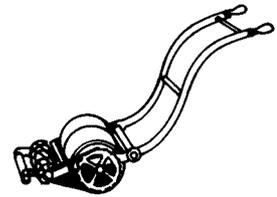


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 53

Summer 2005

500TH MEMBER JOINS

May was a big month for the Club. It was great to have so many members at the Annual Rally for a fantastic weekend with lots of mowers to see, and new and old friends to make and meet. This edition is largely about the event with one or two extra pieces for good measure.

Many of you will have seen the piece about me and the Club in the Daily Telegraph in April. This created a huge amount of interest and led to many new members. In fact, almost 100 people joined between Easter and the Annual Rally. All of which means that during May the number of Members passed 500 for the first time.

I am keeping this "editorial" deliberately short to leave more room for news and pictures of the Annual Rally. There will be more pictures in the next edition. Hopefully if you were not able to make it this year you will be coming along in 2006 to see what all the fuss is about. Dates will be confirmed in a future Grassbox.

Finally, be sure to read the separate advertisement sheet for additional news about the Club. There are lots of potential additions to your collections.



This likely looking bunch are working with what appears to be a Greens pony mower and a Ransomes Patent Chain Automaton.

WHAT'S IT WORTH NOW?

David Lumsden hopes that this formula he devised for calculating the approximate price now for vintage lawn mowers will be amusing to other members:

$$45 \times Y/106 \times P = A$$

45: a constant, the nominal performance of a bond between 1899 and 2005, allowing for inflation (Source: Barclays Capital. It's constant because it's too complicated to take into consideration rates of inflation in different years).

Y: number of years before 2005 that the mower was manufactured.

106: number of years between 1899 and the present.

P: price of the mower when new.

A: approximate price now.

To illustrate the formula, let's see what a Ransomes 30" water cooled Mk3 (as supplied to Buckingham Palace) in 1923 for £185 would now cost:

$$45 \times 82/106 \times 185 = \text{£}6438$$

A reasonable present day comparison is a 36" Ransomes Mastiff heavy duty mower (a current top of the range cylinder mower) for sports grounds and large ornamental gardens, priced £6674. David says he was surprised that the formula works so well.



This mower appears to be a Shanks Caledonia and the photograph dates from just before the first world war.

TOP TIP: FIDDLY BITS

Holding nuts, bolts and other small bits when painting them and while they dry can be a fiddly job. Use old clothes pegs (wooden ones are best) to hold any small item securely while you paint it. When you've finished the peg will sit on the bench and keep the painted bit upright. Alternatively you can hang the pegs out of the way on wire hooks while the bits dry.

MY GYM'S A RANSOMES...

Apparently membership of a gym is a must-have accessory to executive life, writes Tony Hopwood. To counteract the stress of today's business with wall-to-wall meetings and a sedimentary lifestyle boosting the business butt, a way out has been membership of a gym to burn off all those excess cholesterols and cappuccinos.

It's not cheap, with three-figure entry fees and monthly membership bigger than broad band! There is another way to exercise for those with a garden not entirely decked over - GET A PUSH MOWER.

Thousands of push mowers sent to the tip every year as grandpa's shed is cleared out by the next generation, so there's no shortage of machines able to turn a patch of grass to a sward fit for prancing frogs after a bit of TLC.

Think about it - a trim lawn and a trim waistline for free - can't be bad!



It is always good to see older mowers in original condition at our events. This 9" Ransomes Lion, complete with its grass deflector plate and box was seen at the Annual Rally.

DIARY DATES 2005

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 Orllwyn 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

Malvern Autumn Show: Saturday 24/Sunday 25 September. Details from Tony Hopwood. T: 01684 592134 (Upton on Severn).

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.

ANOTHER GREAT ANNUAL RALLY

The Club's 15th Anniversary Rally was held at Milton Keynes Museum on the weekend of 14/15 May. This year saw quite a few first time exhibitors to swell the numbers of those that have been coming for many years. I reckon around 80 members came to the event and we counted nearly 200 mowers on show at one point on the Sunday afternoon which is about as many as we have ever had.



For the first time this year I believe we had two members visiting from overseas. Jim Ricci from the USA and Al Petit from Belgium had both been to the event before but not at the same time. Stewart Baillie flew down from Scotland for the weekend but I would never dare suggest this is overseas even if it is a "foreign" country to the English. Will Grime drove down from The Borders just for the Sunday which was a fair way for just a couple of hours.

Over the years the weekend has developed into three distinct sections. The first of these is the Friday evening when many of the regular die-hards arrive at the Museum to make a full weekend of the event. It's a chance to ease into the weekend with some idle chat, a few drinks and frequent calls to the local pizza delivery service. It's always fun to see if everyone expected manages to make it before the gates are locked!

Steve Smith and Robin Campbell-Coleman both arrived on the Friday evening and spent the whole weekend swapping stories with each other and the other exhibitors.

The real action gets going on the Saturday morning and the wheeling and dealing that forms a major part of the day starts early. It has become a bit of a tradition for members to pounce on incoming vehicles to see what's on board almost before they have stopped. This year was no exception with people such as John D'Agostino, John Barnard and Andrew Grout offering a good selection of hand and motor mowers for sale at reasonable prices. John also sold smaller items including nuts, bolts and washers that are always useful for restorations.

Robbie had a trailer full of mowers when he arrived but managed to go home with just one - a Follows & Bate "Manchester" sidewheel that he'd recently completed restoring having swapped bits with Tony Houghton, who has an identical machine, so that they could get castings made of each other's missing pieces.

Among our regular exhibitors, Stan & Jonathan Hardwick turned up with a selection of Shanks motor mowers, a Jehu and two different Wizards, which they are planning to restore over the coming year.

Although most of the "one dayers" come on the Sunday a growing number of members come just for the Saturday. One of these is Tom Lucas who roars up in his open top Lomax/Citroen kit car. It always looks good parked next to the display.



Henry Ellis and Stewart Baillie (above) spent much of the weekend poring over the JP machines on view to add to the list of serial numbers that Henry has compiled in the past couple of years. Henry also managed to bring a couple of immaculate JPs to display - a Maxeex and a Matchless sidewheel.

Andrew Hall and Michael Duck of the Hall & Duck Trust brought one of the smallest, and definitely the largest, mowers on show. The biggest was a 1909 Ransomes horse mower that Michael had restored over the winter at his workshop in Somerset. The smallest was a 6" Follows & Bate "Croquet" sidewheel dating from the 1870s.

Richard Durrant had a nice selection of Atco motor mowers from the 1920s to 1960s and even managed to add to his collection during the weekend. Charlie Moore brought along an interesting selection of motorised finger bar mowers. This type of machine is seldom seen at the rally but Charlie's display will I am sure have convinced more people to take an interest.

A big part of both days is the chance to have a natter to other members (like Mike Tomkins and Tony Hopwood, below) and look around the Museum. Saturday lunchtime saw the annual "fish and chip fest" by the Museum's mower shed. This was followed by a few pints in the afternoon.



The evening party was followed by discussions well into the night on all things mowery. Andrew Hall had his new laptop and was showing people pictures of mowers from the Hall & Duck Trust collection and elsewhere. Modern technology, don't you just love it?



The Sunday is always the busiest day of the weekend and this year was no exception. The Annual General Meeting was held during the morning and was attended by over 60 members of the club, slightly more than average. Formal business was relatively short with the following people elected to the various positions on the committee: Keith Wootton (Chair), Bernard Robinson (Secretary), Martin Stephenson (Treasurer), John Barnard, Tim Durant, Andrew Grout, Alec Hillyar, Richard Jones, David Sullivan. A summary of the report presented by Keith at the meeting is included on the separate advertisement sheet.

The Charlie Jones Award was this year presented to Chris Thompson. He has been a regular contributor to the club's activities over many years, most notably preparing our popular Directory of Mower Manufacturers and Models (over 150 sold so far) as well writing articles for Grassbox, supplying photos of old mowers, and promoting the club and mower collecting in general around the East of England and further afield.

This year saw the tenth awarding of the Andrew Grout Plate to the owner of the mower selected by the exhibitors as the one they would most like to take home. With three previous "dual winners" there was some speculation that one of these would emerge for the third time to claim the trophy "outright" like the World Cup. But it was not to be as the clear winner was Christopher Proudfoot for his Clipper, a reciprocating blade hand mower made between 1900 and 1910 by the Clipper Lawn Mower in Dixon, Illinois, USA.



Another popular feature of the weekend is the Parts Identification competition. This year the event was won by Peter Hampton (above, left) who correctly identified all six items supplied by Richard Jones (above, right). Peter received a prize for his efforts.

The variety of mowers on show was as good as any previous year and it was good to see many new exhibitors and exhibits.

Tony Houghton displayed a selection of smaller mowers - he normally brings larger motor mowers - including a number of overseas hand machines.

Dusty Miller brought along some of the smaller mowers in his collection - normally he brings a Dennis - which must have made the drive to and from MK a bit easier.

Mike & Pam Tomkins had the largest collection on display during the weekend, slightly easier for them of course because they only have miniature and toy mowers. Plenty to see there and much more than when they first came to our event over ten years ago.

Tony Edwards displayed a selection of Atco booklets covering almost the entire range from the 1920s to the 1960s. Copies of many of these were for sale and Tony did brisk business.

Future restoration projects seem to have been a bit of a theme this year. Chris Stoneman brought along a couple of Ransomes Mk2 motor mowers from the early 1920s and Mark Kearns (below) had a couple of slightly later Ransomes which he also intends to do up soon.



Elsewhere there was the usual smattering of the even more obscure machines. On view on the Sunday was a compact Keynsham motor mower (sorry, I'm not sure who this came with). I was also interested to spot another "Jestimah" hand mower, brought by Martin Seymour, which is only the second one I have seen. It is in fact a Brill made in the 1920s/30s in Germany.



Richard Dent (above) was the first to break with tradition and actually use a mower to cut some grass. Richard's Atco Standard, complete with transfers brought from the club, is often seen at the rally and he spent a bit of time each day running up and down the lawn behind a cloud of smoke! Another regular "runner" is Roger Wilkinson with his early Dennis motor mower that we have featured in many previous editions.

There were loads more members present than I am able to mention in this report. If I have missed anyone this was not deliberate and solely down to me not taking enough notes - mental or otherwise - or having too little time to get photographs of everything present.

DO-IT-YOURSELF RESEARCH!

Some members of the OLC have been researching lawn mower history for years but for the majority the time and cost involved makes it prohibitive. A prime example is patents relating to mowers. Until recently it was necessary to visit a patent library (usually London or a major UK city) for time-consuming research. It was easy with a patent number because you could trace the specific document. But if you didn't have a number or wanted to look for general mower patents the only way was to wade through card indexes to find references and ask the library for the related papers to see if they contained anything interesting.

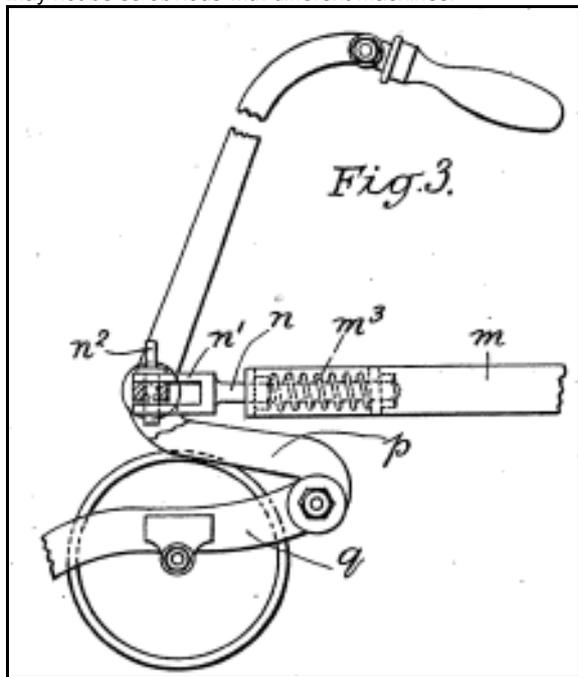
Now there's another way if you have access to the world wide web. Most UK patents from 1900 onwards are now available online for free. The database also has some patents for earlier years (the oldest I found is from 1898) and presumably the older ones are being added.

The service was originally hosted by the UK Patent Office but has recently transferred to an international site at <http://ep.espacenet.com/>. There is a search page where you can enter criteria including the specific patent number, a year, a keyword (such as "mower") and so on.

There is lots of help information but if you are looking for a specific patent number you need to precede it with GB on the search form so that the database knows you are looking for a UK document. I tried it out on a couple of numbers found on my own mowers.

First, patent number 200581 from an MP Mower Pusher. The database brought up a document called "Improvements In Or Connected With Lawnmowers" published on 12 July 1923 and for which the applicant was Herbert John Newton Clare. I was able to click on a link on the page to read all about the patent because the original documents - including full text and images - have been scanned in by the Patent Office.

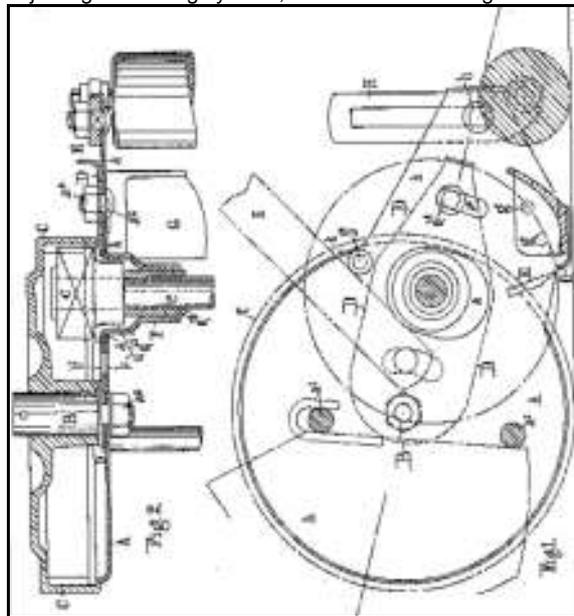
The document showed that some design elements of the Mower Pusher were registered with this patent, giving a reasonable indication of the date of the first machines produced. We know this from other sources of course but it may not be so obvious with different machines.



The patent stated that "This invention for an improved motive power unit for driving lawn mowers and similar implements has for its object to provide a self contained and readily detachable power unit which can be easily applied to existing lawn mowers." In other words it describes the MP and how it works. The image from the original patent (above) shows how the MP attaches to the mower being pushed.

Incidentally, the patent's abstract mentions the "friction drive" version of the Mower Pusher like the rusty example seen at our annual rally in 2004.

The ability of the database to give a guide to a mower's date was particularly useful when I searched for a sidewheel I acquired in 2004. This had "Pontings" on one of its wheels and looked like a basic "catalogue" mower from between 1930 and 1950. The other wheel had "British Made" and the patent numbers 379462 and 389183. The first of these is a patent for "Improvements In Lawn Mowers" dated 1 September 1932 granted to Joseph Mason Fleming and William Henry Barnes. It relates to the design of the sideplates and a new mechanism for adjusting the cutting cylinder, as shown in the image.



The second patent, dated 16 March 1933, is titled "Improvements In The Cutting Cylinders Of Lawn Mowers" and describes a way of attaching the spiders to the shaft.

The two patent applicants had addresses in Cheshire and Manchester and my guess is that they were connected with Follows & Bate. This was subsequently confirmed by posting an email on the Club's "Smartgroup" system to which Christopher Proudfoot replied that the patent numbers are also on Follows & Bate "Magic" sidewheels.

Another advantage of a patent search is that it helps you date a machine. The number can only be included on the mower after it was issued so that gives the earliest possible date. Incidentally, on early USA mowers it was common practice to include the date of the patent on one of the castings, which helps identify the age of the machine and track down the supporting documentation.

At the moment the online system only goes back to just before 1900 but if you are really keen, a CD-ROM is available covering all British patents from 1617 (when the first was granted) to 1889, which is well into mower territory. The CD called "Early British Patents - A Cradle of Inventions" is at <http://finpubs.demonweb.co.uk/patents.htm> but at around £75 it is probably only for those with a serious interest in the inventions of the industrial revolution. There is lots more information about patents and trademarks on the British Library website at www.bl.uk/patents

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>

Next Edition: Oct 2005

Edition 53 - Jun 2005

Edited & written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton