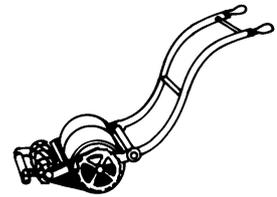


# Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 57

Summer 2006

## IT'S A GRAND CLUB

Just before the Annual Rally in May Robbie emailed to tell me we had recruited our 1000th member. This is quite an achievement for the club and I remember not so long ago (or perhaps it was) writing about our 100th and 500th members. As you probably realise, each new member is given a unique number and this latest milestone is for the 1000th person to join since we started. The current membership is also at an all-time high of over 550 which means that over half of all the people that have ever joined the club are still members, which I think is pretty good. So thanks to all of you for your continued support.

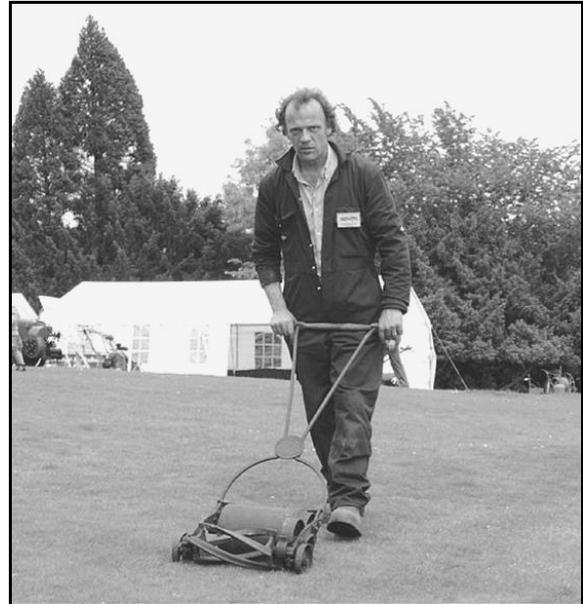
Inside you'll read quite a bit about the Annual Rally which was held at Milton Keynes Museum in May. This was probably our most successful event ever, apart from the weather, depending on how you measure it. There's also news about the club's participation at this year's Great Dorset Steam Fair (come and see our stand).



Here's another entry into our collection of old mower photographs. It's hard to identify the mower this time but it looks like a 1930s model or later judging by the handles.

## ALL CHANGE?

At the AGM during the Rally weekend I announced that I would like to take on a different role within the club in a couple of years. Having founded and run the club for 16 years (and counting) I see this as an opportunity to bring new people into the organisation of our club so that I can spend time on new ideas that will help the club evolve in the future. Don't panic just yet! You probably won't see any dramatic changes immediately but over the next year to eighteen months I will be working towards reducing my own workload and broadening the active base of the club. I hope that members will recognise that this presents some challenges but also opportunities for us all and that it will be good for the long term future of the club. It is quite possible that other long-serving members of the committee may also see this period as a chance to change their own roles.



Simon Woollen reports that the inaugural rally at the American Museum in Bath, held over the first Spring Bank Holiday Weekend, was well attended and a great success. Fittingly, Simon is seen here with the American Chadborn and Coldwell hand mower from the Hall & Duck Trust.



Tony Hopwood, the winner of the Charlie Jones Award for 2006, on board one of his Dennis mowers. Read more about the Annual Rally inside. Tony can be seen on board one of his collection of Dennis mowers at the Banbury Rally in June. Apparently this mower is used regularly despite dating from the 1920s.

## DIARY DATES 2006

**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).

**Margam Country & Steam Show, Port Talbot:** Saturday 26- Monday 28 August. Mowers and other vintage exhibits welcome to help establish this growing event in South Wales. Details from Philip Booth. T: 01656 785011 E: enquiries@phbevents.co.uk (Porthcawl).

**Great Dorset Steam Fair:** Wednesday 30 August-Sunday 3 September. Don't forget to call in and see the club's special display and say hello to "Team Dorset".

**Alresford Agricultural Show:** Saturday 2 September. Come and join the "award winning team". Details from Colin Stone. T: 01428 604003 E: stonethemows@hotmail.co.uk (Hindhead).

**Bedford Steam Rally:** Friday 15-Sunday 17 September. Bigger and better with 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 23/Sunday 25 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.**

## ANNUAL RALLY REPORT

Our Annual Rally and AGM was really successful and it was great to see so many members, new and old, there. And even though the weather was a bit "damp" I think this was the best attended and most fun we have had. It just keeps getting better.

The weekend starts on the Friday afternoon and it's always interesting to see who gets there first (it was Robin Campbell-Coleman this year). Some of the more adventurous members made a full weekend of it and a few of these - I am told - were camping for the first time. They certainly picked a good weekend with the rain on Friday and Saturday nights.



From a mower collecting perspective it's always exciting to see what new machines are brought out to show. Members always manage to finish off restoration projects or bring newly acquired specimens and plenty of these - as well as a few favourites - were to be seen.

It was good to welcome a number of people travelling from afar. Jim Ricci from the USA timed a visit to England to coincide with the event. He's becoming a bit of a regular! Stewart Baillie from Scotland booked early on EasyJet and flew into Luton to meet up with Henry Ellis. We also had a member from Holland or Belgium over but I am afraid I didn't catch his name.



Bill Galley was over from the Isle of Man which involved a very long and diverted ferry journey and a drive from the north of England due to bad weather.

There was a lot of wheeling and dealing on the Saturday with many members bringing items to sell and swap. Andy Hall erected a big tent and laid out a spread of spares for mowers dating (mainly) from the 1950s onwards and these proved surprisingly popular. Despite selling most items for just a pound or two Andy managed to fill his wallet and have a few bits over for later events.

Bill Galley, making a first visit to the rally although he had been to the Museum before, brought some Suffolk and Qualcast motor mowers to pass onto collectors for free. These all managed to find a home and quite a few ended up with younger members beginning to build their collections. Others took them as working machines.

John D'Agostino also had a tent with a good array of mower bits, odds, ends and bygones for sale. Some of John's profits go towards funds for the Whitewebbs Museum in Enfield where he also organises a mower rally each year. A very worthwhile cause.

Someone else who always has interesting items on sale is John Barnard. This year he also had a selection of wooden handles and front rollers. John displays interesting mowers and this time he raised more than a few eyebrows with an extremely large sidewheel until he revealed that he'd put a new T handle on a gang mower unit (above). It fooled a few people but we won't tell who.

Inevitably the weather meant there were fewer mowers on show during the day but despite this there were some decent gems to be seen. Stan and Jonathan Hardwick brought a newly restored Greens pony mower as well as some smaller hand mowers.

One of the innovations on the Saturday was an informal competition to find the best working mower. This was the brainchild of Bill Outram (left, right) who acted as judge and generously contributed a bottle of champagne to the winning entry. A few intrepid members took part - although not everyone realised they were in with a chance - with the winner being Mark Chapman (left, left) with his 1920s Godiva motor mower. Mark's a relatively new member of the club although he's had the mower for a number of years. This was one of its first outings for a while.

Also present on Saturday were some of our newer (and younger) members who were there for the first time. One or two of these had made arrangements to deliver and collect machines bought and sold through recent Grassbox advertisements.

Roger Wilkinson brought along his immaculate Dennis and was happy to run it around in the rain. Tony Edwards displayed a great selection of Atco manuals and brochures and was selling copies at very reasonable prices. Tony's a great source of Atco information as he's worked for a dealer in the midlands for some years and knows the machines back to front.

Another Atco aficionado is Richard Durrant who brought a selection of different Atco models. He's recently decided to concentrate on 14" models which gives him scope to cover the whole period of Atco's production from the 1920s onwards with the added benefit of not having to haul around too many monsters.

The day's proceedings were brought to an end by the evening get together when around 25 members and guests were present. At least it was dry inside.

Sunday's weather was a little better although it rained a few times during the day. Plenty of people turned up and almost everyone brought at least one mower to display which is after all one of the objectives of the weekend.

As always there was a good mix of mowers on display, large and small, new and old, motorised and hand. The largest machines were the 1930s Ransomes ride on mowers presented by Chris Stoneman and Andrew Grout (below). It was interesting to see these side by side for comparison. It's harder to say which was the smallest as a number of six and eight inch hand mowers were present. Small mowers are always popular because they are easy to store and transport and examples from Follows & Bate, Greens, Shanks and Ransomes could all be found.



I was particularly pleased to say hello to many members whom I hadn't seen for a while. Among these were David Lumsden, John Moulton, Rod Child, Crawford Stirling, Andrew MacMorland and Brian Radam, who somehow managed to turn up with wife Su on their wedding anniversary! Dusty Miller brought some interesting motor mowers and Geoff Christopher had a pair of Automowers, which are always good to see. Tony and Gary Houghton had their usual eclectic mix. Vic Banks also had some unusual mowers and was more than willing to share his engineering expertise with anyone who needed advice. We understand that Vic's been ill since the rally but is now on the mend. I'm sure all members will want to wish him well.

The AGM was held on the Sunday morning as usual. As in previous years I presented a written report covering key points of the last year and a slightly edited version of this should be in this Grassbox's advert sheet.

During his report Robbie revealed that we have just enrolled our 1000th member since we started recording these 12 years ago.

The accounts showed a slight surplus for the year. There was some discussion about whether we should increase the membership fee but the feeling of the majority was that it should stay the same.

The Officers and Committee were all re-elected for the forthcoming year although I did make the point that the club will only develop in the future if new people are willing and able to contribute some of their time to help those who already do the bulk of the work.

At the end of the meeting I presented the annual Charlie Jones Award to Tony Hopwood. As many members will know, Tony is one of the club's experts on Dennis mowers, the organiser of the rally at the Malvern Autumn Show and a regular contributor to Grassbox. This makes him a thoroughly deserving winner of the Award which aims to recognise exceptional contributions to club activities.

This year the Annual Rally "giveaway" item was a special tape measure with the club logo printed on the case. If you were at the event on either day but didn't get one, for whatever reason, let me (Keith) know and I will send you one.

The auction in the afternoon was eagerly anticipated and despite being held during the wettest part of the day it was one of the highlights of the weekend. Most people seemed happy to watch rather than bid but those that did take part were up for it and some of the items - not always the rarest - attracted brisk bidding. Christopher Proudfoot donned his professional hat to become auctioneer and this added tremendously to the fun. The commissions added up to about £80 which was donated to the Museum.



One of the most popular features of the rally is the Andrew Grout Plate, the prize awarded to the owner of the mower that everyone votes for on the day. Unusually there was no stand out machine this year and Andrew (above, left) had to use his tie-breaking powers to choose the winner. He decided this should be the Chadborn & Coldwell displayed by Andrew Hall and Michael Duck of The Hall & Duck Trust. Andrew and Michael (above, centre and right) reckon this could be the oldest American mower in preservation (almost certainly the oldest over here in the UK) and it was a popular winner. This was the second time they had won the prize, the previous being way back in the competition's second year. Another of their machines on show was an unusual American motor mower which had an open crank engine driving a long sidewheel cutter unit. It made quite a noise when it ran.



Another popular feature of the day is the "spot the spares" competition organised by Richard Jones (above, right). This was the third time Richard has run the event and it was won for the second time by Alan Hardwick (above, left) who correctly identified a selection of "mystery objects".

*There's always a danger when writing these reports that names will be missed out. It's never possible to mention everyone present of course so please don't think an omission of your name is a sleight on my part. Thanks to everyone who came. You all helped make it a great weekend. Keith.*

## MOWERS AT AUCTION

The recent AGM weekend at Milton Keynes saw the Club's first auction, and from what Keith tells me, this was well received *writes Christopher Proudfoot*. Certainly, from my experience with other collectors' societies, an annual auction is a major attraction.



Auction is a good way to sell, particularly if disposal is the main aim rather than guaranteed enrichment, or where an article is particularly rare **and** desirable. Many 'rare' items are rare because no one wants them, like bandy-legged chorus girls.

Relating this to lawn mowers, if you have a Budding for sale, put it in an auction where at least two keen lawnmower collectors are likely to be present, and you will get the best possible price. If you have a bog-standard 12-inch Silens Messor, you will get a fair price, but probably not the sort of figure an upmarket Garden Antiques emporium would charge. If you enter a 1950s domestic mower, you will get virtually nothing, but you will probably get shot of it, if only via a sympathy bid from a collector feeling sorry for the auctioneer.

Above all, don't try to push the price up with a high reserve; it is more likely to prevent the thing from selling. If you want a reserve, fix it at the very lowest level you would accept – and remember that, if the mower doesn't sell, you will have to take it home, to occupy the space you hoped to make for your latest purchase.



*Les Rynart wondered if anyone on the club had any information about his Kenilworth sidewheel mower which was made in the USA. It looks suspiciously like an Edgbaston mower that I have seen but does anyone know more about the company that made it?*

## QUALCAST AHOY!

*By Barrie Gobey*

If the owner of the Qualcast iron-framed mower from a recent Grassbox (it was a Qualcast 16, ed) has a grass box with an unusual motif in the style of a Merchant Navy cap badge he has a rare one. I sold it six years ago...and this is the story: in the 1950s I was second mate on the MV Helenus trading between Australia and the UK and found myself in the port of Hobart, Tasmania. It was idyllic in that the ship was moored at the end of the tree-lined main street. I bought the said mower, second hand, from a dealer at the top of the street, started it up and trundled down towards the ship stopping at the traffic lights etc. The stevedores loaded it up for me and on route home it was tripped, inlet manifold polished up inside etc. It was then tested by placing matchsticks in the bitumen between the planks on the boat deck and sure enough it cut the matchsticks down. On arrival in Liverpool my wife met me and we bundled all my seagoing gear plus the mower into a Mini and drove back home to Derbyshire.

Once home, I purchased from Qualcast in Derby some cork inserts for the clutch and mentioned that the mower had done over 40,000 miles (exported and brought back) with only one decoke, so claimed a record. I think the story might have ended up in the company newsletter. So if that is the one sir, you have something unique!

I am sure it has been mentioned in a previous Grassbox but the way to fit cork clutch plates is to boil them first and insert when warm. That bit sounds rude but you will probably remember it better!

## WE'RE OFF TO DORSET

Earlier this year the club was asked by one of the section organisers at the Great Dorset Steam Fair if we would like to put on a display. We were pleased to accept the invitation so you'll be able to see the club in the Vintage Collections section at the event which runs from Wednesday 30 August to Sunday 3 September.

This is a great opportunity to promote the club and raise our profile within the vintage collecting movement. In planning the event we took the view that it wouldn't be possible to organise it like a normal rally because there will not be enough space to accommodate very many exhibitors or mowers. It would be unfair to make this an open or invitation event because inevitably we would then have to choose some members over others. Instead we decided that the club committee would take the responsibility of attending the event and creating the display. These are the people who are chosen by members to run the club and they are best placed to represent every one of us at the event. The emphasis of our display will be on what the club does for members and how we fulfil our objective to "promote the collection, preservation and display" of old mowers. The display will comprise machines from the 1850s to the 1960s. We will also be preparing display panels and leaflets about the history of the mower and the club.

I know that many club members visit the Great Dorset each year and we would love to see as many of you as possible on our stand. Everyone member that calls in will be presented with a souvenir. Plus we'll enter everyone's name into a draw for an extra prize at the end of the show.

**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>

**Next Edition: Oct 2006**

Edition 57 - Jun 2006

Edited & written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton