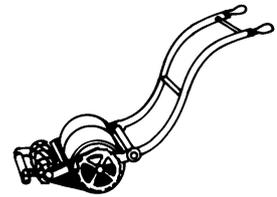


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 58

Autumn 2006

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Thanks to everyone who responded to my recent letters and emails reminding members about outstanding renewals. Thanks too to everyone who provided updated information for the new Directory of Members, which should be enclosed with this Grassbox. With so many members this is our biggest ever publication and it's as up to date as we can possibly make it. But please try to make the most of the publication. It takes a lot of time to put together and costs quite a bit to print and send out. The idea is for members to use it to contact each other so why not make a point of getting in touch with at least one other collector?

I'd also like to thank Dick and Joyce Hardwick who helped immensely by sending out the last Grassbox.

In the last Grassbox I alluded to the possibility of changes on the committee from next May. Bernard "Robbie" Robinson has decided to stand down as secretary at that time which means that we will be looking for a replacement. I probably don't need to remind members what a fantastic job Robbie has done over the past 14 years and he will be a hard act to follow. Robbie standing down presents an opportunity for us to separate some of the tasks he currently carries out in to (hopefully) more manageable sections. There's more about this in the advert sheet and I would be pleased to have an informal chat with anyone who might be interested in helping out.

This will be the last Grassbox before Christmas so I would like to take this early opportunity to wish everyone in the club a very happy Christmas and successful New Year. Thanks also to everyone who has contributed to the club in some way. It gets to be more people each year so it's not possible to mention everyone by name, but I hope they know that they have the thanks of me and all the committee.



This photograph was given to Charlie Moore at the National Amateur Gardening Show by visitor Arthur Guppy. The shot was taken in about 1928 and shows Arthur's father with an Atco Motor Mower at Lufton Manor, near Yeovil, Somerset. The horse is pulling a Shanks or Ransomes mower (it's not very clear).

Many members will be familiar with the "legend" of how the first Atco Motor Mower was produced. According to the story when the pony that pulled the mower belonging to one of the directors of Charles H Pugh died the owner convinced the company to produce a motorised machine that would be more "reliable". I was delighted to receive an email earlier this year from Georgina Edwards, the great grand-daughter of George Frederick Bull, the director in question, who was able to confirm the story. She also provided the additional snippet that the horse was in fact a donkey called Silverwings.



This photograph was sent in by non-member Peter Ashworth. It's a Shanks "Standard" (they were only referred to by this name later) dating from before 1895 as there are no springs on the axles. According to Peter, the gardener's name was Mr Edwards and he worked for Peter's great grandmother in Worthing. Peter thinks the photograph was probably taken in summer 1891 at the latest as his family had moved from Worthing by the end of that year.



Your intrepid committee represented the club at the Great Dorset Steam Fair at the end of August by preparing a display about the club and the history of the lawn mower. There's a longer report in the separate advertisement sheet (which seems to have become a full four pager permanently now) but we thought you'd like to see a picture of the team. As far as we can remember this is the first time these seven have been shown together in a Grassbox. From left to right they are: Richard Jones, Tim Durant, John Barnard, Andrew Grout, Keith Wootton, Alec Hillyar and Bernard "Robbie" Robinson. Sorry about those knees on the right, but Robbie was celebrating his 58th birthday or something!

DIARY DATES 2007

Annual Rally, Milton Keynes Museum: Saturday 19/Sunday 20 May. Yes, it's already time to get those new diaries filled in with the dates for the Annual Rally 2007.

More dates in the next edition. Do you organise or attend an event where mowers are welcome? Send us details and we'll include it here.

MORE MOWERS AT MALVERN

Once again, the last show of the season was blessed with good weather. Saturday was perfect and Sunday started with a local thunderstorm which knocked out the power on the showground for two hours, then the sun shone all day. The regulars were on parade with Keith Wootton bringing his 150 year old Ferrabee and Andrew Grout proving how many mowers you can get in a Land Rover.



There were excellent contributions from Paul Channon, Dave and Brenda Stanford, Alec Hillyar, John Hammond, newcomer Nick Waldon (shown with Qualcast), the Williams families and Tony Edwards which ensured there was lots to see with a tent full of machines as well as outdoor displays. Highlight of the show for exhibitors was "playtime" on Sunday afternoon with eight machines cutting grass in a fenced-off area.

Tony Hopwood broke with tradition and didn't bring a Dennis but hurtled around on his British Anzani Lawnrider. Next year we shall make more of the vintage mowing possibilities of the showground.

ISLE OF MAN UPDATE

This year our rally season started once again with the club rally at Port St Mary in the south of the island on Mad Sunday which is in the middle of the TT Week, writes Bill Galley from the Isle of Man. Fortunately there was no racing on the same day this year and attendances were well up. I took a selection of machinery concentrating on the less well-known makes (JP, Valor Ironcrete - which I bought at the Annual Rally auction in May - and Greens). I also included a battery powered Atco which created a lot of interest (see image, right). We were joined by our two sons who displayed their Mamod steam engines, the only live steam at the show. My friend Ian Watson from Peel brought along Suffolks and Atcos to complement the display. Other exhibitors concentrated on the agricultural side and there was an impressive line-up of Fergusons to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the introduction of the Grey Ferguson.

The other rally this year was the St Marks Fair where I showed a selection of machinery, although concentrated more on stationary engines as space was restricted because of the presence of many vintage cars.

On both occasions the displays were well received and created a lot of interest. Several people told me they had a mower and asked if I would like it. It goes without saying that I shall be busy this winter! Finally, I would like to thank all the members of the club who have helped me this year.

Editor's Note: Bill's too modest to include it in his article but I know that he won the prize cup for the best collection at the Port St Mary event, where his sons also won a prize.

MADE IN BEDFORDSHIRE

By Dick Hardwick

This was the theme of the three day rally to mark the 50th Anniversary of the organisers, The Bedfordshire Steam Engine Preservation Society. There was a special area for items made in the county that included Alec Hillyar's "Corse & Carne" motor mower (still the only known example) and my own "Bedford" push roller mower. The name on the box and the distinctive height adjusters enabled a visiting OLC member to identify one that he owns, bringing the total known to be in preservation to five now. This suggests that the mower, manufactured by Watkinson & Co of Bedford, had a bigger production run than previously thought. There was even some talk that ex-employees of Watkinson had set up Corse & Carne but Alec's attempt to follow this up has so far drawn a blank.

Our display at the usual location on the rally field seemed to be "bigger and better" than ever. It certainly provided lots of fun for us OLC members and interest to the visitors.

Several OLC members came along to exhibit here for the first time, including Stan and John Hardwick from Filey, Yorkshire with their large and unique Atco (below). The introductions were great fun: "Mr (Stan) Hardwick and Mr (Jonathan) Hardwick, meet Mr (Dick) Hardwick and Mr (Alan) Hardwick and Mrs (Joyce) Hardwick..." Next year Stan's wife might come too! And, in case you wondered, we don't think we are related - not since the far off days of the Vikings anyway!



It was nice for "old regulars" to meet up again – Roger (& Helen) Wilkinson, Charlie Crouchman, John Bloxham, "Robbie" (& Wilma) Robinson, Richard Ward & Martin Faulkner to name a few. Meanwhile some of the "younger regulars" decided that a little restoration work was needed on the Shank's Firefly that Alan had recently acquired. Their enthusiasm and industry was rewarded when the motor sprang into life and, although running a little fast, it gave a quite presentable cut. If "Dusty" Miller reads this, he'll want an extra £20 for it!

Despite much public interest and chat no exciting "treasures" came to light, though we look forward to meeting again, next year, the several new members who joined the club at this year's show.

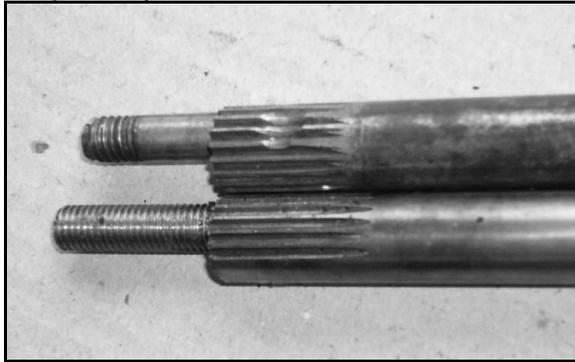


TABLE TOP FINISH

And finally, as they used to say on The Two Ronnies, Colin Stone spotted the following in an instruction manual for the Suffolk Viceroy Mk 2: "The machine is now ready for use, but must be adjusted for height of cut. Place the machine on a flat surface (such as kitchen table), not on the grass itself."!!!!

A MINOR PROBLEM

Henry Ellis explains more about a common ailment...



The adjustment to bring the bottom blade up to meet the cylinder cutter on pre-war JP Minors was effected by a worm drive screw engaging with splines cut into the top cross shaft. In almost all of the Minors I've seen the splines have been chewed up by the worm drive.



IS IT JUST ME? AM I ALONE

David Oakley on a curious empathy with things mechanical Summer heat, hotter than I can recall and that goes back to pre war days! The lawn looking like a field of mown hay, apart that is, of the cursed weeds, Yarrow and Yellow Sorrel, which seem to enjoy seeing the grass wither and die. Feeling somewhat belligerent I decided to run the 1939, or thereabouts, 10in Follows & Bate over the weeds on the front "lawn" to cut them down to size. Perhaps it was because I rescued the Folbate from a fate worse than death from the local tip many years ago, complete with grass box, though no throw plate (anyone got one?) and spent some time enjoying myself in my mechanical workshop bringing it back to life and ending up with a mower which is a delight to use and more importantly enjoyed by my Head Gardener. She finds it useful for light touching up where the Webb motor mower cannot reach. This ensures marital bliss of course - she leaving the mechanical monster to me.

Then, when I start with a gentle push over the weeds and hear the musical singing of the cylinder blades running over the bottom blade there is something in the sound which stirs the soul...do you know what I mean? It is like hearing Maria Callas singing an aria from Aida. At the finish, I brush it down, oil it and put it away side-by-side with the Webb and feel I ought to say "Thank You" to the ancient Folbate. Is it me, am I the only one who has this feeling of friendliness with an apparently inanimate object? I have to admit to having the same feelings for my 1920 Bullnose Morris as well as my 1915 Royal Enfield motor cycle and sidecar, both of which I have owned for over 50 years. Am I the only idiot who on returning from a vintage rally has been known to actually pat the vehicle with affection? The curious thing is, I have no such sentiments for my modern, twenty-first century motor car or the one my wife uses, useful though they both are. These are more or less essential to own these days, like a dish washer, or vacuum cleaner, but there is no affection involved.

So dear reader, should I pop off to see a "trick cyclist", or are they any other folk who have these curious feelings and want to talk to their "family friends" in the garage, workshop or shed?

This is almost certainly because the two nuts at each end of the cross shaft (which hold the handlebars) have not been slackened first. The result is shown at the top in the photo and means that adjustments cannot be made.

No doubt the original handbook/instruction sheet stated the correct procedure but with the passage of time and change of owner this information may well have been lost and strong arm methods were probably used to turn the worm drive. To make matters worse the spanner supplied with these mowers had pegs in the handle which fitted two of the holes in the head of the worm drive and this encouraged force to be used! The worm drive screw threads also suffer as can be seen in the second photo, which also shows the three holes for the pegs on the spanner supplied.

It would seem that by about the mid-1930s JP realised there was a problem and they deleted the three holes and took out the pegs in the handle of the spanner. They also at about the same time, put a label on the backplate, or the rear roller cover of later machines, warning of the necessity to slacken the two nuts at each end of the shaft. This label was 'upside down' so it could be read when standing in front of the mower with spanner in hand.

IMPORTANT BEFORE MAKING HANDWHEEL ADJUSTMENT FIRST SLACKEN THE FOUR NUTS SITUATED TWO EACH SIDE OF THIS ADJUSTING ROD

The new splined cross shaft and worm drive screw were made for me by that skilled worker in metal - Vic Banks, who says he happy to make these for anyone else in the Club. Of course, this isn't a minor problem but a major one too because it affects the short-lived 12" JP Major which is constructed in exactly the same way.



Christopher Proudfoot organised a special display of his collection at home in July. Luckily, or perhaps not, he chose what turned out to be the hottest weekend of the year and many members were able to accept his invitation. Here, in the shade of an old apple tree on a hot Sunday in July, collectors relax while Henry Ellis checks out a JP in its packing case. Meanwhile, Andrew Grout and William Proudfoot discuss a 1939 17" Ransomes Lightweight sitting next to an Automower from the 1920s.



ANY QUESTIONS?

Bill Jeffries suggested a new section for the Grassbox where people can send in a couple of questions and hopefully generate some replies which we can publish in the future editions.



To get things rolling, Bill suggested the following which will help him complete the restoration of the 1960s Dennis Premier Mk1 pictured. The idea is to get some responses, so if you think you have an answer, send it in and don't just think that someone else will do it!

1 - One of the problems I faced with the Premier was the fuel tank which, whilst in good overall condition, was rusty inside. The rust was not serious but very flaky and caused regular fuel blockages. Is there a low cost way of removing the rust and sealing it against further corrosion? I'm aware of products like "Petseal" but they seem expensive.

2 - I would like to know the procedure for removing the cutting cylinder from my 1937 36" Dennis. I know that there is a special box spanner required (Dusty Miller lent me one) but I didn't succeed in completing the job.

3 - I have recently restored a Dennis Premier Mk1, but can't complete the job to my satisfaction, as it seems impossible to source the correct Dennis Brothers of Guildford royal crest transfers for the grass box. Has anyone found a solution - I can't be the first?

4 - Is there a way of dating Dennis trailed seats? I have two, one with a more ornate cast seat with the name Dennis in the casting and a four digit number stamped on the right hand chassis, the other of pressed steel with no name and no stamping. I imagine the more ornate one is the older of the two.

Send answers by post or email to Keith at the usual addresses (see below). As mentioned, this new section is designed to provide two-way hints and tips so any contributions will be very useful. This is also the idea behind our online email forums but of course not everyone can access those.



One of our newest (and youngest) members is Lewis Garner who has been building up a collection of mowers this year. He sent us this shot of some of his collection (he's recently picked up a Dennis and another Atco Standard). Sometimes when older members look at mowers from the 60s and 70s they forget that to the younger generation these machines were made 20 or more years before they were born (so they are like 1930s and 40s machines to the older members).

OOH, VICAR!

A local 90 year old retired vicar whom I know, rang and asked me whether I had a push mower I could let him have, writes Dusty Miller. He had read in the Daily Telegraph that it was a good way of getting exercise! He's a wonderful old chap, a bit crippled, and when I went to see him the grass was considerably more than a push mower could be used on - even a 19 year old wouldn't have enough puff! In the end it was arranged that Richard Jones and I would go round to sharpen and overhaul his self-propelled machine. All part of the Old Lawnmower Club's service!



Geoff Christopher gets going with his big 1930s Automower at Tilmow '06 in June. Geoff's since completed the restoration and refitted the chain guard. Meanwhile, below, Alec Hillyar is almost engulfed by the smoke from a very early Ransomes motor mower. I'm not sure whose mower this is as more than one member has acquired one recently.



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>

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