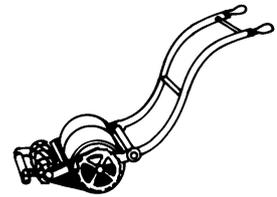


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 61

Summer 2007

BACK ON TRACK?

Time has gone so quickly this year and, being extra busy, I have not been able to complete this latest edition sooner, for which I apologise.

Inside you'll find lots of information about the annual rally at Milton Keynes in May which now seems quite a while back. Between then and now we have had some pretty rough weather and I know that more than one member has been flooded out. A number of events that collectors enjoy have also been cancelled or postponed.

Anyhow, hopefully we are now back on track and the next Grassbox should be along a bit quicker.

The Club's AGM, at the Annual Rally, led to a number of changes in the committee and this will mean some new contacts for members when they want something. There is a section about this on the separate advertisement sheet.

One of the extra jobs I have taken on for this year only has been to handle all the membership renewals now that Robbie has stepped down as the Club's Secretary. Nobody else came forward to take on the renewals role but it really is something that I cannot do in the future, which means somebody out there really will have to make a commitment for 2008. In fact we will be looking for a number of people to take on some tasks over the next few months otherwise some of what we (try) and do as a club may have to end.

On a brighter note we have continued to receive a steady trickle of new members which has brought the current total to around 600.



We presented Robbie with a special watercolour caricature to commemorate his retirement as the Club's Secretary. The picture shows Robbie driving a steam engine towing a trailer full of mowers. As many members will know, in addition to his role within the Club, Robbie is also Chairman of Banbury Steam Society. I wasn't able to take a photo on the day so had to pop over to Robbie's house one evening for this shot.

Robbie has now taken over the running of the "Club Shop", so anyone that wants to buy clothing, souvenirs, transfers and so on will need to contact him direct. More details of this are on the separate advert sheet.



This chap was apparently one of the directors of Charles H Pugh at the time the Atco Motor Mower (which we all call the Atco Standard) was introduced. The mower shown is not one of the earliest "oval frame" models made in 1921 and the photograph probably dates from a few years later.

MEMBERSHIP FACTS

When I was going through the membership renewals recently I had a look at some of the numbers. Since we formalised the Club in 1993 we have had 1130 members at one time or another, 600 of whom are currently in the Club. Our 100th Member joined in 1995 and over half of the first 100 are still on board. Other membership milestones include 200 (1995), 500 (2001), 750 (2004) and 1000 (2006). At present 38 of the 600 members are from overseas.



This is a small part of a photograph of a garden in Hastings taken in 1872 and found recently by Michael Neale. The mower appears to be a very early Greens Silens Messor (originally introduced 1859) which had a combination of gear and chain drive. A gear on the rear roller drove an intermediate chain sprocket which connected to the cutting cylinder. The design was modified after a few years to the much more familiar style with chains only. No examples of these very early gear/chain models are known to exist.

ANNUAL RALLY 2007

What a great weekend! Each year we get more members turning up and more mowers on show and this year was no exception.

The weekend kicked off early on the Friday afternoon when I arrived at the Museum in good time to meet the first visitors. Not this year though as Donal Flynn was already there have come over from Ireland on the overnight ferry and arriving at Milton Keynes mid-morning. It's been a while since we've seen Donal but he was as popular as ever.

Next to arrive was a cohort of committee members including Robbie, Andrew Grout and Alec Hillyar, who made a detour to the Frog Island Brewery in Northampton to pick up the all important weekend fuel. Close after was Bill Galley and family who also crossed (some of) the Irish Sea from the Isle of Man to join us for the second time.

The weekend is all about getting together to meet old friends and have a good old natter. The air was soon filled with tales of new acquisitions, latest restorations and (no doubt) a few hoary old chestnuts, retold for the umpteenth time but always popular. I am as guilty as the next person on this count by the way.



Bill Jeffries (right) and father in law brought along a Dennis dating from the 1960s.

While Friday is a mix of anticipation and relaxation before the weekend rush, Saturday is a different sort of day altogether. In particular, there is a lot of wheeling and dealing, making trades and rummaging through the stalls that grow in number each year.

One of the bigger stalls was being run by John Barnard, another committee member, who was one of the instigators of the "bring and buy" idea some years ago (although he always brings some interesting exhibits too). Another was set up by John D'Agostino who was raising money for the Whitewebbs Museum in Enfield (we recommend it).

It was good to see many new people as well as regulars such as Robert Hanson and Arthur Booth from Nottingham, Barry Ward from Kent and Tom Lucas from Luton, who always brings his Lomax "Citroen Special" car.

Stewart Baillie had flown down from Edinburgh to Luton on EasyJet (£1 fare, £20 taxes no doubt) so didn't have a mower in tow. With him was Henry Ellis, JP expert and number collector supreme, and the two spent much of the weekend poring over new examples. In fact, Henry was so taken with a motorised JP in the auction that he simply couldn't resist it.

Another "international" visitor was Hugo Wondrausch who was visiting from Belgium (although it seems his in-laws live about four miles from me) for the first time.

Andrew Hall and Michael Duck of The Hall & Duck Trust always manage to bring something out of the ordinary and this year they really "pulled out the stops" with a display of around eight machines, all rare and none made after about 1890. Star among these was probably the Samuelson hand mower which Andy and Mike think was probably made in the late 1850s or early 60s, making it one of the oldest mowers around.

Saturday lunchtime is "fish and chips" and this year we placed (should that be plaiced) an order for 25 with local chippy. Luckily we had warned them beforehand otherwise we might have cleaned them out.



Roy Newball and Chris Flint compare notes.

The day always goes too quickly and before too long some of the exhibitors were packing up and on their way. We hold a bit of a party on the Saturday evening with food supplied by the Museum (the beer's on the Club!). Robbie had organised a short quiz and this proved to be quite popular with a bit of light hearted rivalry.

Sunday is always the busiest day of the weekend of course. People were arriving from just after 8am which meant those of us without hangovers (surely no-one) had to be on hand. By 10am the area was filled with mowers and members happily chatting away. The weather was pretty good - excellent considering the forecast all week had been for rain - and it was mostly sunny and warm.

This year we held the AGM in a new location on the site, an old barn which is being converted into an exhibition gallery. I reckon this is at least the sixth different part of the museum we've used for the meeting over the years!

Normally the AGM is fairly straightforward affair with committee members happy to present their reports and continue their roles. This year, however, we were aware that Robbie wanted to stand down and Martin Stephenson suggested it might be a good time for him to leave the post of Treasurer he's held since the club was formalised in 1993. Robbie and Martin made their reports and were thanked by the assembled members for their contribution over so many years.

Replacing Robbie was never going to be easy and we had thought very hard about how we could split some of the workload to make the role more attractive to members. Part of this involved separating new members and renewals. In the long run this should make it easier to operate the club but for this year it presented a need to find two or more people to take on the role. Brenda Stanford had offered to take over the new membership registrations and I know she'll be a great success. But she didn't want to take on a committee role. Instead Andrew Grout was proposed and elected as the new Secretary. Andrew, as members may know, was one of the club's founders back in 1989 and he's been on the committee since 1993. If anyone can follow Robbie, Andrew is the man to do it. But we still need to find a way of dealing with membership renewals (read more about this elsewhere).



The role of Treasurer is also important for the Club and we were pleased when Dick Hardwick offered his services and was elected. Dick became involved with the club through his son Alan (who is still an active member) but the bug soon got to him too and he's now a fully fledged mower collector in his own right.

I had thought that Robbie would stand down completely from the committee but he offered to continue as an "ordinary" member and was elected along with Tim Durant, John Barnard, Richard Jones and Ted Sutton. Ted may be a new name to many but he has been a club member for some years and has a particular interest in machines with a motor cycle (his real passion) connection.

There was one final piece of business at the meeting, which came as a surprise to Robbie. Unbeknown to him we had arranged for a caricaturist to prepare a special watercolour for him. This was our way of thanking Robbie for all his work over the past 15 years in establishing the club and keeping it running. This presentation was extremely popular with everyone present and many took the trouble to sign a copy of the picture for Robbie as their personal way of thanking him.

In fact the excitement and emotion of the moment was such that I completely forgot to announce the winner of this year's Charlie Jones Award, so I had to do it later.

The meeting finished in good time which meant we were able to press on with the next special event of the day, the auction. This year we had almost 50 lots and Christopher Proudfoot once again agreed to be the auctioneer. Bidding was "brisk" although a few people seemed reluctant to bid. Despite this most items reached what many of us thought was about the right price (I even bought something myself) and the total hammer price was £817 which allowed us to donate the commission of over £80 to the museum.



At the end of the auction I announced Geoff Christopher (above, right) as the winner of the Charlie Jones Award. This award is presented each year to someone who makes a contribution to the club in some way or other above the normal "call of duty". Geoff was at our first proper rally in 1990 and although I think he missed one year he's been one of the most regular attendees. On top of which he supports numerous events around the country, especially in the south and around Hampshire and Dorset with his collection of (mainly) Atco and Automowers.

One of the most popular and eagerly awaited parts of the weekend is the Andrew Grout Plate, awarded to the owner of the mower that members "would most like to take home". Each member present votes for the mower they'd like the most and the winner receives the engraved plate for a year and a pewter tankard to keep. I'm usually busy rushing around organising things while the voting is going on but even I realised that competition was a little bit fiercer than some previous years. It was a close run thing apparently but in the end the winner was Christopher Proudfoot's Williams & Co "Archimedienne". This mower has most of the wording on it in French and it is likely that it was made in the USA for sale in France. I have it on good authority that at least two other members had more than one mower in the running for prize which suggests that these mowers effectively split the vote leaving the path clear for Christopher's machine.



Andrew Grout (left) presents the plate and tankard to Christopher (centre) and William Proudfoot.

In fact it turned out to be a bit of a double whammy for Christopher because the same mower also won the prize of a bottle of champagne awarded by Bill Outram for the "best mower in working order and cutting grass" on the Sunday afternoon. The winner was chosen by Bill's son Henry who is also a member of the club, probably the youngest present on the day.

There was one final prize to award later in the afternoon, the winner of Richard Jones' "spot the component" competition. A couple of entrants correctly identified the six items Richard (above, left) had prepared and after the names were placed in a hat the winner drawn out was Vic Banks (above, right). Vic chose a year's membership as his prize. We heard recently that Vic became seriously ill a few weeks later but is now on the mend. I am sure all members will wish him well.



The planning for the Annual Rally starts some way in advance despite the format being pretty much the same every year. There are still lots of little jobs to make complete in good time, not least ordering the souvenirs which we give out to everyone who attends. This year we revisited an old favourite by producing a green mug with a design showing one of the very first hand mowers made by Ransomes in 1832, so it was a sort of 175th "anniversary" souvenir. If anyone was present at the rally but didn't get one of these we will be happy to send one to you.

Inevitably with reports like this it simply is not possible to mention everyone that attended by name. Apart from the competition winners the naming and shaming is relatively arbitrary so please do not feel offended or left out if your name isn't included.

Next year's event will be on the weekend of the third Sunday in May, in other words 17/18 May. See you there?

Note: Images used in this report by Bill Jeffries, Nigel Ball, Roger Wilkinson, Ron Oglesby, Robbie Robinson and Keith Wootton. Thanks to everyone.

DIARY DATES 2007

Harvesting The Old Fashioned Way, Chichester: Saturday 8/Sunday 9 September. A few members have been going to this event for a couple of years and putting on an excellent display while having a lot of fun. Why not join them this year and add to the merriment? Details from Richard Jones. T: 023 92598601 E: richard.jones@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk (Clanfield).

Bedford Steam Rally: Saturday 15/Sunday 16 September. One of the Club's most popular and well-attended events of the year in the spectacular setting of Old Warden Park. Lots to see and do in addition to the mower stuff. Details from Dick Hardwick. T: 01462 816018 E: Hadw2@aol.com (Shefford).

Tilmow, Old Kiln, Farnham: 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@hdtrust.co.uk

Malvern Autumn Show: Saturday 29/Sunday 30 September: The club's final event of the year is always worth the trip. The flower and vegetable marquee is fabulous and there's always a good selection of outdoor stalls. Giant leeks anyone? Details from Keith Wootton.

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

YON DANGLING APRICOCKS!

I've just said "au revoir" to one of my Dennises which will appear in a Royal Shakespeare Company production of Richard II, writes Tony Hopwood.

I know they didn't have motor mowers in Shakespeare's time - let's just say it's a modern production which will be playing until Spring 2008.



To make the mower safe for use on stage it had to be modified. First was a dead man's handle in case the actor driving it lost the plot and drove into the audience.

I designed and fitted a spring loaded fail safe switch operated by a chain across the pram handle (above, left). As long as it was gripped by the driver the switch stayed off and did not short the ignition, using the Wico A magneto side contact. So the engine could be easily started I fitted a knife switch on the side frame labelled "Start" and "Run" (above, right). When the engine was running the switch was moved to "Run" to connect the cutout, which had to be held or the engine would stop.

I also disabled the cutting cylinder clutch by removing the actuating rod and bolting both clutch handles together to avoid possible confusion. This stops the blades spinning when the machine is running.

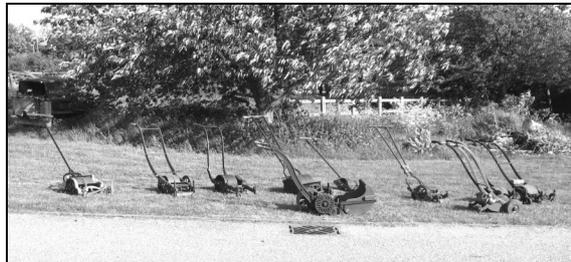
All these modification can be easily removed when Dennis returns after a career on the boards.

Editor's Note: according to the RSC the mower is used in a scene set in a garden (where else). The production is now on at the Courtyard Theatre, Stratford on Avon until March 2008. Tickets range from £5 to £40 depending on date and where you sit (or stand).

MORE MEDIA SPOTS

Jim Ricci reports from the USA that he was recently on set with Leonardo di Caprio and Kate Winslet to provide a couple of 1950s lawn mowers for a forthcoming film called "Revolutionary Road". Jim was also featured in on one of his local news programmes. Meanwhile, in the UK, Brian Radam's British Lawnmower Museum was featured on the recent series B-Road Britain with Robbie Coltrane.

SILVER JUBILEE



Andrew Hall and Michael Duck (below) are celebrating the 25th anniversary of The Hall & Duck Trust. At Milton Keynes in May, they brought along a selection of hand mowers (above) including some which are the only known examples. As always Mike and Andy were on hand during the weekend to share their knowledge and a drink or two with fellow collectors. In July they prepared a major display at a rally in Somerset close to Michael's home where much of the Trust's collection is stored.



NEW MEMBERS

Brenda Stanford has nobly offered to become the club's "New Members" secretary. Brenda and husband Dave attend shows during the year across the midlands. Here's Brenda at Milton Keynes.



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). The Club can also be contacted by email at: olc@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk or the web at: <http://www.oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk>

Next Edition: November 2007
Edition 61 – Sep 2007
Edited & written (except where stated) by Keith Wootton