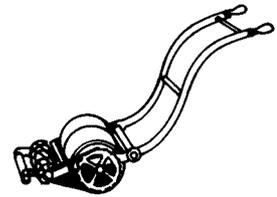


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 50

Autumn 2004

FIFTY NOT OUT - AND COUNTING!

When I formed the club back in the late 1980s I didn't think about producing five copies of our newsletter let alone fifty. But here we are with our "golden" edition and haven't the years gone by so quickly? Over the years we've been able to increase the quality of the Grassbox and this has been due in no small part to changes in technology. For example, the first editions were produced by printing out strips of text on a very expensive laser printer and sticking them onto larger "layout" sheets with a few very basic images in between. The pages were then copied on an office photocopier. We gradually introduced better images but it was only after I managed to get a scanner (GB19 onwards) that it became easier to produce photographs. Today it's all done on computer - text, images, mailing labels, advert lists, the lot - which makes everything a bit easier although it still takes plenty of time. In fact most of the time goes into collecting the information in the first place. Technology hasn't really helped here because it's now so easy for people to contact the club. Even five years ago hardly anyone contacted us by email but now the majority of adverts come to me by the web. On top of which I still have to check and reply to letters, phone calls and surreptitious pieces of paper handed to me at all sorts of events. It can be a bit of a nightmare making sure that everything is included and I do get it wrong sometimes.

One thing that hasn't changed over the years is the need to stuff everything into the envelopes once the printer has finished. Back then of course we only had a handful of members but GB50 is going out to well around 450 people and this all takes time. Plus all the inserts of course.

One major improvement over the years has been the input from other people in the club and this edition is no exception. In fact, I reckon this one has more pieces from different people than any of the previous 49. Many thanks to all of you who have written or contributed over the years.

Incidentally, 2005 will mark the 15th anniversary of the Club's first proper Annual Rally so let's try and make it a really big deal next May.

As usual I'm running a bit late with this newsletter so there may not be another one before Christmas and New Year. In which case, season's greetings to everyone and thanks for helping make for great mowing in 2004.



Jim Ricci found this image taken at Ransomes, probably in the 1960s or early 1970s by the look of the clothing. The mower in the front is the "Budding" style mower made by Ransomes from 1832 that was displayed in the foyer of the Ipswich factory for many years and which was most recently seen at the museum in Stowmarket. Jim wonders if anyone knows more about the picture.



Chris Thompson sent this postcard showing a Ransomes motor mower from around 1905. The mower is almost identical to the one from the Hall & Duck Trust that has been to many club events over the years.

NEW MOWER VIDEOS & DVD

Lawnmower World is a new video (and DVD) all about the history of the lawn mower produced by the British Lawnmower Museum in Southport. The video is presented by Brian Radam (an OLC member of course) who is the founder and curator of the museum. It features many of the machines at the museum and images and footage showing mowers in action over the years. Brian and his colleagues produced some new scenes to show some of the machines working, including a pony mower and an old motor mower. There is a section on mower restorations undertaken by the museum and a bit about lawn mower racing that has some shots of Brian riding one of the fastest mowers in the world! The video lasts approximately 20 minutes and is an ideal introduction to the subject for newcomers while providing something a bit different for the experienced collector. I certainly enjoyed it and I suspect many others will too. Costs are £9.99 (video) and £12.99 (DVD). Both can be ordered through the Old Lawnmower Club at the usual address or direct from the British Lawnmower Museum on 01704 501336 (info@lawnmowerworld.com). Details on the advertisement sheet.



This pair of Ransomes mowers was seen at Knowl Hill Rally. The one in front is Tim Durant's Anglo Paris and the one at the back is Colin Stone's New Paris. They are similar but not quite the same. For example, the New Paris has very bulbous wheels.

DIARY DATES 2005

Milton Keynes Museum: Saturday 14/Sunday 15 May. Our Club's Annual Rally at the usual venue. As always the AGM will be on the Sunday morning. Details from Keith Wootton (see back page).

Banbury Steam Rally: Saturday 25/Sunday 26 June. Details from Robbie (see back page).

Tilford 2005: Saturday 2/Sunday 3 July. A return to the popular venue of the "Old Kiln Museum". Details from Colin Stone. T: 01428 604003 E: colin-stone@tiscali.co.uk.

Bedford Steam Fayre: Saturday 17/Sunday 18 September. Details from Dick Hardwick. T: 01462 816018 E: Hadw2@aol.com

Do you organise or attend an event where mowers are welcome? Send us the details and we will include it in future editions.

MALVERN 2004

Another fine show with good weather despite an hour of rain on Saturday where the tent proved its worth, writes Tony Hopwood.

There was a wide cross section of machines on show from spanning a hundred years from 1860. Star of the show was a 1929 Ideal. Brought by Andrew Hall and Michael Duck which was much coveted by the stationary engine exhibitors along the way. The drive belt shrank in the damp on Saturday so we had to wait until the sun on Sunday to test it on the mowing area. Their collection of Victorian border mowers created a lot of interest because they seemed so tiny.

The Williams families brought their Shays and Tarpen cable drive accessories and brightened up the Saturday with their bright colours and superb display of Tilley lamps and heaters which proved comforting in the cool damp wind.

Andrew Grout showed a fine selection of early push mowers and a 1926 Mk4 Ransomes motor mower which defied the proposed smoking ban in public places as it burned off the excess oil in the sump in the mower area. Alec Hillyar and Keith Wootton brought a range of push mowers, one of which showed how well a sidewheel machine could cut in the mowing area. Paul Channon also supplied sidewheel mowers including a Husqvarna which had a definite minimalist appeal. Dave and Brenda Stanford had assorted mowers and a two man chain saw which would have been a real handful when used. Tony Hopwood brought his 80 year old Dennis FE which was driven by "Skelly" a medical skeleton which generated puns like "bone idle" and "worked his fingers to the bone".

Highlight of the show was playtime on a perfect Sunday afternoon on the dedicated grass area. Here the Ideal proved easy to drive despite its weight, and formation mowing was demonstrated by Andy Hall and Michael Duck on the Record, Tony Hopwood's 1946 Dennis, Andrew Grout's Ransomes which laid a smoke trail, Keith's sidewheel push mower (which didn't). Tony Hopwood's Anzani Lawnrider sulked on the sidelines with a blocked carburettor after running the day before. Thanks to all.



The Shanks Lynx, centre, was designed for golf greens and similar surfaces. This 1930s example was displayed at Milton Keynes this year by Christopher Proudfoot.

BEDFORDSHIRE STEAM FAYRE

By Dick Hardwick

Held once again in the grounds of Shuttleworth house the Old Lawnmower Club display at this event was well supported by 'local' members – if you call a 70 miles or so drive, local. The weather turned out fine despite a fairly wet week beforehand though the ground didn't get soft enough to be a problem.



The regular stalwarts of our display welcomed a couple of members attending for the first time – Richard Durrant from Ware, an Atco buff – not to be confused with Tim Durant from Bucks – and Martin Byrne from Leicester who is 'well into' JP mowers. Kevin Phillips, better known for his horticultural equipment, vintage tractor and leather bush hat interests found his 'inner self' at last and turned up with an unrestored, but very presentable Ransomes Mk.4 to show. It was great to have Charlie Crouchman back with us again, having resolved the health and family commitment problems that kept him away last year.

One of the nice things about being part of a club display at an event like this is that all exhibitors don't have to be present for all of the time. This means that if you can only attend for one day, it's OK and when you are there you can have time off to tour the site. It also means that the display changes a bit too, as it did when 'Robbie' and Wilma Robinson, who came on Saturday could only stay for the day because of his motor cycle meeting on Sunday. It's a shame when events clash, especially since if they clash one year they usually clash every year, but such is life.

Roger Wilkinson and Helen were around too on Sunday, but Roger was probably 'out and about' on his impeccably restored ride-on Dennis. What a wonderful advert this is for the club. I cherish a dream of an OLC main ring parade of ride-on and motor mowers, but the ring is still dominated by steam engines, tractors and classic cars. Maybe, next year though we should aim to run more of our mowers – it's amazing what size of crowd gathers, so quickly at the sound of a mower engine running, especially if it is a Dennis Blackburn engine with its characteristic long stroke, 'thud'.

The photo shows part of the display, including (second from right, next to the Ransomes Conquest) an interesting little push JP Minor that Martin Faulkner recently 'found'. Alan Hardwick reckoned that we had, on average about 57 mowers on display and not all small, push mowers either.

The date for next year is September 17th & 18th so if you haven't exhibited here before why not plan to join us? You can check out show details, location etc at <http://www.bseps.org.uk>

It's great to chat among friends, take in the atmosphere (dust and smoke!) enjoy our barbecue and later on the beer tent with its music. Then there is the waiting in anticipation for a mower 'find' to be offered to us by 'Joe Public'. This year was a bit of a let down on that front ... only a couple of Multum-in-Parvos and the Budding we were offered had so much chipped paintwork we took it straight to the scrap yard!!

JP MODEL CHRONOLOGY

Following his comprehensive articles on the numbering of JP mowers Henry Ellis has produced this handy summary of the years of manufacture for all of the known models made by the Leicester company. Henry says that the dates have been gathered from brochures, advertisements and serial number data. It is not clear how much lawnmower production there was during World War 2 when JP Engineering was heavily involved in Rolls-Royce aero engine manufacture. The fact that ironmongers' catalogues in summer 1940 listed the full range could mean available stock rather than continuing manufacture. Henry has so far recorded only one mower that has a wartime year-letter code. Henry is continuing his research and will be pleased to speak with anyone with a JP mower who has not yet provided him with details. Years followed by a "?" indicate the earliest (or latest) so far found.

Hand Mowers

12" Super	1921-1960
14" Super	1937-1955
16" Super	1921-1960
16" Super (Bowling and Golf Green)	1930?-1963
(12" and 14" versions of the Bowling and Golf Green model also available)	
9" Minor (double helix cutter)	1930-1940
11" Minor (double helix cutter)	1934-1940
11" Minor	1948-1950
11" Minor Mark 2	1950-1961
12" Major	1936-1940
12" Maxees (centre adjuster)	1938-1940
12" Maxees	1946-1952
12" Maxees Mark 2	1952-1956
12" Maxees 12	1956-1961
14" Maxees 14	1956-1961
12"/14" Maxees Mark 3	1961-1971
(Electric and petrol engine version - and conversion - available 1957-1963)	
10"/12" Matchless (sidewheel)	1948-1949
12"/14" Monarch	1949-1957
10"/12" Minimower	1961-1971
16" Sports Green	1964-1967

The photo shows the JP Maxees Mk3 and illustrates how the cutting unit can be lifted out without undoing any of the main frame components. This was a feature of JP machines for many years and modern manufacturers have only recently started to use the same ideas.



Power Mowers (Petrol)

16" Super Power	1921?-1940
24" Super Power	1921?-1939
14"/16" Super Simplex	1948-1955
17"/20" Super Mark 4	1955-1961
15" Super Mark 4	1956-1961
14" K-Type	1957-1959?
17"/20" Super Mark 5	1962-1969
15" Super Mark 5	1962-1966
17"/20" Super Mark 5 B	1968-1971
24" Super Mark 5 B	1968-1971
14"/16" Sunbeam	1963
(name change to Simplexes)	
14"/16" Simplexes	1964-1970
14"/16" Simplexes B	1970-1971

Power Mowers (Electric)

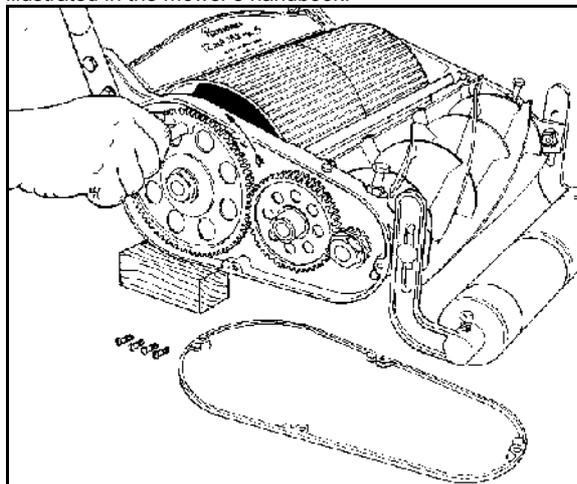
12" Super Electric	1948-1955
14" Super Electric	1948-1957
16" Super Electric	1948-1958
14" K-Type	1957-1962

Gang Mower Units

20" A15 and Rough Cut Tractor Unit	1951-1953
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A BIT MORE ABOUT BACKLAPPING

I was interested to read Richard Jones' article on this subject, writes Nigel Lockyer. The Ransomes Ajax MK 5, and probably other Ransomes, has a tool kit which includes a rod which is screwed into the main land-roll drive gear to form a handle. This is then used to turn the gear for backlapping purposes. There is no need to dismantle anything, other than to remove the gear case cover. The side frames are supported on a couple of blocks (not included) to enable the land rolls to turn freely. This is illustrated in the mower's handbook.



This set of Greens Utility sidewheels was displayed at Milton Keynes by Stan and Jonathan Hardwick. The Utility was produced in 10", 12" and 14" versions, each of which is shown here, during the 1930s. Prices in 1935 ranged from £1-11-6 to £1-17-6. As always grass box and deflector plates were extra. We don't see many of these machines at rallies but I am sure there are lots of people out there with them. As a general rule there seem to be fewer Greens sidewheel mowers than, say, contemporary examples from Ransomes and Shanks.



Atco produced a 12" hand mower during the 1960s. This photograph was taken in 1964 and was used in the company's publicity shots. We suspect the shoes weren't very practical though...

REVELATION

I'm a new boy, having only just acquired a 17" Ransomes, believed pre-war, and joined the club, writes Ken Stevens. So there's a lot to learn and I've been looking for the books mentioned on the club's website. With a few hours to kill across in Stroud, having dropped my daughter off for a job interview, a browse in a secondhand bookshop produced a copy of the Shire Album "Old Lawn Mowers". Later on, reading it in the firm's car park, I noted on page 3:

"...The idea of a machine to cut grass was conceived at Stroud in Gloucestershire around 1830..."

Hey, I was in Stroud just now, thought I. Pity I hadn't then known about the vintage lawnmowers mentioned in subsequent pages as being in Stroud Museum.

"...A freelance engineer, Edwin Beard Budding worked for various local mill owners and the idea of cutting grass with a cylindrical cutter probably came to him after seeing a rotary cutter designed to cut the knap off wool cloth at Brimscombe Mill..."

Raising my gaze in astonishment, there was Brimscombe Mill, latterly converted into modern offices, the very building in which Astrid was being interviewed at that moment. Ah, who could have thought it possible to have a quasi-religious experience in respect of mechanical grass-cutting aids! Perhaps this was a slight variation of Psalm 121: "I lift mine eyes unto the mill, from whence cometh my help"? I would have liked to finish this revelatory tale by saying how I then returned home to find that the Ransome's Villiers engine had miraculously recovered its vanished spark. But unfortunately...



Future (or should we say current) museum pieces on display at Milton Keynes in May included these solar powered and robotic mowers brought by Brian Radam of the British Lawnmower Museum. These mowers are already "out of date" despite being less than 10 years old.



Just thought you might like to see this monster which I acquired a few weeks ago, writes Chris Stoneman. It's a Ransomes 42" ride-on from the 1920/30s powered by a two cylinder Alfa engine (we think), water cooled. The engine is complete with carb, mag and even its starting handle! A few bits are missing - can you work out what they are? I have now purchased a Ransomes cast iron seat at Dorset steam fair. I hope to restore the machine if I can find a cutting cylinder and other bits and bobs. I will make a new grass box myself from copies taken from other machines.

TOP TIPS

Recycle fruit and vegetable trays from local shops to hold bits from each mower under restoration. Being made of thick cardboard they can be labelled with a marker and when the job is finished can be used to light bonfires if they are too oily for further use. They fit neatly onto shelves and can even be stacked if you standardise. Lettuce or tomato trays are best but should be lined to stop small parts falling through the ventilation holes. The bigger fruit trays are useful for storing and supporting larger light parts such as cowlings and grass deflectors during cleaning and painting. Another good wheeze is to cut plastic milk containers in half and use the, lower half for holding small bits or cleaning oily parts. The tops make good disposable funnels for draining ancient oil and crud from engines.



I think it goes there, or is it there! Keith Wootton and Richard Dent investigate Richard's Atco Motor Mower at Milton Keynes with a view to replacing the petrol tank!

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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Edited & written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton