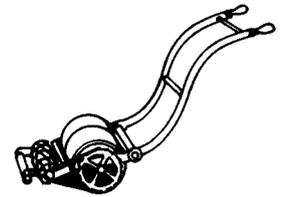


# Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 68

Spring 2009

## EDITORIAL

Despite the spring sunshine in the air, it seems no time at all since I was putting together the last Grassbox in the depths of winter, with hard frosts and snow on the ground. This leads me neatly to an apology, as many of you will recall that the last issue was somewhat late in arriving, and sadly this was due to the snow in early February preventing the van transporting the newly printed magazines from getting to Colin Stone, who was due to put them in the envelopes and post them, on time, which resulted in a substantial delay.

By the time you read this, it will be a couple of weeks away from the Milton Keynes rally, and barring further disasters there should be plenty of time to get lots in for the auction before the deadline – the form is included again with this issue. In case anyone missed out last time, I have also included the liability insurance form again on the same page.

We have decided to include a themed section in the Milton Keynes rally this year, this being to try and encourage as many people as possible to bring comparable machines to display, though I would emphasise that this does not mean that you can't bring other mowers as well. So dust off your greenkeeper's mowers for this year's subject, fine turf mowers. To get you in the mood, Christopher Proudfoot has provided a brief history of fine turf mowing up until the 1950s in this Grassbox. The next issue should include a 'special feature' on one or two of the machines displayed in this section of the rally.

I would make a plea again though not just for material and pictures for Grassbox but more importantly for any dates of rallies coming up in the latter part of the summer and autumn. As dates change and events move, I won't publish events in the diary based on last year's event alone, so please, if you are attending a rally and want other club members to come along with their machines, let me know so I can get it in Grassbox in time. The deadline for the next issue will be the 11<sup>th</sup> July.

## CONTACTING THE CLUB

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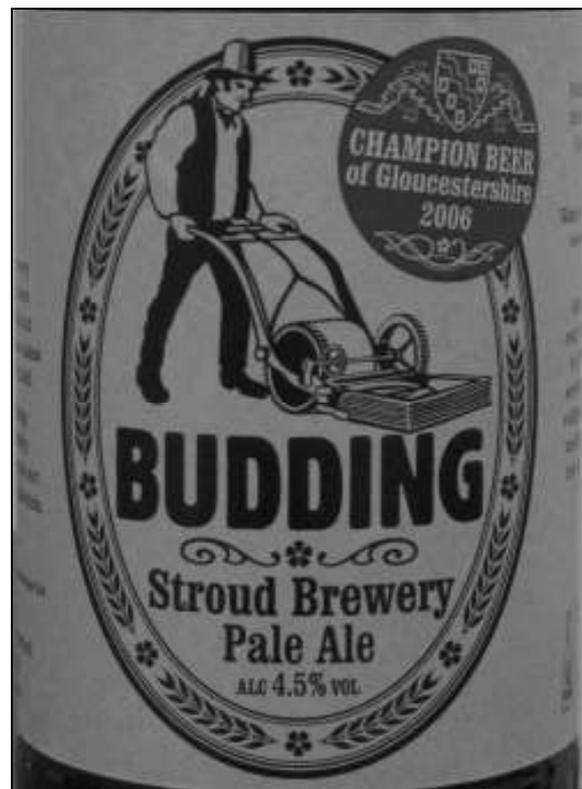
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## ONE FOR BUDDING DRINKERS

The Stroud Brewery of Thrupp, Gloucestershire ([www.stroudbrewery.co.uk](http://www.stroudbrewery.co.uk)), brew a pale ale sure to be of interest to lawnmower collectors. No, not because we're all boozers (just most of us?), but because it bears both the name and the likeness of one of Thrupp's most famous sons, Edwin Beard Budding, and also that of his finest creation. Furthermore, emblazoned upon the label is the proud boast "Champion beer of Gloucestershire 2006"! At a manly 4.5% ABV, surely something to warm the cockles of any mower enthusiast?

Its makers claim of it "a grassy bitterness, sweet malt and luscious floral aroma". Does it live up to such a billing? It is certainly as pale as billed, with a delicious summery yellow hue. In line with many modern paler beers it has a distinctly citrus aroma – I would argue with the suggestion that it is floral – and sharp citrus, rather than hop, bitterness. A little torrefied wheat ensures that it is not fizzy, but the bubbles keep gently rising and thus it stays crisp on the palate with a sweet malty aftertaste. In common with many bottled beers there is a slightly odd buttery flavour lurking somewhere behind its facade but this is not overpowering and is balanced by the sharper flavours. It certainly beats anything you'll ever find in a can. I would cheerfully buy more bottles of it, and look forward to finding it in cask-conditioned form behind a bar somewhere where it will be even better. Edwin would probably have settled down at the end of the day with a jug of Entire, but his namesake is just the kind of summery pale ale to quench the thirst engendered by a hard day's mowing!



A label for mower enthusiasts to look out for!  
Adrian Gray

## DIARY DATES

**Annual Rally & AGM, Milton Keynes Museum: Saturday 16 & Sunday 17 May** See the adverts page for more details or contact Keith Wootton. T: 01327 830675 E: keith.wootton@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

**Lords Farm, Sheet, nr. Petersfield: Sunday 24 May Annual vintage get-together.** For a number of years now club member and avid collector John Lovell has arranged this popular local event, supporting various good causes.

John's premises provide an interesting back-drop to the event which has a very strong local following and gives an opportunity to see John's own large and very varied collection including his cast iron garden rollers

Richard Jones organizes the lawnmower section and is supported by a number of other club members, old and new. The display is set out on the edge of an old orchard bordered on one side by an oast house and barn and with a long abandoned Ruston Bucyrus having a tree growing through the middle of it. The area allows for some practical demonstrations and the vintage lawnmower equivalent of the JCB formation dancing team has been known to take place! John is keen to expand the lawnmower side of it so would encourage more members to come along, preferably with a machine or two.

Contact Richard Jones. T: 01243 573488 E: richard.jones@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

**West Dean Garden Show: Saturday 20 & Sunday 21 June** Contact Richard Jones. T: 01243 573488 E: richard.jones@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

**Banbury Steam Rally: Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 June** A regular club event for many years. Further details from Robbie Robinson: 01895 450899 or bernard.robinson@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

**Rustic Sunday, The Rural Life Centre, Tilford, Farnham: Sunday 26 July** Contact Colin Stone T: 01428 604003 E: colin.stone@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

**Alesford Agricultural Show: Saturday 5 September** Contact Colin Stone T: 01428 604003 E: colin.stone@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

**Bedfordshire Steam Rally: Saturday 19 & Sunday 20 September** Contact Dick Hardwick T: 01462 816018 E: treasurer@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

**Malvern Autumn Show: Saturday 26 & Sunday 27 September** Contact Tony Hopwood T: 01684 592134

**TILMOW 09 The Rural Life Centre, Tilford, Farnham: Saturday 26 & Sunday 27 September** Contact Colin Stone T: 01428 604003 E: colin.stone@oldlawnmowerclub.co.uk

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## A CONFUSION OF CLICHES

Radio 4's Afternoon Play is often good for some light relief, though I generally listen with only half an ear while doing something more important. One afternoon in late February, I had such a divided ear on a play called *Mole*, about a chap with an obsessive dislike of molehills on his lawn. For reasons I missed, it was not he but his wife who went to collect the mower from the local mower repair shop ("buckled deck"), and my ears pricked up when the proprietor of this establishment admitted to being a collector, with 258 mowers, arranged alphabetically, from 'Atco De Luxe' to 'Zephyr'. A chromium-plated Ransomes Ajax Mark 4 was noted, used by 'the Late Lord Meyrick' for mowing his tennis court. I dismissed idle thoughts as to whether an aristocratic tennis-court owner would choose an Ajax, or why he would get it chromium-plated, in time to hear the repair man describe his 'Pushmepullyou' Budding.

I was impressed by these accurate descriptions of real live lawn mowers – clearly the author had done some research. But then things started to go awry. "What do you notice about this Greens' 6-inch Multum in Parvo, made in 1860?" the customer was asked. "That's right, the handles are very low. That's because people were much shorter in those days. It was used for mowing between gravestones." What a load of nonsense! For a start, the Multum in Parvo did not appear until the 1880s. Then, if anyone was attempting to mow between gravestones at that time, the early MIP would have been singularly unsuited to the task – it has exposed gears projecting on both sides, and grinding away at the stones with them would do neither much good, while leaving a wide margin of uncut grass on both sides.

And that hoary old chestnut about people being shorter in 'those days'. Yes, the average height today is greater than it was before the last war, but there were tall people and short people then, as there are now. Indeed, I was interested to learn recently that the average inhabitant of Naples today is actually shorter than his Roman ancestors of circa 79 AD, when Vesuvius erupted.

**Christopher Proudfoot**

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## THE ULTIMATE 'PUSH-PULL' MOWER?



The marvellous image recently came to light, in the photograph album of a local family, of a large Silens Messor (probably 18 or 20 inch) with a distinctly unorthodox form of power conversion. The mower has been previously converted to be used with a Mower Pusher, as seen by the upright handles, however, this had been dispensed with for unspecified reasons, and the family's motorbike used instead. Quite how the mower and the lawn stood up to this treatment is unknown, but there don't appear to be any ill effects visible in this picture, taken in 1930.

Apparently, this arrangement was maintained throughout the pre war years, and it was only with the advent of petrol rationing in the 1940s that the motorbike was dispensed with and an elderly donkey used instead, as seen in this view from 1950. Note that the Mower Pusher attachment is still in place, making the handles unnaturally high for someone controlling the mower from behind.



# FINE TURF MOWERS

This year at Milton Keynes we are going to have a special theme section, an idea that has been talked about in the past and actually tried at Banbury. The first theme is Fine Turf mowers, those multi-bladed affairs beloved of golf and bowling green keepers.

The type seems to have developed in the 1920s, growing out of 'special' versions of mowers like the Automaton Minor and the rival Multum in Parvo, which appeared about the time of the 1914-18 war. These had extra blades (typically eight instead of the usual six) and a thin bottom blade, as seen in this Ransomes catalogue (*below*) from 1915.

The Automaton Minor, a cheaper and lighter sibling of the Patent Automaton, would evolve from this mildly modified 'Special' into the Certes, which in its early versions had the same handle bars and grass box, among other parts, as the Automaton Minor. The most important difference was that it had fully enclosed compound gears – for an explanation of compound and simple gears, see Grassbox No. 51 (2005). Eight or ten blades were available, the ten knife version becoming the standard for professional greenkeeping use.

**"Special Roller"  
LAWN MOWERS**  
Gear or Chain Drive  
as preferred

For Golf Greens.

**F**ITTED with special cutting cylinder with eight knives and flat bottom blade to ensure a very close cut. They are the closest cutting and easiest to work of any obtainable.

They were selected for use on the "Putting Greens" at the Open Championship Meeting, Muirfield, and gave complete satisfaction.

**PRICES.**  
14 in. £5 10 0 | 16 in. £9 5 0  
Grass Boxes included.

Greens, as usual, were behind Ransomes in this development, and in the 1920s gradually added improvements to the antiquated Silens Messor, calling the result the Silens Messor de Luxe. This had ball bearings and acquired an extra knife in its cylinder (nine instead of eight)

**NON-RIB  
MODEL-DE-LUXE  
"SILENS MESSOR"  
LAWN MOWERS**

Specially designed for Golf and Bowling Greens and Fine Lawns.

Superficial Cutting  
Adjustable Cylinder  
Heat-treated Steel Cutters  
Non-Ribbing or Mixing  
Mechanism Compound Gear Drive  
Inter-gear or Roller Bearing

Wood Ends to Grass Box to obviate noise when mowing  
Adjustable Handles  
Aluminium Frame and Drums  
Ball-bearings in Cylinder and Gear Shaft  
All Bearings and Gearing enclosed.

Grass Gun, Leather Tool Bag, and Spawner included.  
Can be supplied with single wood handle if preferred.  
Complete with Grass Box.

**Cash Prices**

For Lawns, Bowling Greens, etc.	8 Cutters	10 Cutters
12 inch	£13 10 0	£14 5 0
14 inch	£16 10 0	£17 10 0
16 inch	£18 10 0	£19 10 0
18 inch	£20 10 0	£21 10 0

For Golf Putting Greens, etc.  
8 Cutters  
£14 10 0  
10 Cutters  
£15 10 0  
12 inch  
£16 10 0  
14 inch  
£17 10 0  
16 inch  
£18 10 0  
18 inch  
£19 10 0

Transporting Carriage not included. Transporting Carriage included.

Luxe, steel plate in the slightly cheaper Supreme). The new de Luxe (like the rival Certes) could be had with eight or ten knives, as in this 1939 Greens catalogue.

The Certes acquired an aluminium frame in the 1930s; it survived the war and carried on through the 1960s, although it had by then been joined by the motorised 'Auto-Certes'. Shanks's equivalent model, the 'Lynx', also had aluminium frames (in the late 1930s it became the 'Golf Lynx', and this

survived the war). Greens took a different route altogether after the war, reverting to a simple chain drive so that their fine turf 'Zephyr' shared many parts with the domestic 'Monitor'. To compensate for the lack of compound gearing, there were no less than twelve knives in the cylinder.

Other fine turf mowers came from Pennsylvania (Lloyds) and, of course, JP, whose mowers were mostly so well engineered as to be pretty well eligible for the title in basic form. Ransomes for many years between the wars also offered the 'Bowling Green', described as suitable specifically for Cumberland turf. It had ten knives in its cylinder, but simple gearing and a large diameter land roll. This gave a less impressive performance (22 cuts-per-foot) than the Certes, but was perhaps more gentle on delicate turf. Given that a bowling green would be cut more or less daily in the height of the season, a large diameter roller with minimal frictional resistance would be useful in reducing wear on the turf at the end of every swathe. Shanks had an equivalent model, called the Drake, a clever pun on its bowling use and conforming to the ornithological theme of several other Shanks mowers. I have never examined a Drake, but from illustrations it looks as if it had compound gears.

The cutting performance of a cylinder mower is measured in terms of cuts-per-foot or per yard (or even per metre, but we won't mention that, will we?). An ordinary domestic mower usually achieves about 12 – 15 cuts per foot; a Mark 3 Certes with 10 knives does 26, a Shanks's Lynx goes one better at 27. The mechanically similar Eagle (6 blades) does 18, while the Green's Supreme (1930 type, compound gear, 8 blades) does 22 cuts per foot. This is better than the 1929 chain-driven SM de Luxe, which with 9 blades cuts 20 ½ times per foot. (By contrast, the 3-bladed Archimedean manages 10½, while an early compound geared Multum In Parvo does 24 cuts per foot, making it technically eligible as a fine turf machine!)

As a final note, few mower catalogues gave cuts-per-foot figures in pre-war days, but Arundel Coulthard's 'Rollmo' (*see picture below*) broke the mould by incorporating them in model names, which sound like extracts from a train timetable. Thus the '5-15' had five knives cutting 15 times in a foot, while the '8-32' had eight blades and an impressive 32 cuts. I have never found one of the latter – despite its resemblance to a Qualcast Panther, it would have been a Fine Turf Mower, without question!

**ROLLMO 8-32 SILENT FLEX HELICAL TREAD**

Specially designed for Bowling and Golf Greens, this model will appeal to all who require supreme cutting qualities. Patent SILENT FLEX Drive and HELICAL TREAD Rollers, EIGHT-bladed Ball-Bearing Cutting Cylinder giving THIRTY-TWO cuts per foot of travel, TELL-TALE Cut adjustment and BALL-BEARING FRONT ROLLER.

12" Size	14"	16"	List Price.	Less 5% for Cash.
.. .. .	.. .. .	.. .. .	£9 9 0	£8 19 6
.. .. .	.. .. .	.. .. .	£10 10 0	£9 19 6
.. .. .	.. .. .	.. .. .	£11 11 0	£10 19 6

From The Ironmonger's Standard Catalogue, 1940/41  
Christopher Proudfoot

**Next Edition: Summer 2009**  
Edition 68 – Spring 2009. Edited & written (except where stated) by William Proudfoot

# SHANKS MOTOR MOWERS

In Grassbox No 66 it was written that I was off to Arbroath to see if Shanks may have beaten Ransomes to producing the first Motor Mower? Wow was I a popular person for a few days after this article appeared, phone calls from all over the world from some of our most eminent collectors and historians pointing out that this couldn't be possible as Ransomes produced the world's first successful motor mower in 1902.

Of course I was already aware of this and had a fair idea that Shanks entered the arena of Motor Mower manufacture in about 1905. What I needed to answer was whether the remains I have of a Shanks Motor mower, could be the earliest Motor Mower in preservation.

The honest answer to the question is, no it isn't. Research has proved that the mower I have was first introduced in 1909, and I know there are Ransomes mowers that were manufactured in the first few years of their production still in existence. So what have I learnt and what have I got?

Shanks entered the mower market in 1842, responding to an order from W. F. Lindsay-Carnegie of The Kinblethmont estate for a 27" cut mower for use on a 2½ acre lawn, and owing to its size, this was to be drawn by a horse. Shanks have since claimed that this is when they became "Manufacturers of the first effective lawnmower." If reports of the time in such publications as the "Mechanics Magazine" are to be believed the original Budding Machine would today be classed as not fit for purpose!

Shanks continued to patent improvements to their hand



and pony mowers throughout the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and entered into many other areas of horticultural engineering, such as this (left) nice Shanks garden roller standing in the grounds of the ruined Arbroath Abbey.

One of the finest testaments to this company's diversity still stands - the Palm house in Gothenburg,

Sweden, (right) was manufactured by Shanks in 1878. In this splendid building of almost 1,000 m2 you'll find plants from every corner of the globe, as you're taken on a journey to five continents in five different temperate zones. You didn't think Eden was a new concept!



In 1900 Shanks entered the powered Lawnmower market with a steam mower that was fuelled by cheap lamp oil; one claimed advantage of the machine suggested it left no unsightly hoof prints, though I'd be fairly confident that the first pass of this massive steaming leviathan removed any indication what so ever of the previous power source while its own waste products weren't quite so beneficial to the garden.

But that most progressive of companies Ransomes introduced a petrol powered Lawnmower in 1902, the first being sold to Mr Prescott Westcar, It's a real shame that that steam didn't get a bit more of an opportunity to get established, can you imagine the public's admiration of a collection of these magnificent machines displayed at any one of our events. Although we await the appearance of one or two from quiet sheds up and down the country.



As mentioned earlier Shanks entered the Petrol Powered Market in 1905; the first of their pedestrian machines looks to all intents and purposes to be a pony mower with an engine. The 42" ride-on of 1907 and the 30" pedestrian mower

for golf courses of the same period are stunning looking bonneted machines, in appearance not dissimilar to an early Peugeot or De Dion car, but from images of the time it would appear that the Shanks name wasn't cast into the frames of the early machines. This is one of several significant changes brought about in 1909. The most compelling evidence that this is in fact the date manufacture started of machines identical to the one I have is the part number D1 cast into the left hand side frame, clearly visible in works photographs.

### Shanks's Motor Mowers.

THE Petrol Motor Mower, of which an illustration is given on opposite page, cuts 30 inches wide. It is easily handled and particularly well adapted for use on undulating ground, lawns, &c. A specially strong machine of this size is made for golf courses.

This Machine is very compact, and is easily accessible for examination of parts. It can be turned almost on its own centre with very little trouble. Reversing gear is unnecessary, but a free clutch is fitted for Motor, and also a clutch for taking cutter out of gear. All regulating levers are conveniently arranged close to attendant. Grass-box and efficient Delivery Gear are supplied with this Machine. It is driven by a 2½ H.P. Motor, with High Tension Magneto Ignition.

<b>Price,</b>	<b>£105</b>
GOLF Course Mowers, with Grass-box and Delivery Apparatus, in Steel with heavy balance weight in front instead of Grass-box.	<b>£115</b>

As with all manufacturers modifications and improvements were on going and by 1912 although the same basic chassis and engine were still in use the governor mechanism had changed resulting in a modification to the engine block. The machine I have pre-dates this modification so I'm happy to claim that the remains of the Shanks 30" Motor mower I have dates from 1909 -1912 and may be the Oldest Shanks Motor Mower in existence unless you know otherwise.

**Andrew Grout**