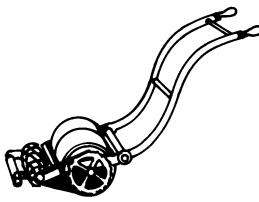


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

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Winter 2005

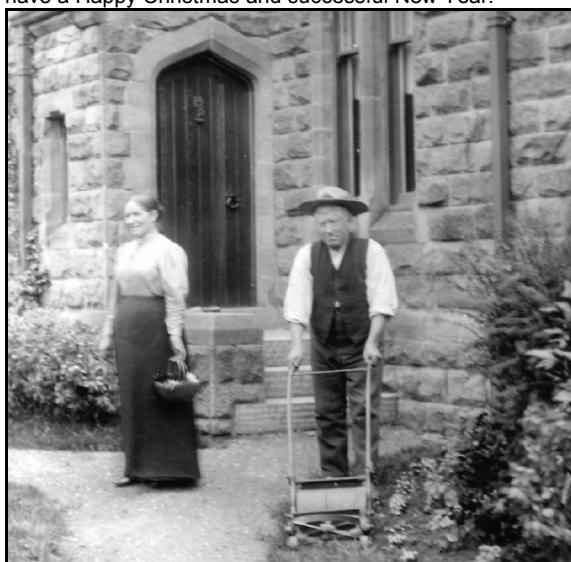
TIME TO CATCH UP

There's a bit of an international theme this time with articles from members (and their families) on four continents. It's all good, interesting stuff and I hope you like it. The annual colour section is also included, as you will see. Like last year I've tried to cram loads of images with the aim of including "something for everyone".

Winter is always a good time to catch up with projects which fall by the wayside during warmer periods. We are planning quite a few new things for 2006 and getting this Grassbox out now may give a bit more time in the first few months of the year to work on these. The downside is that there may not be another Grassbox until March.

One of the projects I have been working on has involved adding more information specifically for members to the website. There's nothing new as such, so don't worry if you cannot see the site, but the idea was to provide electronic versions of recent Grassboxes and our annual directories online for members to download. If we have a record of your email address you should have received an email from me with more about this in early December.

As always I should like to round off the year by thanking everyone who has helped with the club in the past 12 months, especially those of you who have been to events, contributed to the Grassbox or helped in some other way. In fact, just by being a member you are helping the club and I know that many members contribute by helping each other out in all sorts of practical ways. Wherever you may have a Happy Christmas and successful New Year.



Colin Stone found this scene which must date from the late Victorian or early Edwardian period. It's another example of someone posing with their mower and, like a few of them, it's hard to tell precisely which make and model. On the original, which is a bit bigger and clearer, it looks like it could be a model with enclosed gears and front jockey wheels, no roller. A Coldwell or Excelsior perhaps?

TOP TIP: CLEAN CHARACTERS

Cleaning paint or rust from numbers or lettering on castings can be a problem when wire brushes won't get into the awkward places. Use a small electric drill with a metal bit running in reverse and you will be able to clean the nooks and crannies without damaging the castings. Special tools like the "Dremel" are ideal for this too.



This image of a cheerful chappie and his Atco Standard was found by Cliff Laxton. The man is wearing a suit and may be a bit too smart to be mowing the lawn so perhaps he is simply posing for the camera. The mower seems to be one of the earlier models with the wooden tool box and Senspray carb. The building looks impressive too and could be a cricket club or school pavilion. Despite the number of Atco Standards that were made it's fairly unusual to see one in contemporary use (and yes I know we had one in the last issue too).

TOP TIP: PROTECT YOUR MAGS

Bill Jeffries pointed up the need for reliable sparks on any old motor mower, writes Tony Hopwood. Round tank Dennises (post 1927) use Wico magnetos which are very dependable. One problem is the capacitor (condenser) across the contact breaker, which gets leaky and makes the engine difficult to start. It's important that the heat shield is in place between the magneto and exhaust or the electrics will be cooked if the mower is used for serious grass cutting. Wico magneto spares are easily available because Dennis used the same magneto for over 40 years. The problem applies to all rotary magnetos if the capacity across the contact breaker is failing - it should test OK at 500 volts. Symptoms are weak spark and difficulty in starting from cold.



The interesting thing about this photograph, also sent in by Colin Stone, is the striping on the lawn which seems to run both ways across the lawn to make a chequered pattern. The mower is a hand roller model but it is too small to see which model.

DIARY DATES 2006

Whitewebbs Museum, Enfield: Sunday 26 March. John D'Agostino hopes to build on the support given by members earlier this year to make it a great start-of-season event. It's a fantastic venue and easy to get to so why not join in for the day? Details from John on 0208 3510510 (London).

Milton Keynes 2006: Saturday 20/Sunday 21 May 2006. What more to say! It's the biggest weekend of the year for the Club so make a note of the dates now. There will be more about this in the New Year but in the meantime further details can be had from Keith at the usual addresses.

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

Tilmow 06: Saturday 3/Sunday 4 June 2006. It's back for another year, the popular event at the Old Kiln Museum, Surrey. Details from Colin Stone. T: 01428 604003 E: stonethemows@hotmail.co.uk (Hindhead).

Layham Open Garden Day: 18 June. 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

Banbury Steam Rally: Saturday 24/Sunday 25 June. One of longest established events right in the middle of the year! Ever popular. Details from Robbie at the usual addresses.

Wisborough Green Fete, West Sussex: Monday 28 August. Pleasant village fete with five members present in 2005. More for 2006? Details from Jeff Herridge. T: 01403 700599 (Billingshurst).

Alresford Agricultural Show: Saturday 2 September. According to Colin it's "the return of the award winning team" (see GB54). All welcome. Details from Colin Stone. T: 01428 604003 E: stonethemows@hotmail.co.uk (Hindhead).

Bedford Steam Rally: Friday 16-Sunday 18 September. It's getting bigger and better, moving to a three day format. You can come for a day at a time if you like! Details from Dick Hardwick. T: 01462 816018 E: Hadw2@aol.com (Shefford).

Malvern Autumn Show: Saturday / Sunday September. Also bigging it up to three days is our ever-popular end of year get together. Well worth the trip no matter how far you travel. Details from Tony Hopwood. T: 01684 592134 (Upton on Severn).

Do you organise or attend an event where mowers are welcome? Send us details and we'll include it here.

ANOTHER RUST SOLUTION

We've all encountered a rusty situation of some sort, be it a simple nut or bolt, or that well bonded exhaust system, writes Clem Davidson in South Africa.

Your best rust "solvent" is plain old water, and the price can't be beat! Of course, once you've got everything covered with all those oily commercial compounds, you may have to run around the block a few times to burn off the oil, before the water can get into the joint.

Manifold studs, exhaust clamps, flanges, whatever, wet them down good, tap "generously" with a small hammer while keeping thoroughly wet, and you can usually unscrew them with your fingers.

Oil and rust don't mix, but water and rust were made for each other!

For a large connection like that muffler end, soak a strip of rag in water and wrap it around the connection. Let it sit 5 or 10 minutes, tap gently, re-wet, and tap again. Don't dent the pipe though, as that makes it more difficult.

Same with tools. Got any pliers, dykes, needle nose, with rusted joints? Toss them in a bucket of water for an hour or so, and then tap with a small hammer. Keep rinsing and tapping until the joint is clean, _then_ dry and re-oil quickly.

MALVERN AUTUMN SHOW

The great thing about the Malvern Autumn Show is the variety of things to see. If you like real ale, obscure species of apples and pears, fuchsias, proper cheese, giant carrots or massive marrows this is the place for you. Actually these are some of the things I like about it but you get the idea...

It's also one of the shows that has become firmly established on the club calendar thanks to the efforts of Tony Hopwood with support from a growing number of members. Since we first exhibited there in 1999 the number of exhibits and exhibitors has grown significantly. The area we take up has also grown and for the past few years Tony has managed to secure a marquee and roped off area for us to demonstrate our machines. It's a proper show ground so the grass is fair and flat which means this is one of the few shows where we can use the mowers. This year our display was once again alongside the VHGM (the two clubs have lots of members in common of course) and, with the increasing amount vintage machinery, there was a very good all-round display.



Tony had the usual obligatory Dennis on hand but punters seemed more interested in his British Anzani Lawnrider (he's seen above on it with left to right, Alec Hillyar, Andy Grout and John Hammond). Andrew Grout brought some Ransomes and John Hammond was showing some of his recently acquired machines. Among Alec Hillyar's mowers was a newly-restored Qualcast Royal Blade in bright blue finish. Tony Edwards showed some Atcos and Dave & Brenda Stanford had an interesting selection of hand mowers and garden tools. The Williams family brought some of their Rotoscythes and a selection of Tilley lamps. The Skingleys and friends were showing an impressive array of mowers and horticultural equipment. One of the exhibits that interested me was the Ransomes back-lapping frame, complete with a Certes mower. It was good to see this after the articles on the subject in Grassbox over the last year.

It's meant to be a three day event next year which may present additional logistical problems. But I guess we'll deal with them when the time's right...



JIM'S ON THE TELLY!

I missed the annual meeting, writes Margaret McCarthy Ricci, but did I have fun dealing with the household in Jim's absence? I signed him up to do a filming of one segment of a Public Broadcast Station [equivalent of the BBC] new series on gardening. The series is called "Cultivating Life" and features the host discussing various aspects of gardening. The series is to commence in January 2006.



Jim's portion was obviously on lawn mowers and the aspects of modern mowing. The area was Tiverton, Rhode Island, on an expanse of farming land overlooking one of the inlet bays. This is the old and quaint part of New England. The town was founded in 1672 and retains its old sea character. The Cape Cod houses are shingled with a typical type of wood that weathers in the salt air. The houses face south to capture the winter sun and most retain the central fire place. Like England the roads are narrow and wind around corners, shouldered by stone fences. The shops have a village character with a general store and of course churches everywhere. The specific location was a garden centre with rows of plants and greenhouses [glasshouses with plastic glass] with a modest central building.

It was a cool, clear May day, perfect for filming. The first segment of the shoot was a cooking portion featuring a local but upscale style cook. A temporary kitchen arose among the rows of immature trees and flowers. And for lunch--guess what we had!! We ate the beef and veggie left overs from the show supplemented by another cook who is originally from Hobart, Tasmania.

WALTER ON VILLIERS

Walter McLellan, Melbourne, Australia

I would mention that I have been a Villiers enthusiast for 55 years! Oops, my beard is showing!

Firstly, I am aware that Villiers and Atco had a very good relationship. Villiers modified some engines for their use, an example being the 98cc Midget engine that was altered to have a vertical cylinder and flange fitting exhaust. Also postwar was the exclusive-to-Atco 79cc engine. It is interesting that the 1922-introduced Marks VIA & VIC, being 247cc and 147cc respectively, were continued up to about 1930 although the motorcycle equivalents by then had been developed through subsequent mark numbers.

This may have been because the extra power was not needed or perhaps Atco purchased a quantity early in the production. Incidentally, some Atco Standard HY models have a Mark VIC without compression release in the head. From about 1930 Atco used 147cc engines with the carburettor at the rear, engine designated 1½hp. Other makers carried a Mark XIC designation and the motorcycle versions continued to have a forward facing carburettor. The Atco version ran until about 1950.

I have two Excelsior Monarchs, an early one with the breadbin fuel tank (like the one pictured) and the other with a Qualcast like tank above the engine. I discovered the twin port engine in each is a Villiers VID 122cc engine introduced in 1925 for motorcycles but not popular. Perhaps the mower engines were a job lot bought in the early 1930s at an attractive price. It seems production only lasted a short time in the 1920s and a two-port engine was definitely not designed for mower use.

On the Mark 1 Midget engine, as introduced in 1931 for motorcycles, the plug was offset in the head.

She had cooked on ocean yachts whose tour of duty was international ports of call. Those Aussies are nuttier than we Yanks. There is a barbie [barbecue] in every back yard and on every boat. I'll call the back portion a "yard" as there really is no "garden" in that climate.



Jim was featured in discussion with the host on a hill top overlooking one of the bays. He explained his lawnmowers and their function to the audience. He presented several styles of lawnmowers and answered questions on the type. His presentations featured the Monta mower and why it was non-functional followed by a junior kid's lawnmower. At the edger/trimmer discussion I think that the host did not really know how to use it. Included were a green's mower with its grass box and a miniature Webb mower, ending with an old finely painted mower.

The feature was his silver and red horse drawn new improved 30" Coldwell lawnmower. The director had hired a horse from the local area. So please, the Percheron was the only available horse on short notice. His duty is normally summer tourists and weddings. The driver, the host, and Jim were filmed in discussion of the horse boots. The final clip of the segment is supposed to be the horse and driver silhouetted in the setting sun.

Now that this escapade is over, Jim is happy. So in closing, I miss you all, but I shall sent over the film clip for next year.

This allowed a compression release valve on the other side and the fins radiated in a sunburst pattern. I have a late 1930s Qualcast where the engine has vertical head fins and central plug with no aperture for a decomvalve. But adverts in 1939 show the earlier engine! The engine produced for Atco had the latter features from inception...



On the Club website one of the "Mowers of the Month" shows a small Excelsior Monarch with a Midget engine the same as my Qualcast! This engine should not be confused with the postwar Mark 2 Midget with the smaller flywheel magneto. Are Monarch mowers rare in UK? I guess I am asking more questions than providing answers!

(*Editors Note: A few members have Monarchs - I think the one above is Tony Hopwood's - but it's interesting that some more made it all the way to Australia.*)

HOW IT ALL STARTED FOR ME

By Bill Jeffries

I often wonder how many OLC members stumbled into mower ownership completely by chance and how many had as their first machine the ubiquitous Atco Standard.

It was certainly the case for me. I set out one evening with my wife for dinner with friends and by the end of the evening was the owner of something I knew looked interesting, but hadn't a clue what it was.



Despite having lain dormant in the back of a shed for many years, the following day, having cleaned the carb, gapped the plug and points, the unknown thing was running beautifully. This was important, to allay the doubts that I'm sure many wives have expressed when confronted for the first time with this new and worrying turn their husband has taken and the comment "you'll never get that bloody thing going" – "don't know what you wanted that for" etc.

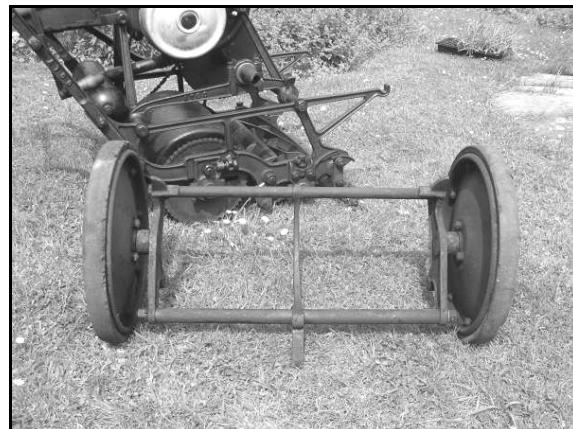
As there were parts missing – cutting cylinder, blade and all the associated bits, I sought help through what at the time I didn't really believe could exist, The Old Lawn Mower Club. I called a certain Robbie Robinson and having described the machine, he very quickly identified it as a 16 inch Atco Standard and to my slight dismay informed me that they were 'two a penny'! He was very helpful and gave me the benefit in that call of all his knowledge on the common Standard and encouraged me to join the club.

This I did and through the Grassbox adverts, located all the missing parts, sourced through one Keith Wootton, who I was soon to learn held esteemed status within the Club!

Well that was all some years ago now and from that one mower a rewarding hobby was spawned, several machines of varying types have been added and many contacts have been made with some genuinely nice people.



Whilst on holiday in Orkney, Andrew Grout found this 10" Shanks Caledonia at the Wonderful Kirkbuster farm museum. Not far from the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Skara Brae and Maes Howe, the museum includes a 16th century farm house and an enchanting Victorian garden. It wasn't clear whether the mower once worked there.



My second Atco Standard also came about by chance. An old lady friend, a one time code breaker at Bletchley Park in her 80's, spotted my machine and mentioned that she thought she had one just like it and if I wished, I could come and have a look.

The following day, I was fighting my way through a lifetime's clutter in an old stable. Underneath it all covered by an old 1960's motorcycle coat, was sure enough a beautifully unrestored 14 inch standard, with 'box and to my delight the original transport wheels.

The mower had been purchased new by her father in about 1927 and was finally pensioned off into the stable in 1960. I decided it was too original to do more than just sort the non-running engine out and clean it up and that's how it has stayed.

As with most old Villiers engines, the reason for not running was electrical and by the evidence of assorted plugs and bits of wire in the toolbox, this was probably why it was abandoned.

A year later, I invited the old lady to come and see the mower running and as I demonstrated it she watched in tears – the last time she saw it in action was 40 years earlier with her father at the handles! It made her day.

So you see, to me the Standard has been something special and despite being 'two a penny' remains a firm favourite.

One question though – why does all the early Atco literature and many restorations depict the machine with various red parts, notably the fan, when both of my machines are completely green, other than the cutting cylinder? I know they were often painted, but the 14inch is totally original. And to start the debate all over again, what is the correct colour green, as my original seems to be much darker than most restorations I have seen?

NEW YEAR RESOLUTION!

We are told to exercise more, but how? The answer may lie in the shed. If you have a small lawn, why not dust off that old push mower? Judging by the number of push mowers going to the tip there must be thousands lying about in garden sheds. Putting an old mower back into use will cost less than joining a gym and provide more productive exercise than mindless pedalling or running on the spot.

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: Mar 2006

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Edited & written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton