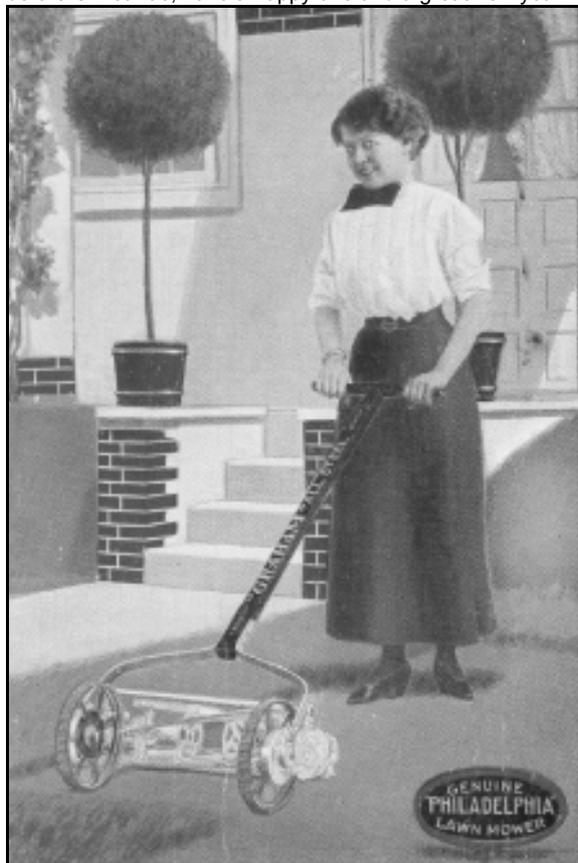
Number 46

Autumn 2003

STILL WORKING HARD...

It has been a long hot summer (well once it arrived it was) but we have been working hard behind the scenes to bring you even more from your favourite(!) club. This edition sees a major departure for us with our first ever colour supplement, featuring new photographs and some old favourites in glorious technicolour. It's not cheap so we may not be able to do it every edition but we will try. Let me know what you think. Also enclosed, hopefully, is the latest Membership Directory. It's as up to date as we can make it.

Finally, as you will see elsewhere we have introduced some new transfers to help make your restorations even better. If I don't manage to get another Grassbox done before Christmas, have a happy one and a great new year.



Chris Thompson found this charming postcard for the Graham All Steel "Philadelphia" lawn mower which he thinks may date from around 1920. Although it's for an American mower the postcard is in fact Belgian, with the agent being named on the reverse as Louis Ruys of Antwerp. Text on the reverse, translated from French, reads: "It is 43 years this summer that this marque has been going, it was first on the market then and has maintained that place today. Without rivals, made from first-class materials, of solid and meticulous construction and most simple to use, it is in the forefront of the world's lawn mowers. Insist that your supplier gets you Philadelphia and do not accept other makes. The Graham All Steel Mower (entirely of steel) is the most perfect to use. Ask for our illustrated catalogue of both hand and horse operated lawn mowers with the latest refinements."



Tony Houghton has a big beast on his hands with this 1928 Greens cricket pitch mower at the Gosfield Show in Essex in July.

MORE MOVIE MOWERS

Tony Hopwood writes to remind us that his Dennis was recently seen once again on BBC TV in "The Gathering Storm". Tony also spotted an Atco Standard making a cameo appearance in an episode of "Monarch of the Glen". Has anyone else spotted old mowers in TV programmes or feature films?

BUDDING MODELS

Some while ago we included an item in Grassbox about miniature 1:43 metal model kits of a Budding mower and a number of members bought one. The models are still available from Classic Commercials, PO Box 800, West Wratting, Cambridge CB1 5NB. The price is £15.45 (inc postage and packing). Please make cheques payable to "Classic Commercials". This could be your best chance yet of owning your own Budding mower!



This is a Ransomes sidewheel mower, possibly a Lion, shown in around 1925. This picture was also sent in by Chris Thompson.

DIARY DATES

Milton Keynes Museum: Our Annual Rally and AGM 2004 will be held on Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 May 2004.

BANBURY STEAM RALLY



Another good weekend at Banbury Steam Rally with a number of members present. This year the theme was "foreign" mowers and everyone present was able to contribute to the display. As might be expected the bulk were made in the USA but there were also examples from Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, Australia and elsewhere. Very few of the foreign machines on display were motor mowers, although there was one Victa, but this was made up for in the outdoor section where there were Shanks, Greens, Dennis and Atcos to see. Thanks to Robbie for another splendid weekend.

WEST DEAN

West Dean clashed with Banbury this year so some people had to choose between the two, which meant numbers were a bit down at both events. Despite this the turnout at West Dean was pretty good and the display was very well received by visitors. Event organiser Richard Jones welcomed Dusty Miller, Colin Stone, David Lumsden, Tim Durant and Geoff Christopher to the show. The image shows some of the crew during a well-earned break!



WELLAND

Despite a washout on Friday until mid afternoon and a wet Saturday afternoon and evening which made the roadways very claggy, writes Tony Hopwood, there was a good turnout for the first "official" Lawnmowers & Horticultural Machines Section at Welland.

The centrepiece was Hall & Duck's 1909 30" Ransomes motor mower under a much appreciated gazebo which provided shelter and shade! The machine was cranked into life on Friday and after fitting a new plug ran even better during the show with a fine plume of steam from the engine cooling vent. The mower also served as an anchor for Mike's dog Bobo. I understand the Hall & Duck Trust has no plans for dog-hauled mower racing.

Andrew Grout brought a fine spectrum of early Ransomes push mowers, while Martin Briggs and Paul Channon showed a wide selection of machines to join Ron Jayne's Shays, Geoff Ravenhall's Trustys and Henry Carwood's Gutbrod. Tony Hopwood's Dennises bulked up the display and a tractor exhibitor added a rare 1950s power barrow. Contacts were made with exhibitors wanting to bring machines to the 40th Rally in 2004, a four day special.

KNOWL HILL STEAM RALLY

A number of members turned out for what ended up the hottest weekend of the year at Knowl Hill Steam Rally in August. The weather was so hot it was pretty difficult to do anything but sit in the shade. The display featured a selection of hand mowers with a few motorised beasts thrown in for good measure. Organiser Tim Durant was joined by Andrew Grout, Keith Wootton, Alec Hillyar, Colin Stone, Robbie Robinson and Richard Jones.

HALL AND DUCK AT GREAT DORSET

The Great Dorset Steam Fair at the end of August saw a major display by Andrew Hall and Mike Duck with the help of OLC members John Dyer and Jim Ricci, and friends.



The display marked Andrew and Michael's twenty one years of joint collecting and offered a rare opportunity to see some of the larger and more unusual items from their collection. Visitors cannot have been disappointed.

The display was in three sections. A large number of British machines were on show in a large marquee. Among these were the large "Cadbury" Ransomes motor mower (with the exhibition crew above) as well as motor mowers from Shanks, Greens, JP and others. These were complemented by a section on American machines overseen by Jim who had flown in specially for the event with his son Jonathan. This included unusual machines such as a Locke motor mower and many hand mowers. Outside was a "tennis court" to show associated items such as line markers, sweepers, edgers and hand tools.



Many OLC members visited the event during the week and there was a huge amount of interest from the public. This was apparently the biggest ever Great Dorset so plenty of people were probably introduced to vintage mowers.

We will feature more shots of the mowers at the show in future editions of Grassbox.

NEW TRANSFERS

After some hard work behind the scenes and thanks to help from a number of members we have been able to introduce some additional authentic transfers. These include designs for JP, Royal Enfield, Atco, Ransomes and Qualcast with more designs for Qualcast, Suffolk and Automower to follow very soon. These are so new that we cannot even include an example here but full details and prices are included in the Advertisement Sheet that is sent out with every copy of Grassbox.

ABOUT LAWN MOWERS

By FW Follows

This article appeared in "The Ironmonger" on 30 March 1901 and was written by the founder of Follows and Bate. The image is from an 1871 advertisement, also from "The Ironmonger".

One of the chief results of international exhibitions is the improvement of taste. One of the results of improved taste is the construction of neat dwellings and one of the results of the construction of neat dwellings is the multiplication of grass plots.

Nowadays there is scarcely a domicile with any pretensions to appearance, not to say respectability, without its little lawn in front and its conveniences, however limited, for the pursuit of the art of horticulture by its tenant. And not only so, but since the advent of exhibitions a wonderful evolution has taken place in the multiplication and improvement of appliances wherewith the lover of horticulture may make the surroundings of his little dwelling attractive and pleasant to the eye. Even the spade, the fork, the trowel, and the rake are no longer the clumsy tools they used to be and it is with a twinge of regret that we mourn the loss of the sound of the whetting- of the scythe at early morn.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LAWN MOWER

The ponderous lawn-mower of fifty years ago gradually supplanted the scythe. It was followed in its turn by machines of much lighter draught, whose revolving cutters were also driven by rollers and simple gearing, as well as by chain. These machines found great favour with gardeners, and became popular, but they were almost exclusively purchased direct from the manufacturers by the well-to-do (the only users), and this practice of "direct trading" laid the foundation of at least one substantial fortune. But in 1869, when not one ironmonger in fifty sold lawn-mowers, or understood even the elements of their mechanism, my firm (Follows & Bate) took the trade by storm when they secured the first English patent for side-driven lawn mowers, and began to offer the "Climax" lawn-mower to every ironmonger in the country.

There was then a great opening for a cheap, simple, and effective lawn mower for the million. "What have you got there, your coffin?" said many an ironmonger to me, when for the first time in his life I brought a lawn mower to his door. Disclaiming the soft impeachment of travelling about with my coffin in those days of my youth, I used to say, "No, sir, but I have brought you a machine from Manchester, which I am sure you can sell; will you be good enough to look at it?"

HSE CALLS TIME ON OLD MOWERS

By Tony Hopwood

The number of big mowers for free in Grassbox highlights a big change in the market for old machines. The HSE has got its blades out to prune the number of old machines in use. Which don't comply with the latest safety standards for contractors machines used by employees. It doesn't apply to machines used only by their owners - yet!

Simply put, mowers without cutter brakes and dead man's handles and starting interlocks may not be used for paid work on playing fields, parks and verges.

Although it's sad that many machines capable of more years of work will be phased out in favour of their trixier modern replacements, there's a silver lining for those of us who use old mowers on our grass.

Expect lots of machines from fine turf to jungle busters at auctions or low prices and a corresponding fall in the value of machines in preservation. Rare machines will be less affected because there's a strong collectors market for them. At the moment spares for long lived machines like Dennis are still in good supply but as the pool of working mowers empties, consumable spares will become scarce, so buy for the future and store them if you have the space.

Editors Note: Tony raises some interesting points and certainly there have been plenty of Dennis mowers at auctions recently for very reasonable prices, often less than £50 for a complete 1930s machine.



The box was then opened, and the little stranger was soon running joyously over the ironmonger's shop-floor, or on his grass plot (if he had one handy), doing its work with a will, and with no more noise than the grasshopper makes when he is merry. Ah, those were the good old times!

"How many shall I send you?" I would say, after a brief inspection had been made. "Send me six each of the 6-inch and 7-inch, and three each of the 8-inch and 10-inch, and if they sell I'll order more, and the larger sizes, too," came the usual response.

Nine ironmongers out of ten throughout the country who were offered the "Climax" bought it in this way, some two of each, some three, others six or more.

I can therefore claim that my firm were the first to induce ironmongers generally to stock and sell lawn mowers successfully.

The great firm of Ruston, Proctor & Co, of Lincoln, made thousands of the "Climax" for us, and to see the machines hanging up in their great engine-erection shops reminded one of a herring curing establishment. Penney & Co, of Lincoln, likewise made thousands, and the Coalbrookdale Co. made and delivered in one season as many as 5000 machines. Besides these, my firm made as many as they could themselves.

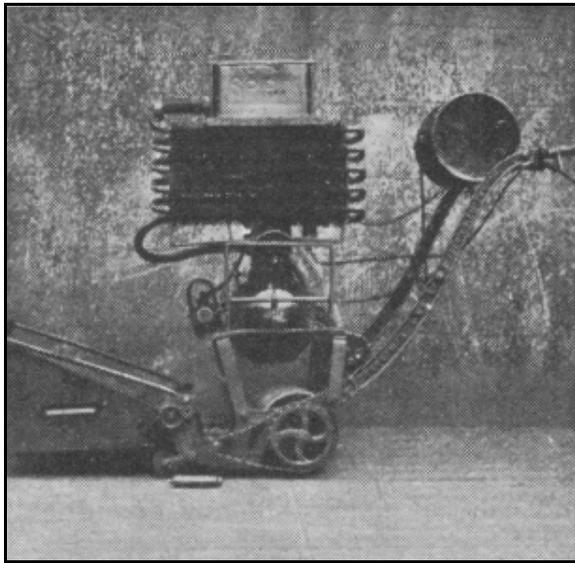
THEN AND NOW

And didn't they sell! I affirm, without fear of contradiction that for the first few years every customer repeated his orders, and, had our own means of production been on the same scale as they are today, no fewer than 20,000 of these machines could have been sent out during each season.

Editor's Note: The second part of this article will appear in the next edition.



An interesting aspect of mower collecting is that similar machines, often sidewheels, crop up in a variety of guises. This was because some manufacturers produced the same models for different customers or markets, a process that is often called "badge engineering". At Banbury rally, for example, we spotted the "Foreign Made" Jestimah at the back was exactly the same as the German-made Brill at the front. The only difference was the name on the wheels and the colour. It is likely that the Jestimah was made by Brill in the 1930s in an attempt to avoid bias against German products by British customers in this period.



We like to feature oddities from time to time and this photograph is a perfect example. It comes from a letter in a 1921 edition of Model Engineer magazine and was found by Robin Campbell-Coleman (the letter that is, not the mower). The letter reads:

"I am giving a photograph of a 24" petrol lawn mower which I made two years ago. It is a great success and will probably interest others. The engine is a 3hp water cooled, mounted on a frame. It is started by handle and the speed regulated by one control lever the clutch being operated by another. The speed is cut down from engine shaft by countershaft then to the roller by chain drive. - GB Atkinson, Sheffield."



Alan Hardwick gets up speed with his rather large Shanks motor mower dating from the 1950s at this year's Banbury Steam Rally. The theme for this year was "foreign" mowers but although Robbie would not include Shanks a few crept into the display!

CHECK OUT CHEFFINS

The next Cheffins sale will be held on Saturday 25 October at the Sutton Saleground near Ely. There are bound to be a few mowers on sale but the real reason for going is to have a great day out with other club members. After the sale we normally "retire" to the Price of Wales, Bluntisham for a pint and something to eat. A great way to round off the day!

OOPS, A CROCK OF SLIPS

The photo of Harry Day's Ransomes Ajax on page 3 of the last edition should have said it was a Mk3 not a Mk5. Sorry for any confusion.

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>

TOP TIPS! SCAVENGING USEFUL BITS

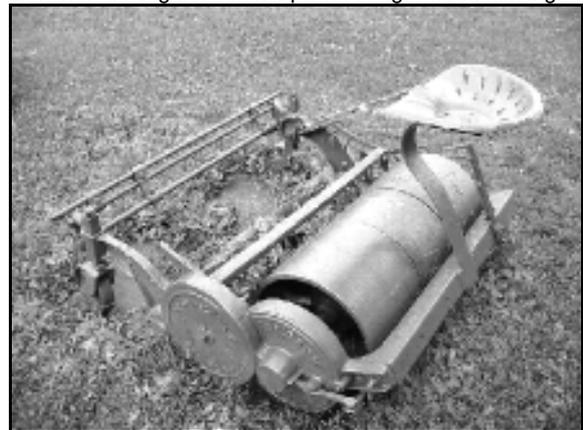
By Tony Hopwood

If people know you collect and restore old mowers you will be offered and given lots of mowers which otherwise would have gone to the tip. Don't neglect this valuable source of useful bits. Even scrap garden tractors and ride-ons can provide a rich harvest. A dismembered Toro provided exactly the right springs for a 1924 Dennis clutch repair as well as four pneumatic rubber tyred wheels for trolleys and other projects plus a box of useful nuts and bolts and a spare Briggs & Stratton fuel tank and carburettor and recoil starter to keep my elderly Hayter orchard mower going.

Post war motor mowers can be even more rewarding. Villiers two stroke engines may donate working flywheel ignition coils as well as carburettor and fuel line fittings. Fuel tanks have period brass taps which will usually fit other tanks. Front rollers and handles are always worth saving. I replaced the rotted out front rollers on my Emery Clipper with some from a scrap 1960s Ransomes. A full demolition will generate chains and sprockets as well as bearings, nuts, bolts and screws a plenty. The long tie bolts and spacers across machines are also worth harvesting because they can be cut down or rethreaded to provide useful long bolts or spacers for other repairs.

A complete dismantle can take several hours although an angle grinder and bolt cutters will speed things up immensely. Remove throttle control, fuel line and carburettor, then fuel tank. Loose parts can be stored in the grass box which will keep them together and provide rough identification. Remove chains, keep serviceable joining links even if chains are scrapped. Take off the engine complete with exhaust, if worth saving, using an angle grinder to cut the bearers and save time. Remember manifold flanges and other parts off rotted exhausts can be recycled to fix exhausts on other machines. Finally remove handles and front rollers. With the right tools this should take less than an hour. The rest can go to the tip if you have no use or room for it.

Although I have concentrated on motor mowers ancient push mowers can also benefit from targeted scavenging. It's getting increasingly difficult to get square black iron nuts and bolts and shiny new hexagons just don't look right. Farm sale scrap piles, builders demolition bonfire ashes and car boot sales can often be a source for old nuts, bolts, screws and washers. Square and round headed coach screws can easily be cut down and threaded to make authentic looking bolts with a patina of age. Good hunting!



This Townsend Triple Ratchet mower was made by SP Townsend and Co of Orange, New Jersey and is believed to date from the 1920s (the company closed in the 1930s). It is owned by Garfield Forsyth of Ontario, Canada, who is hoping to return it to full working order and demonstrate it with his horses. Information supplied by Gilbert Boehm, Garfield's son-in-law.

Next Edition: Dec 2003
Edition 46 - Oct 2003
Edited/written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton