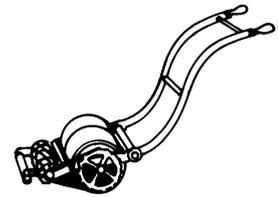


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 59

Winter 2007

MAKE 2007 A CUT ABOVE...!

It's already the end of February and time keeps rushing by. The last Grassbox was in November and to keep up our "four a year" schedule I will be preparing another edition to be sent out before the Annual Rally in May, so the next one should be hot on the heels of this.

It looks like 2007 is going to be a bumper year for events. More members are now organising special mower displays at their local museums, garden shows and steam rallies and this is excellent news. Plenty of members do participate but I know from personal experience that it can be hard work getting new exhibitors to turn up on the day. And it can be a bit demoralising for the organiser if only a couple of people put in a show. So come on everyone, let's try and make all the event this year a fantastic success.

We are already making plans for the Club's Annual Rally at Milton Keynes and the next edition of Grassbox will contain more information about the event. But make a note in your diary now to make sure you don't miss it.

I made an appeal in the last newsletter for volunteers to help run the club in the future. A couple of people have come forward but it would be even better if a few more could offer their services to help spread the workload for all of us. Please contact me (that's Keith if you still don't know) for an informal discussion.

In fact the next 12 months could be a period of considerable change for the club as we approach the end of our second decade. Please read the separate advertisement sheet for more important news.



Simon Woollen, head gardener at the American Museum in Bath, is seen here with a 1922 Atterton cylinder grinder. Is this the oldest grinder in regular use or does somebody out there know better? Simon reports that he has recently started to collect battery electric mowers as these seldom get recognition. Simon's a busy chap. He was in the US not so long ago in connection with his work at the museum and is also preparing a photographic display on "The Art of the Lawn Mower" for Bath Festival. Plus there's the mower rally to organise as well (see Diary Dates inside).



This Shanks Talisman complete with its grass box and in original condition was on sale at one of the Cheffins auctions in Sutton last year. The design is similar to the Pennsylvania sidewheel but the Talisman is less common.



Here is Brian Latham from Preston using a 1930s 14" Greens motor mower in 1965. Brian says that he still has the mower which was bought new by his father. Apparently the mower was a pleasure to use, never failed to start, had lovely controls and cut beautifully.



This advertisement for Qualcast probably dates from the early 1970s. The motor mower is their version of the Suffolk Colt. By this time the two companies (and Atco) were all part of the same group. We will be featuring some more "recent" Atco-Qualcast images in future editions.

DIARY DATES 2007

Agricultural Machinery and Museum Open Day, Whitewebbs Museum, Enfield: Sunday 25 March. John D'Agostino is working hard to build this show at this impressive museum just off the M25. It's an event and venue that deserves support from local members. It's a fantastic venue and easy to get to so why not join in for the day? Details from John D'Agostino. T: 0208 3510510 (London) or John Bloxham. T: 01438 833157 (Hitchin).

Bell's Piece Horticulture Gardeners Day, Farnham: Saturday 12 May. Colin Stone is organising an informal get-together at this Leonard Cheshire Home with proceeds towards the charity. Details from Colin Stone. T: 01428 604003 E: colin.stone@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

Annual Rally, Milton Keynes Museum: Saturday 19/Sunday 20 May. Another year, another rally comes along. We'll be producing a special edition of Grassbox a few weeks before this year's event with all the details you need. But generally speaking it's the same as previous years. Look out for additional details on the advertisement sheet this time with news about the auction.

American Museum, Bath: Saturday 16/Sunday 17 June. Simon Woollen, club member and head gardener at the museum, is organising another event following the success last year. Details from Simon Woollen. T: 01225 445696 E: simon.woollen@americanmuseum.org

Abergavenny Rotary Club, Steam, Veteran and Vintage Rally: Sunday 27/Monday 28 May. An excellent event – so we're told – in Wales for our members in the area. Well worth supporting. Further details from club member Rob Lloyd. T: 01873 853999 E: Rob@roblloyd.go-plus.net (Abergavenny).

Ardingly Vintage & Classic Vehicle Show: Saturday 7/Sunday 8 July. An excellent show that is popular with enthusiasts in the south of England. Further details from club member Paul Mackellow. T: 01892 664786 (Crowborough).

Bedford Steam Rally: Friday 16-Sunday 18 September. It looks like the three-day experiment last year was a success as they've decided to stick with it, which is great news for members attending this popular event. One day or three, details from Dick Hardwick. T: 01462 816018 E: Hadw2@aol.com (Shefford).

Tilmow, Old Kiln, Guildford: Saturday 22/Sunday 23 September. It's moved to a later date on the calendar but should still be a popular event. Details from Colin Stone. T: 01428 604003 E: colin.stone@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk or Andrew Hall. T: 0208 946 8036 E: andrew@hitrust.co.uk

Malvern Autumn Show: Saturday 29/Sunday 30 September: The club's final event of the year is always worth a look. A great setting and much more than just the mowers to see. Who can forget the giant carrots in the marquee? Details from Tony Hopwood.

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



Jim Ricci displayed some of his collection at the Tower Hill Botanical Garden (www.towerhillbg.org), Boylston, Massachusetts at the end of last year. Here he is on a horse drawn machine. I heard during February that Jim is ill and I know that his many lawn mower friends around the world will wish him well.



Jeff Herridge reports that he attended eight events during 2006 including one that will shortly be featured on a new BBC TV Series. The Village Show aims to recreate the traditional village fete with a new twist. Villages around the country compete for a place in a grand final by putting on the best display for the judges. The programmes are presented by Alan Titchmarsh and James Martin and should be shown in the next couple of months on BBC One, early Sunday evenings. One of the programmes was recorded at Petworth Village Show last July where Jeff was showing some of his mower collection. Jeff also participated in two later shows in the series, including the grand final at Highgrove, playing in a brass band, but without his mowers! The photograph shows Jeff at Petworth with a JP hand mower.



Pam & Tony Skingley probably visit more shows each year than any other mower collectors. As members of the Old Lawnmower Club and The Vintage Horticultural and Garden Machinery Club they have a wide selection of machines and their display is popular with visitors of all ages. They regularly spend weeks on the road, moving from rally to rally in their mobile home with the mowers neatly tucked up in a big trailer. Here they are taking a rare quiet moment in the autumn sun at Malvern.

ANOTHER TOP TIP FROM TONY

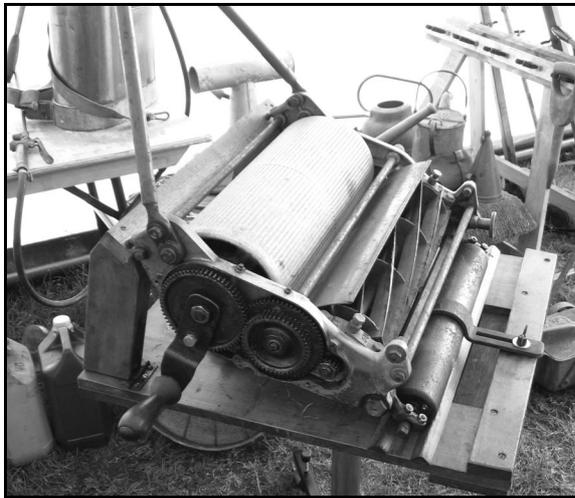
As the new mowing season gets under way, it's worth sorting out your tool kit for servicing machines during the summer, writes Tony Hopwood.

If you have a shelf full of spanners in your workshop, save time by marking the ones you use regularly. I wrap coloured electrical tape round the shanks of frequently used spanners so I can spot them easily – try green for Green's! Tapes can be colour coded for different mowers, and fixed at the most commonly used end.

Also useful is a nail file for cleaning magneto contacts and a contact cleaning aerosol – not a degreaser. Spray grease is great for chains. Open ended or ring spanners are better than adjustables which can easily round the corners of nuts if set too loose.



Robert Johnston sent in this photograph of a Bamford Horse Drawn Lawn Mower which is being restored by a friend of his in Fintona, County Tyrone. They believe the mower was used on Fintona Golf Course. Bamfords was much better known for its agricultural machinery and this is a very usual mower. Judging by the style of the design it could be a copy of US model, perhaps made under license in the UK. A few minor parts appear to be missing but Robert and his friend are hopeful that the machine can be returned to working order sometime soon.



ANY ANSWERS

Two members responded to the "Any Questions" piece in Grassbox 58.

Tony Hopwood says:

1 – Rust in fuel tanks is a common problem not restricted to Dennises. Light rusting can be dealt with without resorting to expensive sealants. My method is to wash out the tank with hot water and detergent when it is off the mower with the fuel tap removed. Then get some pea shingle and more water and shake the mixture about the tank with the cap on until you get bored and the water comes out clean after several goes. Make sure you get all the pebbles out – they may get stuck in the fuel tap. A good way to stop further rusting over the winter is to add 10 per cent diesel to the petrol to reduce the octane rating in summer and promote cooler running – the wax in the diesel stops rusting in during lay ups. Tanks with actual perforations can be treated with tank sealers – a cheaper option is pourable resin used for panel filling without adding the filler. Do this on a warm day.

2 Shifting Dennis cylinder and roller bearings requires serious welly with the correct hexagonal adapter. I use a two foot stilson wrench with a five foot pipe extension on the handle. Brutal but effective.. Set the angle so that you can press down with your foot on the pipe. As break the rust of ages it will give way with a KRAK.

4 Dating Dennis seats is easy. Cast iron seats started in the late 1920s with only the number 5324 cast on them. Later 1930s seats have Dennis on them. Pram handles required lower seats and pressed steel seat tubs appeared and finally a different design with two curved seat supports.

The recent storm nearly flattened some of my mowers stored under big fir trees at the end of the garden. You can see from the picture that two ancient Ransomes, an Atco Standard and two Dennises had a narrow escape from a fate worse than scrap. The mowers have been kept for spares and are already missing numerous bits on the basis that they come in handy occasionally. Another victim of the falling tree was our mains supply with five neighbouring houses being off for nearly four days – fortunately I have a generator which ran for over 36 hours to keep things going.



BIT MORE ABOUT BACKLAPPING

We featured the lost art of "backlapping" a few issues ago. This is where the cutting cylinder and bottom blade are sharpened "in situ" by applying some special grinding paste and then turning the machine over by hand. Some of the manufacturers even sold special frames to help the user to do the work. This picture shows a Ransomes Certes hand mower on its stand. The side cover was taken off and a special handle attached to the gear wheel on the rear roller. The mower was held in place on the frame by clamps, the front one being visible here, with the rear roller off the ground to enable easy turning. The handle was turned to achieve the sharpened blade and the paste was then wiped off with an oily rag, the handle removed and the cover replaced. The mower was then ready for use. This example was demonstrated at Malvern Autumn Show by Dave and Brenda Stanford.

David Oakley also comments:

Over more years than I wish to think about, I have eliminated rust particles from inside the odd petrol tank by simply putting a handful of small metal items like 5mm nuts, very small bolts and various odds and ends, inside, adding some white spirit and giving the whole a jolly good shake and swizzle round. The next trick is to get everything out of it, wash it internally using white spirit, then leave the whole in a warm place to thoroughly dry. It's no use being in a hurry.. It will take at least a week, the longer the better. Off you go to your nearest car body repair and spray shop or local supplier of automotive finishes and scrounge some grey primer filler and a litre of thinners. Actually it's cheaper by the 5 litre can something under £7 and most useful in the workshop, but don't tell the Health and Safety folk. Mix up a quantity of the primer filler into a sort of custard like consistency. Slosh it in and turn the tank over and over to ensure full coating of the inside. Again leave it for at least a week, (yes it is a bit of a bore) having tipped as much as you can get out beforehand.

Finally test the hardness of the primer filler, if it's hard, hooray, if not put it in the airing cupboard, not relevant to marital bliss of course. Now your tank will not leak. I have one which I did 54 years ago and it is "As new". Of course remove the fuel tap before starting and don't forget thinners is highly flammable. If the tank held two stroke mix, you should remove the "varnish" with either meths or cellulose thinners. Have fun !David Oakley

NO SCRAP IN SHEFFIELD

I read with interest the recent article in Grassbox about bringing back an old push mower into use for the smaller lawn, writes Ian Wallis from Sheffield.

There are also at this time of year a good deal of motor mowers going to the tip, some only needing minor work but deemed too old to repair by the service shops.

On many council "dumppit" sites or on dealers' scrap heaps can be found older Atco, Qualcasts and Suffolks (and more besides if you're lucky - Ed). An acquisition given to me by a local repair shop last year only had a sticking valve while a Qualcast Commodore needed only a points clean and is now giving excellent service to a friend.

So, for anyone looking for a new lawn mower, I would say "forget B&Q" and get down to your local tip or repair shop scrap heap. There are excellent machines to be found, some that for a little TLC will give many years of service.

Editor's Note: Ian was featured in The Guardian newspaper last autumn extolling the virtues of using older machines to mow the lawn. Ian's article led me to wonder what the most unusual or interesting mower that any of our members have found on their local recycling site or council dump. This might make an interesting article for a future edition so please let Keith know if you've found anything that you'd like to tell other members about.

THE ORIGINS OF ATCO

There is a well-known anecdote among collectors about how the first Atco Motor Mowers came to be made. According to the legend, one of the directors had a large estate where the grass was mown by a pony mower. When the pony died unexpectedly, the director decided that the company should produce a motor mower to avoid the inconvenience befalling anyone (and presumably himself especially) in the future. I recently received correspondence from Georgina Edwards who was able to confirm that the story is more or less true and that the director in question was her great grandfather, George Frederick Bull. Some members may already know this, but did anyone know that the donkey was called Silverwings?

WAVERLEY WONDER

Here is an unusual Waverley motor mower that Andrew Grout was fortunate enough to unearth in the Bristol area. It is a 19" machine believed to have been made in Scotland in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Little is known of the manufacturer or their machines. Does anyone in the Club have any information? Andrew says that many people ask him how he finds such unusual machines. This one was the result of contact made at one of the shows he attended in 2005. Incidentally, I believe the Waverley motor mowers may have been made by Carrick & Ritchie of Edinburgh. They were better known as turbine and dynamo manufacturers but like a lot of other companies in this period may have tried to make mowers to fill a few gaps. I think another member of the club may also have one.



This is a Shanks Firefly from the 1950s seen at Malvern Autumn Show last year. These mowers were made for "professional" use and were very heavy - the chain cover on the right is made of cast iron. The mower is unusual in that it shares a name with an earlier, very different, model from the same company produced in the 1920s.



Pennsylvania side wheel mowers are reasonably common (they should be as the machine was probably made for longer than any other mower). But the Pennsylvania roller mower is much less common. This example was spotted at Malvern Autumn Show. One distinguishing feature is the same T handle as found on the sidewheel mower.

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: April 2007
Edition 59 – Feb 2007
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