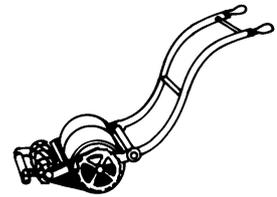


# Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 62

Autumn 2007

## ALL CHANGE

### From the Chairman

This edition of Grassbox marks the start of a new era for the club. After editing and producing the previous 61 publications I am sharing responsibilities for number 62 with William Proudfoot who has gamely volunteered to be the new editor. So I am signing off with this edition and William will take full control (assuming this experience doesn't frighten him too much) from next time. I know that Grassbox will be in good hands. William is young, enthusiastic and knowledgeable which are all good enough qualifications on their own. I am sure he will have some new ideas and I hope he does make changes. It can only be for the better.

When I started the club in 1989 and produced the first Grassbox a few months later I never dreamt that one day it would involve sending almost 600 copies all over the world. That first edition was run off on a photocopier in the office where I worked (with the blessing of the boss). The first "print run" totalled something like 30 copies. In fact, it's such a rarity that I don't even have one myself (I cut up the original master of GB1 to produce our first membership leaflet). It only had basic drawings as well as the text because of technological limitations. The design was otherwise quite similar to a current Grassbox. But how times have changed. Production is now fully electronic and we even post versions on the club website for new members to download when they join.

Freed of the responsibility of producing Grassbox I can now concentrate on transferring my remaining tasks to other members in the coming months. I outlined these in the previous edition and, although some people have offered to help, which is great, there is still plenty more that needs doing. Please do put your name forward if there is anything you can do to help, no matter how little. The more people that volunteer the smaller the workload for each.

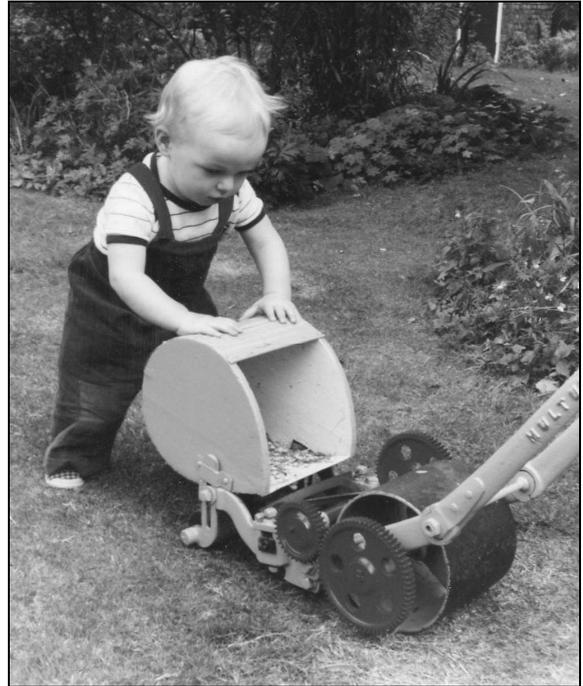
The changes taking place mean that there are new and more people to contact for different aspects of the club. We have decided to produce a list in the advert section of each edition to keep all members up to date.

**Keith Wootton**

### From the Editor

First of all, I would like to thank Keith for his generous words of confidence in me, and I hope they turn out to be justified. Secondly, and far more importantly, I would like to personally thank Keith for producing Grassbox for so long, as well as running so many other aspects of the club. With the club membership now greater than many other collectors' societies where the magazine editing is a task in its own right, the time has probably come for more of the various duties involved in running the club to be separated out. It is however a testament to Keith's enthusiasm and commitment that he has done so much for so long. I hope very much that I will be able to continue to improve and develop Grassbox over the coming years to the same degree that Keith has done during his long tenure as editor. So what about me? Well, many of you know me as Christopher's son, and one or two of you knew me at the age I was in the photo opposite, long before the club even existed.

*This is me hanging onto the grassbox of my father's then newly restored 6" Multum In Parvo in 1982. As you have probably guessed I have been a lawnmower enthusiast ever since!*



Finally for my opening comments, I would second Keith's appeal for people to come forward to perform roles in the club. I would also always welcome contributions to Grassbox from members. Reports from rallies, any technical tips for restoration or writings on any other mower related subject are always welcome. If you have any old photographs of mowers in use, then I know that these are always of interest to other members. My address and other contact details are at the end of the back page.

*Continuing the theme of small children with Greens lawnmowers, this picture below was sent in by John Gough and shows his brother Roland with a 12" Silens Messor in 1939. This example looks as though it has no nameplate, meaning that it would date from between 1887 and 1905.*



## DIARY DATES

### Annual Rally & AGM, Milton Keynes Museum:

**Saturday 17/Sunday 18 May.** It's time to start planning for the Annual Rally! More details nearer the time but until then general enquiries can be made to Keith Wootton. 01327 830675 or [keith.wootton@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk](mailto:keith.wootton@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk)

### Banbury Steam Rally:

**Saturday 28/Sunday 29 June.** Another one for your long term planning diary. Details from Robbie Robinson. 01895 450899 or [Bernard.robinson@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk](mailto:Bernard.robinson@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk)

## RALLY REPORTS

### Tilmow, Old Kiln Museum, Farnham,

**Saturday 22/Sunday 23 September.**

This popular event in the OLC calendar may have moved back by a couple of months from previous years, but it still produced a good attendance.

Andrew Hall and Michael Duck displayed some newly acquired machines, including a Shank's Elf motor mower and a 20" Silens Messor complete with its grassbox. Dusty Millar was in attendance as usual, and brought his 24" Mark 1 Ransomes motor mower and a working Dennis. Bill Outram had a variety of small hand mowers, as did Christopher and William Proudfoot, while among Andrew Grout's display was a Ransomes Lawn Sweeper, *below*, complete with its canvas leaf container.



Thanks are due once again to Colin Stone for organising this event, and especially to his extremely generous gesture in covering the cost of our lunch on the Sunday at the Museum Café.

### Wolverhampton Steam and Vintage Rally, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2007

**By Ray Williams.**

The city of Wolverhampton Steam and Vintage party at West Park gardens was a new venue this year for the OLC. The park is situated almost in the centre of the city and is well within walking distance of the main shopping centre.

The event was attended by Dave and Brenda Stanford from Brownhills, with a fine collection of mowers and garden implements. Bill Heath came from Cardeston (Shrewsbury) with his 1921 Atco 22" 'oval frame' (picture opposite) wedged firmly in the back of his Volvo estate along with camping gear almost bursting at the seams. More locally, Tony Edwards came from Penn, Wolverhampton, with a large collection of his Atco mowers requiring two trailers to transport them to the show. Jeff Skinner came on the Sunday with a 1946 Qualcast 16" and a circa 1955 Green's Master which he is restoring. Janet and Ray Williams, who were asked by the show committee to organise the section, were displaying their Shay, Power Specialities, and Tarpen collection.

Next year, Jan and Ray would like to extend the entries to all members who would like to attend and especially any with machines that have a Wolverhampton connection, for example those with Villiers engines or machines fitted with Ceandess tank components such as filler caps. (the firm is still in business in Dixon street, Wolverhampton. It is also hoped that next year we can have a small enclosure to demonstrate our machines in.

(Anyone interested in attending next year can contact Ray on 01902 731663.)



*Bill Heath with his 'Oval Frame' Atco Standard at the Wolverhampton Rally in June.*

### News from the Isle of Man

**by Bill Galley**

The year started at our monthly meeting of the Southern vintage club with the approach of one member with the question "do you do Allen Scythes?" The answer was of course yes. The machine in question is a pre war model which after considerable difficulties is now a runner and will be at the rallies next year.

The next event was the Mad Sunday rally. This year was of course the centenary of the T.T. races and attendance was well above expectations and a lot of interest being shown by the public, though sadly the very wet weather gave both exhibitors and spectators a good soaking.

We took some mowers and mower related equipment to the Manx Transport Group's annual rally which was a new venue for us this year. As a result of this, it is possible that some of our items may be displayed in the new Transport museum. Hopefully this may become a reality.

Finally, I would like to thank club members for their help and support through the year and to say how much we enjoyed the annual rally.

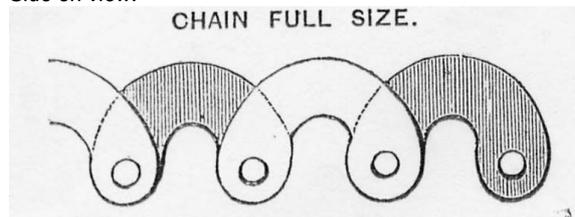


*The Galley family with 2 Webb mowers at home on the Isle of Man.*

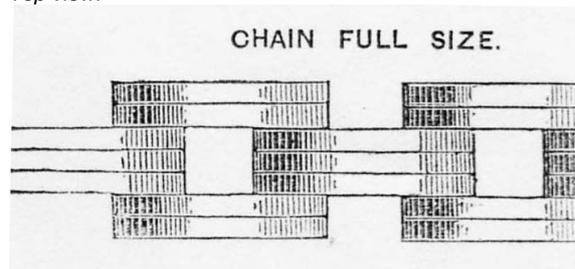
## WHEN A SILENS MESSOR ISN'T A SILENS MESSOR

Page one of Grassbox 61 featured a fascinating image of a Greens lawnmower in use in 1872. The picture is interesting for a number of reasons, not least that the machine in it probably isn't a Silens Messor, however, I should stress the word "probably". It is most likely to be the model Green's sold as the 'Monarch', and several aspects of it are hangovers from the earliest days of Green's lawnmower development in the five years or so from 1859. The most notable feature of this machine is the drive mechanism, which is nothing like that of any other roller mower, incorporating an internal ring gear in the rear roller which works like that of a side wheel mower. This isn't all however. Unlike a side-wheeler, the drive has to be transferred to the blades by another mechanism, and in this case it is a chain, but no ordinary chain. This is an internal toothed chain, by which I mean a chain shaped to have teeth on the inside as well as the teeth on the sprocket. This is best illustrated by the two drawings showing the chain in a Green's advertisement in 1861:

Side on view:

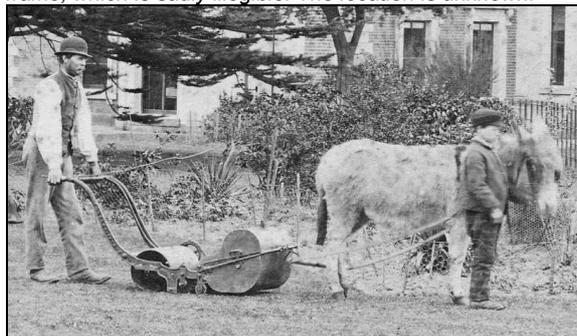


Top view:



One of the effects of this arrangement is that the drive is compounded, as on a Patent Gear Automaton for example, which means that the cylinder revolves faster than on a Silens Messor. Consequently, it has fewer blades (the adverts I have seen don't say how many, but probably five), and was marketed as for cutting longer and rougher grass than the conventional Silens Messor. Therefore this model was more a match for the Ransomes Automaton, especially since the cutting cylinder adjustment was of the crude sliding trunnion arrangement, rather than the split brass bearings of an SM.

*This bearing arrangement is clearly visible in the picture below, which shows a Monarch being pulled by a donkey. Although it is taken from the 'less interesting' side of the mower, the large sprocket is clearly visible projecting above the rear roller, showing this to be an internal ring gear driven machine. Also, when blown up it is possible to read the words "Greens Patent" down the handle sides, and there is obviously a Greens serial number on the side frame, which is sadly illegible. The location is unknown.*



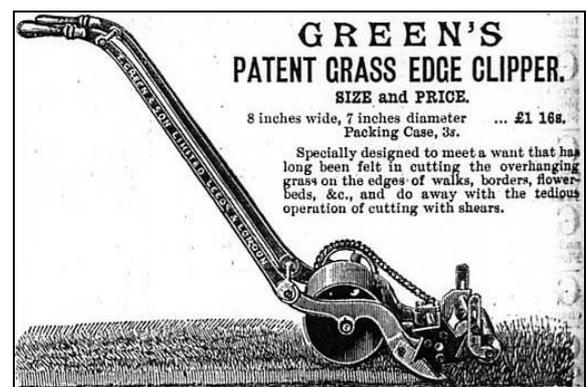
*Below is another photo of a Monarch in use, and although the boy pulling obscures much of the mower, it does show the strange chain and internal ring gear combination clearly, not mention the typical Green's corrugated grassbox metal. Note also that this machine has a clutch much as the conventional pony mowers do. The location of this picture is sadly, once again, unknown.*



Sadly, I have yet to establish whether this design ever was sold as a Silens Messor, but given the partial gear drive, I suspect not because the chief marketing feature of the Silens Messor in the early years was the use of chain drive to reduce noise, hence the name. In 1861, the machine advertised as a Silens Messor was basically a Budding, but with two chains (internal toothed of course) on opposite sides of the mower instead of gears. However, Green's were changing their designs radically every few months at this time, before finally arriving at the 'S' handled Silens Messor with more conventional block chains that we all know.

A few Monarchs must have been sold as these old pictures show, but equally, the lack of any known survivors today suggests that they failed to sell in large numbers against the Automaton. It was still present in the 1884 catalogue, available in the same 6" to 24" sizes that Silens Messors were available in. Advertisements boast that this machine could cut much closer to raised objects like walls than other mowers due to the flat side and lack of projecting parts on the non drive side of the machine. Contemporary illustrations often show it with the chain removed and the edging iron accessory added, and curiously, the design's final stand was as an edge cutter, which was sold with just a plain shaft where the cylinder had been and a rotating edging blade on the non drive end of this shaft. The internal ring gear and internal toothed chain appear to still have been present. One wonders if Green's were looking for a way to use up parts from a model which was no longer selling. Either way, this edge cutter also appears in the 1884 catalogue, and the last reference to it that I have is from 1888, the Monarch lawnmower having disappeared after 1884.

*The Monarch based edge cutter from an 1887 advert in the Gardener's Chronicle. Like the picture opposite, it is identifiable as being a Monarch descendent by the raised sprocket.*



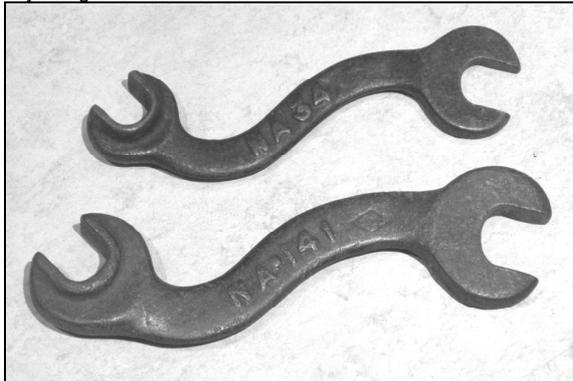
## SPANNER SPOT

Most of us are vaguely aware that almost all lawnmowers were originally supplied with some form of toolkit for maintenance. Sometimes this may have included a grease or oil gun, screwdriver, or other tools, but almost invariably, if nothing else, there was a spanner. Spanners are a collecting field in their own right, but many lawnmower collectors have acquired a few spanners along the way. Occasionally you might find a spanner in the same garden shed as the mower, and if you get hold of a mower straight from a shed where it has lived for years it is always worth a look around for the spanner if possible.

This series of articles is intended to give an idea of what known mower spanners look like, so that they can be identified in the proverbial spanner box at the next auto-jumble. For this issue, I will discuss the Ransomes cast iron spanners you may find.

One feature of Ransomes spanners is that they do not say 'Ransomes' anywhere on them, but are identifiable from parts lists that came with the mowers, as most have distinguishing part numbers in raised letters cast into them. Ransomes part numbers consist of a letter code and a number. The letters indicate which mower or type of mower the spanner belongs to. All these spanners appear to have originally been painted black.

First off, the top one in the picture below, the most common cast iron spanner of all, NA34. NA is the New Automaton part number code, and it remained current on all successive models with parts the same as the New Automaton. These spanners were almost certainly sold with all New, Chain and Patent Automaton, giving them a life span from 1885 to 1935. The odd feature of this spanner is that the smaller end is flanged, so that the spanner can be used end on like a socket, presumably on the bearing adjusting nuts.



The bottom one in the picture above is NA141, which is the same shape but bigger, and was presumably sold with the larger Automaton models, perhaps 20" and above. This is much rarer.

The next spanner is IP17, IP being the part number code for the Anglo Paris. This spanner is, curiously, more commonly found than the number of Anglo Paris mowers around would suggest, so perhaps it was sold with some other model as well for a time. Note that the smaller end is at a 45 degree angle to the rest of the spanner, for getting at the Anglo Paris's bearing adjusting nuts.



The next one, below, is LR35, a more angular casting, and a less common example. LR is the part code for Automaton Minors and carries on some common parts for Anglias, and the early Certes, the LR35 spanner last being listed in the Mark 3 & 4 Certes parts list. The 'LR' letters presumably stand for Light Roller.



There are other Ransomes spanners which appear in the parts lists but which I have never seen or heard of. Sometimes they are illustrated, however, it is possible that they don't have the part number on them, so they would be impossible to identify. These spanners include L39, which came with Lions and Leos and BB28 and BB29 (double ended and single ended respectively) that came with all the Ransomes "Pennsylvania" type machines.

Almost distinctive enough (if the Parts list illustration is to be believed) to be recognised without a part number is the Cub spanner, LG41, which is double ended but with a pointed projection from one end almost as long as the spanner itself. This may have been for cleaning oil holes.

Others are the Anglia Mk V spanners of which there are 4, one a socket with no number, the others being MQ151 (i.e. common to a Marquis), LE115 and a ring spanner LO177. The Mk I Ajax has another ring spanner, LS2507/16. Increasingly, in the later 1930s, parts lists cease to mention spanners, which may suggest that Ransomes were no longer making specific tools for their machines, but were relying on ready made spanners from other manufacturers. In the next Grassbox, I will look at the Greens spanners.

## AND FINALLY...

*This rather fuzzy close up from a larger picture shows a 14" or 16" Silens Messor in use at The lawn, Castle Grounds, Guildford. The mower dates from between 1887 and 1905, having no nameplate but straight handles. The postcard this comes from was postmarked on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1907. The picture was sent in by Arthur Madeley.*



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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: February 2008**

Edition 62 – Nov. 2007

Edited & written (except where stated) by William Proudfoot