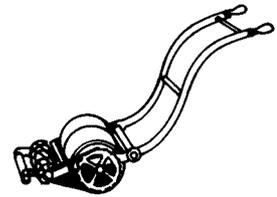


# Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 47

Winter 2003

## YOUR SPECIAL FIND IN 2004?

Welcome to the last Grassbox of 2003. For starters, a big thanks to everyone who gave such positive comments on the last Grassbox with our first colour section. We will repeat this in the near future but at the costs and extra time involved make it a bit too difficult for every edition.

I have often written in this section about finding old mowers. I recently heard from one member who had found a really unusual hand mower in a local car boot sale. The person selling did not know what they had and the collector was able to pick up a bargain. His story is not unique. The moral if there is one is that there are still plenty of good mowers of all ages to find and it is just as likely that they will be found by new members as the ones with the biggest collections. I think that is one of the things that makes this hobby of ours that little bit different to so many others. Perhaps you will find that extra special addition to your own collection in 2004. I hope so.

It has been a busy time in the few short weeks since the last Grassbox. I have caught up with a few delayed projects and the transfers promised last time have finally arrived. I am pleased we have managed to produce these new designs and more will follow soon. Full details can be found on the advertisement sheet.

Also since the last Grassbox I have managed to complete the revisions to the three "annual" directories. Let me know if you would like any up to date copy.

It's been a busy time for another of our founder members too. Andrew Grout married his new wife Sam on 8 November and I am sure everyone in the club will want to wish them every happiness.

Finally I should like to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of the club this past year. There are of course far too many to mention individually but your help and support really is appreciated by all of the members. Have a great Christmas and successful 2004.



Earlier this year a group of OLC members posed for a photograph that was meant to appear in a Daily Mail feature on "unusual clubs". The feature has not appeared yet and may well never be seen but do not be surprised if it crops up one cold winter morning amongst the stuff and nonsense about Posh & Becks and all the rest. Seen left to right are Alan Hardwick, Tim Durant, Roger Wilkinson, Alec Hillyar, Robbie Robinson, Martin Stephenson, Roy Mitchell.

## ANGLO PARIS POINTED OUT

Christopher Proudfoot and other readers with better eyesight than me noticed that the mower on the front page of the last Grassbox was a Ransomes Anglo Paris and not a Lion as had been suggested in the caption.



Christopher Proudfoot found this unusual picture and wondered if it might be the world's first lawn mower race! Christopher and I think it might date from about 1925. The mowers are numbered so it could well be one of the lawn mower trials that were popular some years ago. The mowers featured are, left to right, an early Dennis, a John Shaw Governor and an Automower. The Governor is a really unusual mower that has the engine mounted directly on the end of the cutting cylinder and a radiator mounted above the rear roller between the handle stems. We have featured this mower (GB9) and the similar "Bee" (GB32) in earlier editions. As far as we can tell, the Automower here has a wooden sided grass box but it is very difficult to see. Pity they found the one patch of grassless field to pose the picture. Best not say anything about women drivers either.

## TRUST HALL & DUCK TO NOTICE

Andrew Hall has asked us to point out that the display of lawn mowers at this year's Dorset Steam Rally was organised by the Hall & Duck Trust rather than any specific individuals. Funny, I could have sworn I saw Andrew and Mike there!



On Sunday 1 June some of the residents of Strafford, Vermont, USA gathered to see some authentic horse mowing on the town common. King the horse, a Belgian, is seen with owner Earl Silloway pulling a 30" Coldwell mower dating from about 1920 and owned by Jim Ricci. The mower is silver and, according to Jim, earlier Coldwells of similar design were green. Strafford was the home of Justine Morrill (1810-1898), a US senator who in 1863 helped pass legislation which allowed each state to start a "State" University. These are called Morrill Land Grant Schools and are typically the main University of each state.

## DIARY DATES 2004

**Annual Rally 2004:** Saturday 15/Sunday 16 May. Our annual rally at Milton Keynes Museum. AGM on Sunday morning, as usual. Details from Keith.

**Bells Piece Gardeners' Open Day, Farnham:** Saturday 15 May. One day event in support of Leonard Cheshire Home. Details from Colin Stone. Tel: 01428 604003 (Hindhead).

**Talylyn Railway Rally, Ty Mawr:** 25/26 May. Further details and entry forms from Anthony Coulls, 31 Horseshoe Lane, Bromley Cross, Bolton, BL7 9RR. Tel: 0161 606 0116 (daytime). E: a.coulls@msim.org.uk

**Rural Life Centre, Farnham:** Sunday 6 June. Special vintage lawn mower day at this popular rural museum. Details from Colin Stone. Tel: 01428 604003 (Hindhead).

**Bramshott Village Gardens Open Weekend:** Saturday 19/Sunday 20 June. Display in support of local church and charities. Details from Colin Stone. Tel: 01428 604003 (Hindhead).

**Banbury Steam Rally:** Saturday 26/Sunday 27 June: Details from Robbie.

**Upton-on-Severn Steam Rally:** Friday 23/Saturday 24/Sunday 25 July. Details from Tony Hopwood. Details from Tony Hopwood on 01684 592134 (Upton on Severn).

**Bedfordshire Steam Fayre:** Saturday 18/Sunday 19 September. Details from Dick Hardwick. Tel: 01462 816018 (Shefford)

**Malvern Autumn Garden Show:** Saturday 25/Sunday 26 September. Details from Tony Hopwood. Details from Tony Hopwood on 01684 592134 (Upton on Severn).

## WINTER DAY OUT

We are now starting to plan our annual spring day out for a suitable Sunday in March or April. There are no firm plans yet so if anyone has any suggestions for a museum or similar venue reasonably central to the country, let us know. We will publish details in the next Grassbox.



Mike Tomkins found himself in Qualcast Road, Wolverhampton recently and couldn't resist having his photo taken. According to Mike, the road was formerly the home of one of Qualcast's foundries although they never made mowers there. In any case the site is now derelict.

## WONDERFUL WEBSITE

I have recently been updating the Club's website with the aim of providing even more information. This is the first major update for a couple of years and I have taken the opportunity to make it easier to find your way round the site by creating specific sections on the club, old mowers, technical information, restoration and preservation, and links to other sites.

The site now includes a brand new section that covers the restoration of a Ransomes Patent Chain Automaton mower, one of my own current projects. The objective is to explain some of the basic practices and to impart some useful tips and tricks. There is also a new section on mower colours, a subject that raises a lot of heated debate in this and many other clubs, but well worth tackling despite this.

If you have access to the web please do have a look and let me know what you think.

## MALVERN AUTUMN SHOW



The event over the weekend of 27/28 September was favoured with perfect weather and formed a fitting end to the summer season, writes Tony Hopwood.

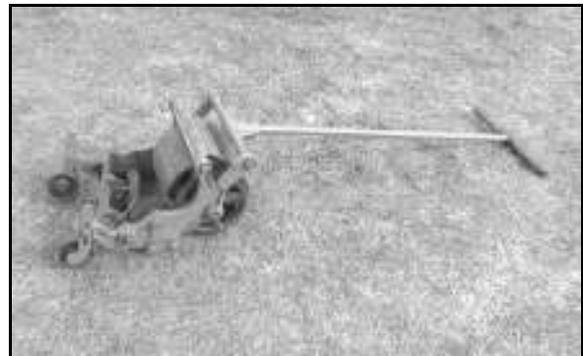
This year the emphasis was on working mowers with a demonstration area taking advantage of the flat, brown grass next to the static display. The Hall & Duck Trust brought an 1898 Shanks pony mower which was demonstrated by Antony Parkes and Justice, a Welsh cob from the royal stables at Windsor. Justice was a great hit with the children, being quite small (11 hands) and on eye and carrot level with the youngsters (see image in GB46). Also from the Hall & Duck Trust was a working 1909 Ransomes motor mower which showed how hard the old time gardeners had to work to drive the beast with its beguiling ribbon of steam from the cooling system. Each afternoon, it was also playtime for other machines with Alec Hillyar (seen above with a Presto motor mower), Tony Hopwood and Tony Skingley further flattening the desiccated sward with a Presto, 36" Dennis Z6 and Rendle mower pusher respectively. A number of hand mowers were demonstrated throughout the weekend by a variety of exhibitors.

In the static display, The Hall & Duck Trust (their Parkinson Villa, made in Ripon 1875-85, is shown below), Andrew Grout, Keith Wootton, Alec Hillyar and Paul Channon showed mowers from the Victorian period to the 1950s and the Williams family showed their Shays and working Tilley lamps.

Tony Hopwood displayed three Dennises and a Victorian Follows & Bate hose reel still in regular use. Pam & Tony Skingley brought a wide selection of mowers and horticultural machines and supplied numerous hot drinks to the exhibitors.

One horticultural item brought by Dave & Brenda Stanford caused a good deal of speculation to its original purpose being a belt driven narrow brush in a frame with pushing handles -- the jury is still out on that one.

After such a varied Autumn Show the problem for 2004 will be follow that!



## MIDSOMER, NOUGHT AN AUTOMOWER

Continuing the theme of spotting old mowers in films and TV programmes, Ian Wallis spotted a 1950s Atco kick start in a recent episode of Midsomer Murders. Personally, I preferred Bergerac to Barnaby...

## ABOUT LAWN MOWERS: 2

By FW Follows



(Speedwell advert, *The Ironmonger*, 1902)

Upwards of 8000 mowers left our works in three months in 1872, and our first despatch of that season, one February day, formed a procession of twenty two loaded luries, which marched round the Manchester Exchange at the hour of high change. These machines had been ordered at the end of 1871 by my customers among the ironmongers, so as to be sure of getting supplied in time for the next season. Alack, how times are changed! Our original side-driven machine has found a host of imitators, British and American, until the market is now overloaded with surplus stock. The necessity to buy lawn-mowers for stock, we are often told, no longer exists, because, forsooth, the makers as well as the importers of these distant relatives of the old "Climax" (who did nothing whatever to create the demand for lawn-mowers), are anxious and willing to send as many machines as the ironmonger desires on sale-or-return terms.

When will the genuine ironmonger stiffen his back against such offers and decline them? When will he support home industries instead of buying foreign lawn-mowers at 10s 6d to 12s 6d apiece net, delivered, all sizes, too, which no English maker of standing can make or cares to make or offer at such a price?



(Chain Tennis, 1890s, as seen at MKM in 2003)

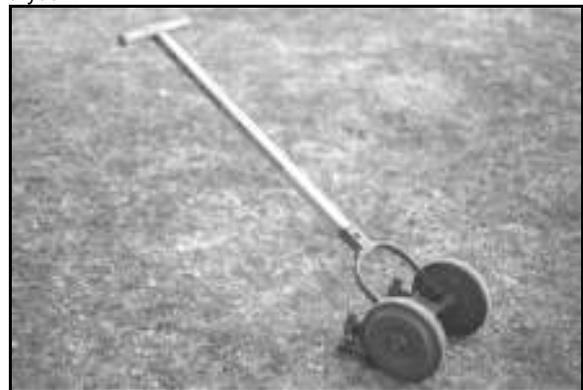
Is not this fact the key to the extraordinary commotion that has taken place amongst ironmongers during the last year or two in connection with lawn-mower prices? One might suppose, from the attention that has been given to the subject, that the sale of lawn-mowers was the high road to every ironmonger's fortune. I wish it were. As a matter of sober fact, however, the total annual sales of lawn mowers in the United Kingdom probably do not now average more than from three to six to every ironmonger. Some years ago the long-discount system of quoting, for example, 40 per cent, plus 10 per cent, plus 5 per cent, and 2½ per cent off the list-price, came over to this country from America, and British lawn mower manufacturers adapted their list-prices of cheap side-driven machines to the wishes of retailers, so that the latter might be able to comply with the demands of the public for a "long discount for cash."



(Chain Tennis advert, *The Ironmonger*, 1902)

The British makers took the short cut; they either allowed a long discount off the list or else they charged net prices as an equivalent, still retaining the old list-prices - that is to say, a machine which listed at 30s was sold to the retailer for 15s less a cash discount of 5 per cent, or net 14s 3d. The price charged to the public was anything between 14s 3d and 30s and I therefore maintain that the list-price of 30s was altogether a fictitious one. In 1900 our firm made an honest endeavour to rectify this anomaly, and altered their list-price to 20s for which we received the thanks of members of the trade from all parts of the country. Latterly, however, it has appeared as though the step taken by us a year ago had drawn the attention of the so-called Lawn-mower Combine to the fact that the 30s rate could no longer be maintained, and they thereupon reduced their list-price to 24s. But the price of the old "Standard" machines of the roller-and-chain type had remained undisturbed for thirty years. The ironmongers' associations wanted to take off 15 per cent for cash from all lawn-mowers, so the "Combine" decided to advance the price of "Standard" machines. For example, the 12-inch machines formerly listing at £4 10s were to be raised to £4 17s 6d, and others pro rata, not because they were worth any more or because it was intended to make the public pay the advanced sum, but simply to bring them under one uniform list which should allow "15 per cent for cash" to the ultimate buyer.

Time will show whether the principle underlying this move is a sound one. In my opinion it is not, and for that reason my firm declined to sign the Combine agreement. We have, however, in conformity with the wishes of many customers, rearranged our prices this year in the same manner as the other lawn mower makers who are signatories of the Combine, and it goes without saying that we shall do our utmost to maintain fair and equitable selling-prices at our goods, and to check underselling by every means in our power. I am in full sympathy with every legitimate and well-directed effort to improve and dignify the ironmongery trade in its best sense, and to raise it again to the proud position which it occupied in the early part of last century. I still believe, however, that before long we shall return to a more healthy and less superficial system of trading when a buyer, whatever shop he may enter, will find that his ready cash is not worth more than a 5 per-cent discount and, further, that pressure on his part will not make an atom at difference. The honest Yorkshireman's motto is a good one: "Tha can take it or leave it, please thysen!"



(Follows & Bate "Croquet", 1883, Hall & Duck Trust)

Note: This is the second part of an article from "The Ironmonger" of 30 March 1901. The first part appeared in the previous Grassbox.

## AUCTION REPORT: CHEFFINS PRICES

The Cheffins sale on 25 October was disappointing for anyone wanting to bolster their collection. Few mowers of any note were on sale which was a pity but at least it was a good day out and an opportunity to meet up with other collectors and friends. One or two lots were withdrawn just prior to the sale and this was disappointing for anyone who had travelled specifically to see them or bid. The format of the listing here is lot number followed by the description and hammer price. Added to this is the auctioneer's commission and, in one or two cases, VAT so each lot in effect cost upwards of 10% more than the figures given here.



89: Collection of lawnmower manuals and advertising leaflets including Greens, Teagle, Barford JP, Royal Enfield, Hayter, Allen etc. (£110)

90: Garden machinery manuals including Wolseley, Clifford, Graveley, Barford, Howard etc. (£80)

426: 1864 Gardeners Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette first 18 issues published (full page adverts of early lawnmowers) (£150)

990: Webb child's hand mower (£30)

1601: A lawn mower sign (A.W.Gamage Holborn Britisher (Unknown)

2135: Ransome Ace hand mower, original condition (£15).

2136: 16" Ransome Certes hand mower, original condition, with new grass box (£20).

2137: Lloyds motor mower with box (£52).

2138: 20" JP motor mower, 1960s/70s, in restored condition with sharpened removable cylinder (£20).

2169: 9" Ransomes "Lion" hand mower, repainted (£28).

2177: 12" Green's Greenson hand mower, rusty with broken nameplate (above)(£55).

2180: Three Atco cylinder mowers c/w boxes (£10).

2181: A pallet of Qualcast cylinder mowers c/w boxes (£8).

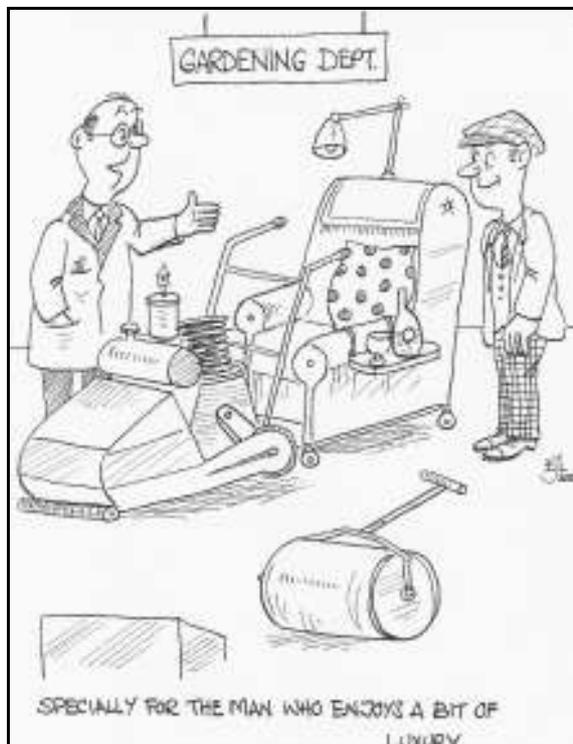
2189: 36" Dennis with box, 40s/50s original condition (£12).

2190: Allen Scythe (£40).

2193: 17" Atco kick start with grass box (£5).



This advertisement for the Qualcast B1 dates from 1950 and looks to be from the first year of production. The price is roughly £4.66 (including the purchase tax) in decimal.



## CAST IRON SEATS AND NAMEPLATES

At a recent steam rally auction, writes Tony Hopwood, I saw an early restored Dennis trailer seat in the lines of objects for sale. It had no seat pan which had probably gone to a cast iron seat collector. At the moment, a cast iron Dennis seat pan is probably worth more than a complete mower so it is no surprise that they are sold separately to make up the displays of seats at rallies. A really rare cast iron seat can be worth hundreds. The same goes for the cast nameplates off early mowers. If collectors aren't willing to pay up for complete mowers then the breakers move in. This has long been the case with old books. For example, a complete mid 19th century Barclay's Dictionary with clean county map plates will be sold purely for the plates which are then filleted out and framed to be sold in antique shops for many times the price of the original book. Mower collectors beware. The virus is spreading because cast name plates and seats don't take up much space and can be hung on the wall so there are many more potential buyers.

## TOP TIPS

A tricky problem during restorations is how to handle something covered in paint. One good solution is to make some wire hooks out of old coat hangers. Simply cut the wire into various lengths (four inches or longer) and bend the last inch over to create elongated S or Z shaped hooks. Components can then be hung on the hook and held in one hand while you brush with the other and paint the whole thing in one go. Afterwards they can be hung up and left to dry. I hang parts on the cross bars of other mowers but hooks on shelving or the side of the workbench or string hanging from the ceiling are just as good.

**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](mailto:olc@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk) or the web at: <http://www.oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk>

**Next Edition: Mar 2004**

Edition 47 - Dec 2003

Edited/written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton