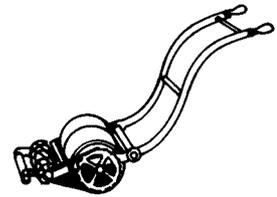


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 52

Spring 2005

LET'S GET READY TO RALLY

The period around Easter is always a busy time for me and the others who run the Club. There is usually a Grassbox to prepare and send out, the third party insurance certificates to issue and, most important of all perhaps, plans for our Annual Rally to be finalised. Although the event is in the middle of May most of the preparatory work is done during March and April. So over the next few weeks we'll be getting ready for the big weekend on 14/15 May.

This year is another of those big anniversaries because it's the fifteenth anniversary of the first "annual" rally. Back in 1990 none of us had any idea we would be starting on such a long trail but here we are still going strong, hopefully bigger and better than we were back then. Some of us will have been to every one of the previous events but don't let that put you off if this is going to be your first time - you will be very welcome and there will be plenty to see and do over the whole weekend. So if you haven't been before, do come along and see what all the fuss is about. There's more information on the advert sheet and I hope as many members as possible can be there to make it special.

We have also been working behind the scenes on some other goodies for everyone to enjoy. In particular, we now have more new transfers available. These include JP Maxees (four designs), JP Minor, Folbate, Webb Wizard, and late series Suffolk Punch and Colt. Some of these are available now and the rest should be ready within the next month or so and all will be on sale at MKM in May. We are also close to having a range of Royal Crests for Atco, Ransomes and Hayter mowers available. Details on the advert sheet.

Finally, thanks again to everyone who has helped or contributed to this edition.



It's a winter meet with a difference. Jim Ricci (left) welcomed Brian Zenobi (right) recently for a bit of wheeling and dealing in the snow. The "difference" is that they're in the USA, with Jim based in Massachusetts and Brian in Ohio. It's around 500 miles (800km) and takes around 12 hours by car between the two. The mower on the pick-up is a 1930s Ideal Model V and the motor in the box is off a Worthington Overgreen (basically the US version of the Ransomes Overgreen).



He was better known as the leader of the British Army during the second world war but Field Marshall Montgomery managed to find some time in the garden during the 1950s with his Atco motor mower. The photo was spotted by Roy Mitchell.

SPACE FILLING CLUB FACTS

When I wrote the first Grassbox in 1991 I nearly called it "Clippings". The first edition to include adverts was GB2 which had six mowers on offer. In the last edition there were over 80. GB1 was sent to a "massive" circulation of 30 members. This one is going to the somewhat larger number of 430. The first edition had no photos, only photocopies of line drawings. Modern technology makes things easier and this edition, like every one since GB18, has been produced entirely on PC. Each edition contains between 2500 and 3500 words, depending on the number of images.



This postcard showing Old Wanstead Church around 100 years ago includes a fine looking gentleman complete with white beard using a sidewheel mower. It is quite difficult to spot the precise model - even on the original card - but from the shape of the box it looks like a Pennsylvania.

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).

The Norfolk Rally, Hoveton Hall*: Saturday 21/Sunday 22 May: Details from Gerald Anderson. T: 01362 687377.

Big Wheels Weekend, Farming World, Faversham: Saturday 18/Sunday 19 June. All mowers welcome. Details from Neil Lawrence. T: 01843 845546.

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

Arley Hall & Gardens, Cheshire*: Saturday 25/Sunday 26 June. Details from Judy Popley. T: 01565 777353 (Cheshire).

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.

Wolds Vintage Group 3rd Annual Rally*: Saturday 30/Sunday 31 July. Details from MJ Pennock. T: 01723 890845.

Farming & Country Festival, Farming World, Faversham: A great day of country fun, one of the biggest vintage events in Kent. All mowers welcome. Details from Neil Lawrence. T: 01843 845546.

17th Orilwyn Teifi Vintage Show, Carmarthen*: Friday 26-Monday 29 August. Details from Derek Davies. T: 01559 370885 (Carmarthen).

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

*Events marked * are not club events or are not organised by club members. Do you organise or attend an event where mowers are welcome? Send us the details and we will include it in future editions.*



Brian Radam sent in this shot showing a women wearing a coat made from a large piece of turf. I'm tempted to add some puns but I'd better not! Perhaps someone else is more daring than I, in which case I am sure we can offer a small token for the best caption received before 1 May (to Keith at the usual places please).

CHEFFINS ANYONE?

This Grassbox should be with you well before the forthcoming Cheffins vintage sale at its Sutton Sale Rooms. As always there will be a strong contingent of club members in attendance, some buying, some not, so why not come along and join in the fun. It's a great day out and an ideal chance to blow off the Winter cobwebs and meet a load of other collectors. It's on Saturday 23 April. As always, a group of us will be retiring to the Prince of Wales pub in nearby Bluntisham as soon as the novelty of the auction wears off or we run out of money!



Colin Stone found this advert for a Coldwell motor mower from 1917. The mower was available in the US although it's unlikely that many women wearing long flowing dresses ever drove them!

TOP TIP

Rust is always a problem when you are working on a "back to the metal" restoration. There's no substitute for a bit of elbow grease although a couple of ideas received from vintage machinery enthusiasts overseas (not that that has much to do with it) might be worth a try. First, try mixing one part molasses with ten parts water and immersing the rusty object in the resulting liquor for a couple of weeks. Apparently the rust just washes right off. Second, for seized and rusted nuts and bolts, soak the offending items in water until they are free. Once the parts are separated spread a small amount of oil on them while they are still damp and allow it to spread over the whole surface. Neither idea sounds like it should work but according to the people who sent them in they really do make a difference.



The latest mower to emerge from the Hall & Duck Trust, er, stable is this 30" Ransomes gear drive horse mower from 1909. The five spiral spokes on the gear make it rather attractive I think.

NEW CORRUGATED GRASS BOX

By Jim Ricci

During one of my visits to the UK from Massachusetts in the USA I was lucky enough to find a small Greens Silens Messor. The box was missing but I reckoned I could make one from scratch using a bit of ingenuity and some help from fellow collectors.



The Silens Messor box is very basic. Two wooden sides support a metal skin and there are some simple brackets to mount the box on the mower. The only problem is that the skin is made from metal with narrow corrugations.

I decided that the corrugated metal could be made from thin sheet steel using my press and special jig. Luckily I knew what the metal looked like because I had taken notes and measurements during a visit to the UK when viewing the mowers at Trerice in Cornwall and at the Hall & Duck Trust in Somerset.



A TRICKY PROBLEM

Christopher Proudfoot came up with an interesting little conundrum earlier this year. Can anyone, Christopher wonders, produce a list of mowers from 5 to 22 inch cutting width, one for each size, naming the make and model without duplicating? There's no right answer but there must be lots of "correct" combinations. We'll award a prize for the best list sent to Keith at the usual address before 1 May.

CLIPPING ONE

Robert Heinbaugh from Plainville, Ohio, USA was the first person to be shot by a lawn mower. Apparently he ran over a bullet and shot himself!

The first job was to make a die from a piece of hardwood I found in my workshop. This had three grooves across one end shaped to the correct profile using a router (see below). The idea was to use three long steel rods made from old bolts of the correct diameter to press the steel into the die and create the corrugations.

The steel was cut to the required width before shaping as this avoids the need to trim the final corrugated form which would be much trickier.

Once the jig was ready the steel sheet was placed in the jig so that there was an inch or so protruding from the top end. This section would not become corrugated and could be bent over to enclose a piece of wire and form the top edge of the box during final assembly.

To make the corrugations one of the rods is placed on top of the sheet in the correct position to press down into the first groove in the die. The press is then lowered to make the first impression. The sheet is now moved forward into the second groove. The forward rod locks in the first corrugation while a second rod is used to form a second corrugation. The sheet is advanced again and this time the first and second rods lock it into position as the third does the shaping. This ensures that there is no distortion to the shape and the corrugations remain parallel.



I repeated the process until there was sufficient length of corrugated metal to produce the box. After determining the exact length needed by forming the finished sheet around the wooden sides I "wired" both ends by rolling the ends of the sheet around a thin rod to form a stiffer edge. This was common practice on grass boxes for hand mowers until well into the 20th century.

Before final assembly I drilled holes into every other corrugation to make it easier to nail the sheet onto the wooden sides. Mounting brackets were made by bending some 3/16" x 1" stock. These were screwed to the wooden sides in the appropriate places.

With a lick of paint, a few scratches and grass stains the finished box looks like the examples I saw on my trips to England.

Jim is planning another trip to the UK this May and hopes to be at the Club's annual rally at Milton Keynes.

CLIPPING TWO

Mikhail Kalashnikov, inventor of the AK-47 rifle, said that he was proud of what he had invented but always wished he could have invented something useful like the lawn mower.

ANOTHER TOP TIP

A worn chain on something like a Silens Messor or an Automaton, says Richard Jones, can be improved by undoing one link, turning the chain inside out and re-riveting it back together. The unworn part of the chain will be now running on the sprockets. Surprisingly this does work and will improve the operation of the mower but it is not a cure for a very stretched or worn chain. However, it will almost certainly give you a little more chain adjustment.

BACK FROM THE DEAD (Part 2)

Tony Hopwood

Once the flywheel is off, take the cover off the contact breaker. Contact breakers are very reliable but do require attention on engines that have not run for some time. There are two likely causes of spark failure caused by the contact breaker. First the contacts. They must be clean and close properly. Take out the moving contact and look at the points. After years of use, the contact faces will be pitted and dirty. Early points were made of a platinum alloy and were quite soft, but did not oxidise. Modern points are made of tungsten alloy and much harder, and get a white powdery film if not used. You will find that one point has a hollow and the other a pip caused by transfer of metal by the current during operation. Both points need to be levelled and returned to a flat parallel shiny finish for best results. DO NOT use a coarse file. The best method is a small oilstone or disposable diamond hone as used by dental mechanics, but clean any dust off the contacts afterwards. If they are too worn to refurbish then replace them. The other problem area is the pivot. The contact breaker must open and close crisply each revolution. If the pivot is sticky and tight, then it won't follow the cam and no sparks will appear. This is a problem more often found with rotary magnetos, where the insulating pivot is often a fibre bush, which swells with age and damp. Clean, lubricate and ease the pivot.

On flywheel magnetos, the fibre heel on the contact breaker often wears badly where it runs on the cam inside the flywheel if it is not oiled occasionally. The curved track that results stops the contact arm following the cam properly. This should be filed to leave a peak at the end to run on the cam. If the heel is too worn and the contacts cannot be set to open at least 0.015 inches at the timing point, then a new contact set is needed. One peculiar fault on a contact breaker caused me much trouble to find. The contact button on the end of the arm did not make contact with it although it was firmly rivetted in place. A few taps on the contact with a light hammer against a vice restored continuity.

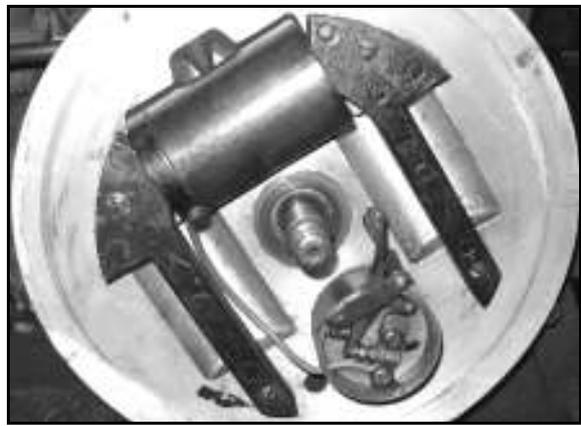
Occasionally, the condenser across the contact breaker shorts out. On a Villiers flywheel magneto it is in the round pot under the contact breaker. To test it, disconnect the wire to the coil and put a piece of card between the contact points.



Geoff Christopher has been a regular at the Annual Rally since the early 1990s. Here he is at another event with a 1920s "square tank" Dennis.

OLD BRIGGS & STRATTON?

Do you have an old mower (or any other machine) with a really old Briggs & Stratton engine? The company is running a competition to find the oldest working example of its engines. B&S only started importing to the UK in the 1960s apparently but I would be surprised if there was not plenty of stuff in the UK from well before then. There's a prize for the oldest they can find. If you have something that might qualify, contact Keith at the Club for more details. If we find anything worth reporting we'll include it in a future edition.



There should be no reading to frame using a multimeter on the 20 Mega ohm range. A better way is to test the insulation with a 500 volt megger. This should also show zero or infinity and also the charge held by the condenser when the megger is turned off. Clockwise rotation can be spun to check the ignition using a half inch electric drill on its slowest speed. Clamp a square head coach screw into the chuck to engage a half inch square drive socket on the flywheel magneto nut. ACW rotation engines can be spun with a reversible electric screwdriver or hand drill. This is the best way to check for sparks at the plug, which should be out but still connected to avoid excessive voltage build up which may kill the coil if there is no safety spark gap. Use lots of lubricating or heating oil to flush out crud from the bore and sump before running the engine.

Now a word of warning. Don't start the engine until you have cleaned out the sump and put fresh oil into the bore and crankcase. Even a short run will destroy rings and bearings if they are dry and gritty.

Ed's Note: Gordon Davenport spotted that the image in the first part of this article showing how to remove the flywheel used a normal spanner and not the "Hammerite" type recommended by Villiers in their operating manuals. These have a box spanner at one end and are solid at the other so that you can hit it. With the correct spanner it is possible to hold the flywheel with one hand and hold a hammer to hit the solid end of the spanner with the other.

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>



If you haven't been to the Annual Rally before and want to spot Robbie and Keith, here they are.

Next Edition: Jul 2005
Edition 52 - Apr 2005
Edited & written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton