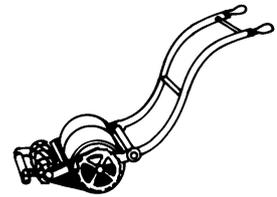


# Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 54

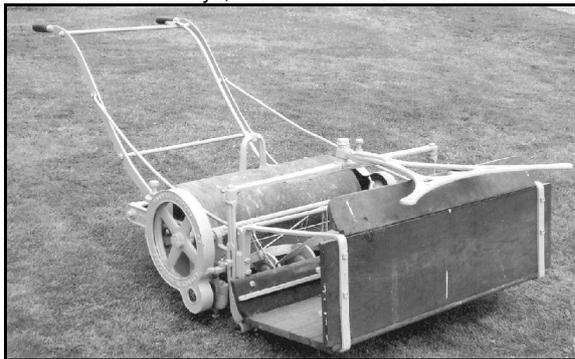
Autumn 2005

## PACKIN' 'EM IN

It seems like ages since the last Grassbox (was it really only June?) and I've been busy with one thing or another (and not just watching the cricket) - a few events, a bit of restoration work and lots of emails, letters and phone calls to deal with.

The large number of new members who have joined the club in the past six months has put a bit of a strain on the way we process applications. In particular, we unexpectedly ran out of some of the booklets we send to new members and I should like to apologise to anyone who was affected by this. I've now put some new ideas into place (especially if you joined on the web) but if you think you may still be missing anything let me know and I will sort it out. It's always good to hear from members in any case.

This edition is crammed with the usual sort of items and there's lots more in the "ad sheet" as well. As I write this I'm not entirely sure how I'm going to fit all the ads and info in but there should be another Grassbox before Christmas so if something's not in this one then it should be in next time. As always, thanks for all the contributions.



Dennis Mitchell of Chester sent in this picture of a newly restored Shanks pony mower residing at the National Trust property Erddig near Wrexham. Dennis says that the team who restored the mower were hoping to demonstrate it for the first time at an event in August but there had been so much rain in the preceding week that the ground was too soft for the horse, even with a new pair of lawn boots.

I was interested to see the mower as one of the restoration team had visited Milton Keynes Museum a couple of years ago to take some measurements of the grass box mechanism on a similar Shanks mower there.

## FORMULA THOUGHTS

David Lumsden's formula (see GB53) would be better described as "what would it be worth now?", writes Tony Hopwood.

It's very interesting to compare prices for items over the last hundred years or so, and David's formula makes sense. Taking a 1924 Dennis mower which cost around £120 then (as much as a small car), and applying a fudge factor of 50 to correct for wage inflation, we get about £6000 today which agrees with David's formula. That's not what it's worth to a collector - so beware. Some household items have remained constant in pound terms since the 1920s with the evolution of technology. Take radios. The price band was from £2.50 to £120 in the mid-1920s which is about the same today! In the 20s you got a set built like a rosewood piano (valves extra) compared to a plastic squawk box full of chips. I remember the days when you could get four gallons of petrol for a pound.



Mark Baigent bought this Ransomes Lawn Edger at a sale last year in very good original condition. It shows perfectly how the machine was used to trim the edge of the lawn overhanging a flower border or vegetable patch.

## TOP TIP: RUST REMOVAL

A member wrote in with a tip for removing rust from old bits of iron. Apparently if you mix one part molasses with ten parts water and immerse the rusty item in it for a week or two the metal will be cleaned miraculously. It's probably something to do with a weak acid that is produced as the molasses ferments in the water. The active ingredient can be bought in farm supply shops (it's mixed with horse feed).



Darren Pidgen, one of our newer members, has recently completed the restoration of this 1960s 12" Atco motor mower. The black and white shot really doesn't do the mower justice and it looks really smart in colour with its new transfers. Darren says that the mower ran for the first time in over 20 years just 15 minutes after this picture was taken. That's what we like to hear!

## DIARY DATES 2005

**Milton Keynes 2006:** Saturday 20/Sunday 21 May 2006. OK, it may be a bit early to mention it but the Annual Rally should be on this weekend, subject to confirmation in the next Grassbox. Might be an idea to put it in diaries now!

**American Museum, Bath:** 27-29 May 2006. A new event is being planned at the famous American Museum in Bath. It's being organized by new Club member Simon Woollen (who works at the museum) with support from Charlie Moore who as well as being in our club is also secretary of the Vintage Horticultural and garden Machinery Club (which will also be exhibiting). Either way, it sounds like a good event at a great venue and well worth supporting. Details in the first instance from Simon on 01225 445696 or by email at [simon.woollen@americanmuseum.org](mailto:simon.woollen@americanmuseum.org)

**Layham Open Garden Day:** 18 June 2006. This event, in a Suffolk village, would like a few old mowers to attend next year. For further details contact Michael Woods on 01473 823798 or by email at [michaelwoods@suffolkonline.net](mailto:michaelwoods@suffolkonline.net) Details of next year's "regular" events in the next edition.

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

## ISLE OF MAN RALLY

The "Mad Sunday" Rally, organised by the Southern Vintage Group, was held on 5 June at Port St Mary on the Isle of Man, writes Bill Galley, the club's only member on the island.

The group encompasses all manner of vintage farm and horticulture enthusiasts and its annual rally is normally held on Mad Sunday, the day between Practice Week and the TT Races. But this year practice was delayed and so coincided with the rally which meant attendances were significantly down.



I took a selection of mowers and cultivators including Suffolk, Atco, Ransomes and Howard. Generally the display created a lot of interest from locals and visitors, so much so that I now have several additions to the collection which should add even more interest next year.

This was my first rally and the exhibits were judged by Peter Kelly, editor of Tractor & Farming Heritage magazine. I was amazed to receive first prize for best collection in the show.

## TOP TIP: NO WINTER BLUES

When you put your mowers into hibernation, don't forget to protect the fuel systems and engine innards, writes Tony Hopwood.

There are two potential problems. When you stop an engine for the winter, always leave it on compression if it's a four stroke or on TDC if it's a two stroke. A squirt of WD40 in the plug hole also helps keep rust at bay. That way you'll not have to deal with stuck valves or pistons in the spring.

Fuel tanks will collect condensation over the winter, so a dose of red diesel in the tank will help stop rust because the wax in diesel will coat the tank. It will also stop the cork seals in "push off" type fuel taps drying out so they won't be incontinent for the first run in the spring.

## TEN YEARS AT BEDFORD

Once again we gathered in the expansive grounds of Shuttleworth House – where the show has been held for the last ten years and at each of which the Old Lawnmower Club has had a presence, writes Dick Hardwick.

Our display "theme" this year was simply to concentrate on displaying working mowers so that the public and ourselves could enjoy the noise, smell and the frustrations too that starting engines can bring - as you see in the picture below (L-R Alec Hillyar, Richard Jones, John Bloxham, Alan Hardwick).

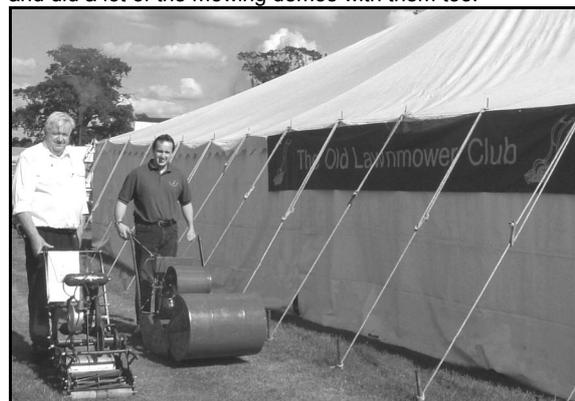


It wasn't exclusively motor mowers. 'Robbie' Robinson brought a nice group of push sidewheel mowers, including his German Brill and a Follows & Bate Manchester, while Charley Crouchman showed a pair of Flexas (12" & 14"), resplendent in their gleaming restored gold finish.

During the year Martin Falconer had uncovered a Greens 24" Silens Messer pony mower in good condition, which he had improved by some careful restoration. All he needs now is a grass box. Any offers of help chaps?

It was nice to be able to display this opposite Andrew Grout's Ransomes 18" Patent Gear Automaton "push me/pull me" to show a range of mower motive power. Andrew had doubled-booked and was spending the weekend off-roading in Belgium, mostly in the bottom of a deep quarry – well that's where he said he was – but he lent us the Automaton, as well as a couple of Anglo-Paris sidewheels, a Ransomes Mk2, and a 24" Atco Standard. We successfully ran the latter machines for him (their first run in about three years) "to blow away the cobwebs".

John Bloxham brought an interesting range of edge trimmers, all powered by the 34cc engine that JAP developed for this purpose. However, even Club members objected to noise and fumes when he started one inside the marquee! Richard Durant - "the Mr. Atco of Ware" (below left with Alan Hardwick) - brought several of the marquee and did a lot of the mowing demos with them too.



Alec Hillyar managed to restore a Royal Blade Deluxe (a relatively modern motor mower) all in the week before the show, but with light blue paint barely dry it wouldn't start. On the other hand, his Atco HY and Richard Jones' dark blue Keynsham fired up immediately.

Next year's show will be a THREE day event to celebrate the Bedford Steam Engine Preservation Society's 50th year. Make a note of the date, 15-17 September, and contact me on 01462 816018 or by email at [Hadw2@aol.com](mailto:Hadw2@aol.com) if you want to come and join us. Bring a mower or two with you so that you can join in the fun. You never know, there may be some wonderful delights to see and play with...mowers I mean of course!!

## JP SUPER GOLF GREEN?

By Henry Ellis

At the Rally in May some discussion arose over a 12" JP Super that showed a number of the characteristics of the Golf Green (GG) or Bowling Green (BG) models and whether this was genuine machine or not. There was a suggestion that it had been made up from a number of other Supers or even from a box of spare parts.

Usually the GG and BG models have a 16" cut but the literature says that these models were also available in 12" versions. 16" GG and BG models have a cast aluminium delivery plate and centre section of the three-part rear roller, a thinner bottom blade and the serial number is prefixed with the letter "A". A nine-blade cylinder cutter and aluminium front rollers were optional extras. Additionally the GG models have the front rollers nearer to the cutting cylinder, this shortens the wheelbase and enables the contours of a golf green to be followed more precisely.

Research back at home revealed that the drive on these models was geared up to produce a faster spinning cylinder cutter and thus more cuts per inch to produce a finer finish. The change in gearing is achieved by putting a sprocket with more teeth than standard on the rear axle driving a sprocket with fewer teeth on the cylinder cutter shaft at the front. On the standard Super the rear sprocket has 18 teeth and the front sprocket 16 teeth; on the GG and BG models the rear has 20 teeth and the front 14 teeth. As the teeth on both sets of sprockets add up to 34, the number of links in the length of the driving chain stays the same (49 links).

This particular 12" Super (WL 37) has the aluminium delivery plate and a nine-blade cutter but none of the other characteristics of the GG and BG models – unfortunately the sprocket teeth were not counted.

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## NEW MAG ON DURABLE DENNIS

I thought I would send in a photo of my 1936 30" Dennis, driven by Bella, my enthusiastic ten year old daughter, writes Bill Jeffries.



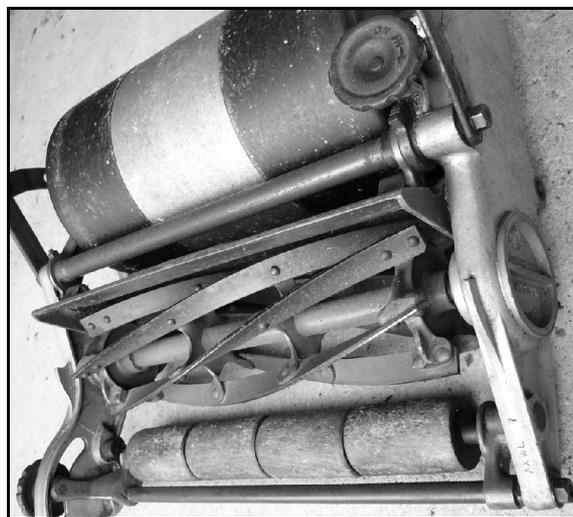
The mower was rescued three years ago from an agricultural breakers yard on the south coast where it had been taken many years ago as part payment for work carried out on a tractor.

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## MORE PRIZES WON!

Dusty Miller reports that a display of mowers he put on at Alresford Show on Saturday 3 September with fellow club members Richard Jones, Colin Stone and Jim (Dusty missed his surname) was awarded first prize for being "Best Vintage Stand". The event is reputed to be one of the largest of its type in the south of England.

I am sure that everyone in the Club would like to congratulate Dusty and the boys and Bill Galley on the Isle of Man (see the other article) for their successes this year. If anyone else has had similar prizes they'd like to tell everyone about let Keith know at the usual addresses and we will be pleased to give you a mention in a future edition. Incidentally, Dusty was also featured on the front cover of the last Farm & Horticultural Equipment magazine which featured a report on the Tilmow event in July. We haven't reported this event in Grassbox because the report in FHEC covered all the bases before we had a chance.



To change the delivery plate from the normal cast-iron to cast aluminium requires dismantling the mower but is relatively easy; changing the sprockets less so and would require detailed knowledge of the specification. So what is it? A genuine GG or BG model; a variation by JP to a special order; a haphazard assembly from a box of parts? If the owner of WL 37 contacts me it would be interesting to find out more about it. Also, if any other member has a Super (including the 14" version) with any of the GG or BG characteristics noted above, I would very much like to hear from them.

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It was seriously embedded in the undergrowth and took a hydraulic lift from an old Ferguson to get it onto the back of a borrowed pickup truck.

Having cleaned it off, it was found to be complete, except for the low tension side of the Wico "A" magneto, which was missing. I replaced this, fitted a new condenser, cleaned the carb and managed to get it running.

For the last two years, it has never run well, been a swine to start and coughed and backfired at the slightest hint of the throttle.

I bought new plugs, stripped down the timing chest to check the valve timing, lapped the valves, but still it seemed to get worse and I couldn't find a solution. Last year, I overhauled the mag again, but still no luck.

One weekend in June, helped by Bella, who by now is an expert at cleaning and gapping plugs, I tried fitting the later magneto from my 1960s Dennis Premier. The mag fitted the retaining holes even though it is a good 30 years younger and after a couple of swings on the handle it burst into life and ran as sweetly as a good Dennis should.

Clearly the original magneto had always had a problem, which I now believe is the coil. This could well have been why it was abandoned all those years ago. I'm now on the lookout for a new coil - any offers?



Seen at Milton Keynes, a 1920s Shanks Firefly with JAP sidevalve engine belonging to Stan & Jonathan Hardwick.

## CATALOGUE MOWERS ON SHOW

This year's Banbury Rally was held on a fairly dreary weekend at the end of June. Our theme this year was "catalogue" mowers, the machines made by one company for sale by another with a different name. This is always an interesting topic for collectors as seemingly quite common machines can occasionally be found with very strange names. It's also a lot of fun trying to spot which mowers were made by which company.



Under Robbie's management the usual suspects were on hand to bring together a reasonably large display of these catalogue machines, mostly sidewheels. As far as we could tell, the following major manufacturers were represented: Follows & Bate (10" Climax British Made, 10" Bhat British Made, 12" Pontings Double Life - see "Patents" article in GB53); Brill (10" Unmarked, 12" Jestimah Foreign); Suffolk (12" Lewis, 12" Lewis Deluxe, 12" Smistol, 10" Gamages No 11 New Champion, 10" British Manufacture); Coldwell (12" Pygmalion Leeds, 8" Closecut, 8" Frankwell); Qualcast (12" Gamages No 7 New Champion, 10" Invincible CWS, 12" Invincible CWS). There was also a number of USA machines of unidentified origin which could probably be categorised as "catalogue" machines, including 10" Corona, 10" Grimsby, 10" Edgbaston and some Beancos.

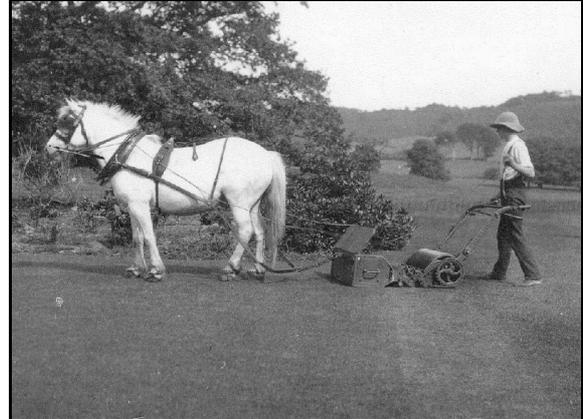
The display wasn't limited to this type of machine and exhibitors including Andrew Grout, Tony Hopwood, Alan & Dick Hardwick, Phillip Dod, and others managed to bring a few bigger beasts. It was especially good to see Phillip's four stroke Atco Standard making its first rally appearance complete with its original transporter trolley (the first I have seen like this) following restoration last year.

## TAKE CARE WITH STARTING HANDLES

A member wrote in with a cautionary tale about how his enthusiasm with a new restoration led to an accident. I won't embarrass him by naming names but the gist of the story is this. He had a new Atco Standard and after cleaning it up he was excited at the prospect of getting it running. I gave him a few pointers and these (may or may not have) helped. When the mower finally fired up the starting handle got stuck in its socket on the end of the intermediate shaft, swung round a few times and hit him hard on the hand. All of which led to a trip to casualty and 10 stitches. The handle didn't have its wooden hand grip and this may have contributed to the damage. The real problem was the handle sticking in the first place. The risk of this might have been alleviated by cleaning the end of the handle and the inside of the socket with some emery paper. In my experience oiling them is not a good idea as the handle tends to slip out too easily and have a similar effect (believe me, this is a mistake I made once too).

## MOWERS IN ACTION

Earlier this year I supplied some information about Rotoscythe mowers to Tom Robertshaw who was restoring one of these machines to display in his lawn mower shop (Robertshaws, Skipton) with two Honda rotary mowers, one from 1986 when the shop opened and a current model, to promote sales. Tom very kindly sent me a couple of images of the restored machine on display and included two very interesting older photographs.



The first shows Tom's grandfather, Jack Wright, using what appears to be a Greens pony mower at Quernmore Park, near Lancaster, just before he joined up to serve in France in 1914. According to Tom, Jack worked on the estate all his working life. The second image shows Jack showing a young Major Garnett (whose family owned the estate) how to use an Atco Motor Mower (it's the oval frame model), around 1933. The Major confirmed the dates to Tom in 2004 shortly before he died.



## MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Thanks to everyone who filled in one of the questionnaires with the membership renewals in June. The response was much bigger than we expected - which meant it took a while to analyse the forms - and the results highlighted a few things to think about. There is a summary of the initial findings on the Ad Sheet and we should also have more details in the next edition. We will use the results to help plan where we take the club in the future. I would like to thank Dick Hardwick for "volunteering" to wade through the forms and for his assessment of the results.

**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>

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