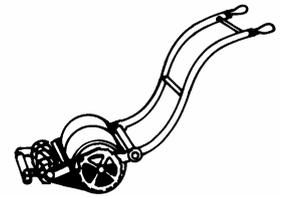


Grassbox



The magazine of The Old Lawnmower Club

Number 69

Summer 2009

EDITORIAL

With the Annual Rally at Milton Keynes behind us for another year, the summer is rapidly advancing, and this issue's diary dates section shows a wealth of large and small shows that club members will be attending in the late summer and early autumn, surely more than in many previous years. This I hope shows the increasing interest shown in old lawnmowers on the rally field, and by members of the public, as well as increasing interest in showing their machines to our members, which must surely be healthy for the club.

Many Club members who were present at the AGM will recall discussion about the possible change in the format of Grassbox. Work on this, especially the costs involved, is ongoing, so for the moment Grassbox stays the same. It is hoped though to be able to produce all or part of the changed magazine in colour, and as a result I have decided not to compile a colour section for this issue, but to save pictures that need to be in colour for future use. Our intention is also to turn Grassbox into an A5 publication, as this will significantly reduce postage costs, as it will no longer be in the large size category.

Finally, I hope that members will all enjoy the rest of the summer, and I look forward to having your reports of rallies and events for future issues.

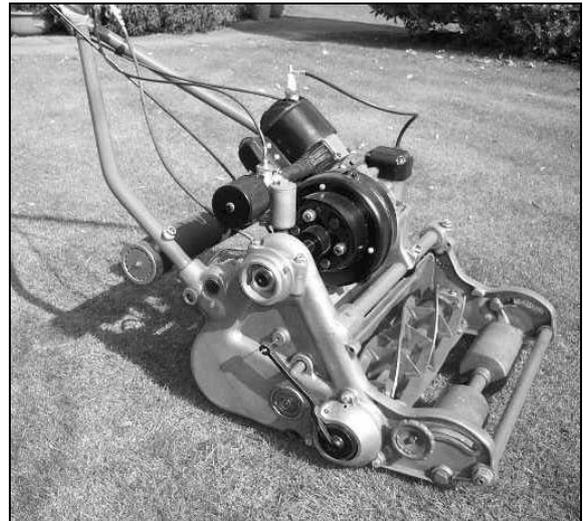
PRE WAR JP RESTORATION

I have recently restored a pre-war JP 16" Power Mower, this being what I call the 'Mark 2' version as it has a multi-plate clutch on the right-hand end of the cutting cylinder in addition to the clutch on the left side of the rear rollers. This means that unlike the earlier models the cylinder doesn't run continuously but it does require a curious double clutch lever assembly on the right handlebar (just visible in the photo below) to operate it, with the throttle lever on the left handlebar as normal.



The earlier models had an aluminium plate which pivoted on a rod running between the two side frames and above the cylinder and which rested on the open face of the grassbox. This was designed to drop down when the 'box was removed and the engine still running to provide protection for one's hands from the spinning cylinder; on the 'Mark 2' this plate was now unnecessary.

The early version was made from 1927 and as far as I can tell the 'Mark 2' was made from 1936 but did not re-appear after the war when JP brought out the Simplex power mower, based on the Super hand mower, in about 1947.



The right side, showing the separate clutch for the cutting cylinder, not present on the earlier version.
Henry Ellis

RALLY AWARD



It's always good to report mower displays winning awards at rallies and events, and Peter Barlow, from Lancashire, was very pleased to win both first and third prizes in the Horticultural section of last year's event at Myrescough College, and we are happy to show him (on the left) receiving his award.

Next Edition: Autumn 2009

Edition 69 – Summer 2009. Edited & written (except where stated) by William Proudfoot

DIARY DATES

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

Suffolk Vintage Festival, Glemham Hall, Little Glemham, Woodbridge, Suffolk Saturday 5 & Sunday 6 September 2009 Contact Barry Reynolds E: info@suffolk-vintage-festival.com

Harvesting The Old Fashioned Way, West Stoke, nr. Chichester, West Sussex: Saturday 12 & Sunday 13 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

RALLY REPORT

Great Bloxham Vintage Vehicle & Country Show

Well, 'IT'S' over for another year – and a 'jolly good time' was had by all those members who attended. 'Robbie' (a.k.a. Mr. Bernard Robinson) besides currently being the Old Lawnmower Club Shop & Transfer organiser has, for several years, been Chairman of the Banbury Steam Society, the Club that arranges this event. Thus our Club was assured of all the very best of arrangements for a show situation - a prime location, large marquee, continuous electricity, adjacent toilets and water supply, nearby food stalls etc.

It was mostly the 'regulars' who contributed to our display again, although new this year was a fine layout of general gardening implements, including some sturdy portable sprayers that attracted a lot of interest.

The centrepiece was a display of Keith Wootton's Ferrabee, flanked by two very modern powered rotaries – a Honda & a Stihl. At first sight a little out of place, but with thought you realised that it was a good comparison for 'Joe Public' to see and to realise that the price of the current mowers, about £800 is a lot less, proportionately to what the Ferrabee was in its day – early technology didn't come cheaply!

Andy Grout brought a recent find (*below*) – a nice Drummond 'Willing Worker' complete with what he first thought was an original grassbox! However, it quickly became apparent that the box had been made, probably some time ago, from a strong metal container of some sort. It bears the name F Robinson & Co. of Hull. A vintage restoration, and one of the more unusual of the many home made grass boxes to have been found!



On the Saturday evening Tony Hopwood, our Club Chairman, suggested we had a barbecue while listening to some of his vintage BBC tapes, played via a genuine

ancient amplifier and 'horn' speaker – the Goon show never sounded better! Tony had brought four of the portable aluminium tray single shot barbecues, which worked fine when set up on his trailer, with his loading ramp and some metal mesh in between the two in case they got hot underneath. We were soon eating and listening happily, the barbecues left in situ to cool off. However, they didn't cool off, but burned holes through the loading ramp. The plume of increasingly dense smoke caught our attention and Banbury Steam Official Robbie rushed to the rescue. Luckily not much damage, but a dramatic warning that leaving hot metal on a wooden base is likely to lead to trouble – but, oh what a giggle we had at Tony's expense!

So, on behalf of all the Old Lawnmower Club members who contributed, including John Bloxham, Tony Hopwood, Richard Jones, Barry Sowerby, Keith Wootton, Alec Hillyar, Andy Grout and myself, thank you, Banbury Steam & Robbie and here's looking to next year for another great event. Why don't you make a note to join us?

Dick Hardwick

ANNUAL RALLY AND AGM REPORT 2009

It's hard to believe that the year since my last annual rally as the club chairman had passed so quickly and we were all converging on Milton Keynes Museum again in May. Nothing much had changed because as part of my new "role" in the club I was, along with some of the committee, still leading the arrangements for the weekend.

Like all our past events the weekend started full of expectation and the turn out on the Friday evening was at least as good as previous years. Many of the usual faces were there as well as one or two new ones, which is always pleasing as we try so hard to make the club an inclusive bunch.

In recent years I have tended to list many of the members in attendance but I suspect this might get a bit repetitive for those who couldn't make it - those that were will know who was there of course!

On the Saturday morning the mowers started to go on show and we were not disappointed. It's always been a feature of the annual rally that members try to bring their newest find or recent restoration to show off and this year was no exception, although a few old favourites were also in evidence.

This year we had encouraged people to bring bowling green and fine turf mowers, if they had them, to put on display. There were plenty in evidence over the weekend including well known models such as Ransomes Bowling Green Mowers, Greens Zephyrs, Shanks Lynx and some slightly more obscure models such as an Arundel Coulthard



Presto, (*left*), (bowling green version with more blades on the cylinder and compound gears, as described in Grassbox 68) and a Pennsylvania New Era roller mower. It was clear that most of these mowers were hand machines although one member did

intend to bring a Ransomes Overgreen before it got the better of his trailer just before setting off.

There was also a good selection of small hand mowers, by which I mean less than 10in cut. It is surprising how many

of these machines there are out there and still being found. As I have always said, anyone is just as likely to find one of these at a local farm sale, car boot or recycling centre as at a specialist (ie high price) sale, so keep your eyes open!

There was also a pleasing selection of motor mowers, including a fairly good spread of Atco machines across the ages. Many of these were well presented and a fair proportion of those that had been restored were complete with a set of decals sourced through the club.

Of the more obscure machines on show, three or four stood out for me. First, the water cooled Qualcast Sixteen (right) that many of us believe to be a unique example, possibly prepared by the factory as a prototype in the late 1930s or early 40s. Another unusual and desirable machine was the MP mower pusher, complete with a set of cast iron wheels that would enable it to be used for pulling a garden roller rather than pushing a mower. A small selection of Automowers, Greens Motor Mowers, a couple of Keyshams and a Godiva motor mower, all from the 1920s, were all worth a second glance.



One of the big talking points of the weekend concerned a mower that wasn't on show but which most of the serious collectors certainly knew about. By curious coincidence there was a very unusual Follows & Bate Climax sidewheel on eBay with a finishing time set for early on the Sunday evening. Discussions were heated about how much people thought the bidding would go to, who was likely to bid and how they would manage to keep an eye on the closing seconds if they wanted to make a last minute bid. Some were more open than others about their intentions but the eventual winner certainly kept their cards close to their chest. In fact most of us only found out some weeks later who the successful bidder was. This is not the place to reveal who it was but suffice to say that, by another odd coincidence, the mower was very close to Milton Keynes and they were able to collect it on their way home and avoid a long return journey to pick it up.

We had a slightly different type of Saturday evening event because the regular party was not taking place. Instead we relied on take aways from local shops and this seemed to work out reasonably well. Nobody seemed to mind as we were in good company and had a good supply of beer from Frog Island Brewery in Northampton to keep the conversation lubricated. Robbie organised a light-hearted quiz, the winners of which I am too modest to reveal.

Sunday always goes by in a bit of a blur and by eight o'clock members were already arriving in waves. This added significantly to the number of machines on show, as you might expect, and the field was soon buzzing with excited chit chat. More deals were done, prearranged exchanges made, and tempting offers made for machines not really on sale. You cannot blame people for trying can you?

The AGM went ahead at 11am as planned with Tony Hopwood in the chair for the first time. The formal business of the meeting was concluded reasonably quickly with the main outcome being a change of Secretary from Andrew Grout to Mike Duck. Andrew has filled this important role for the past two years and has been instrumental in helping us with the transition from the Keith/Robbie period to the new regime. I know that everyone thanks him for all his hard work which is more often than not hidden from most members' view. He has decided to remain on the

committee and, indeed, majority of other committee members were also re-elected for the coming year.

At the end of the meeting I was privileged to present the Charlie Jones Award in my capacity as president of the club. This year the trophy was presented to Tony Houghton who is well known to many of our members in the east of England. Like all Charlie Jones winners, Tony has supported the activities of the club for many years. As an example, this year he offered to collect and bring a mower from a non-member for sale in our Sunday Auction and this resulted in a very collectable machine passing to an enthusiast rather than ending up elsewhere.

The auction, our third, was a great success with the total "hammer price" for the fifty lots exceeding £1200. This allowed us to present the museum with around £120 as a donation, this being the commissions collected from buyers and sellers. As in the previous two years there definitely something for everybody with lots ranging in price from a few pounds up to £150 for an Atco Standard "Oval Frame" and £250 for a small Follows & Bate Speedwell.

The afternoon was rounded off by our usual presentations.

The competition for identifying the mower parts organised by Richard Jones was won by Alec Hillyar. (Alec, left, with Richard Jones) The Andrew Grout Plate, awarded to the owner of the mower the members most



want to take home was awarded to, er, me (left) for my Ferrabee Improved. This was unusual for two reasons.

First, this was the first time that an unrestored mower has won the prize. Second, as far as any of us could recall, all previous winners were at the event for the first time whereas this was the third or fourth time my mower had been on show there.



The weather which had been dodgy on and off all weekend managed to stay reasonably calm until almost everyone had gone home. But the heavens opened at around 5.30pm just in time to give a few of us a bit of a soak.

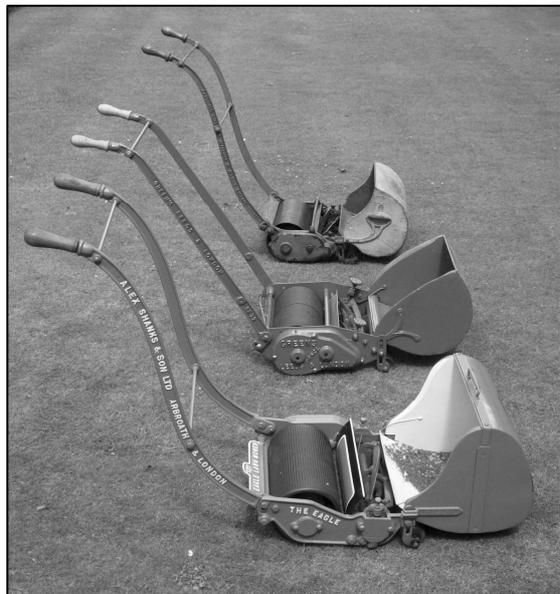
See you next year? Third full weekend in May, same place!
Keith Wootton

OLD MOWERS ON TEST

Like our Chairman, Tony Hopwood, I am a great fan of using old lawnmowers, rather than just restoring them and looking at them. Apart from the satisfaction of making something work properly, a lawn mown by a well set up hand mower takes some beating, even if the mower in question is a hundred or more years old.

In 1960, Which? Magazine tested the then current lawnmowers, and I have often thought of putting some of the older machines to the test, but never really got round to it until spurred on by the restoration of a later style Greens Prince recently, as this gave us three direct rivals, the

Shanks Eagle, the Ransomes Anglia and the Prince in good working order so they can be compared fairly.



The three mowers in question. The Anglia is un-restored, but mechanically in full 'cutting' order.

These machines were produced in the 1930s, and were probably the top end of the domestic market, all three having machine cut compound gears and ball bearings on both roller and cutting cylinder. Unlike the true fine turf mowers though, they only have six blades in the cylinder, which means that they are still inclined to rib the grass somewhat, which is obviously not terribly suitable for a professional finish on a bowling green.

In reality, the Anglia in question is the Mk 1 version rather than the Mk 5 which would be the contemporary of the other machines. The main reason for this is the Mk 5's Achilles heal, the screw operated hand adjuster, which means that it cannot be set to cut grass high enough to be any use on our lawn, therefore we have never got round to putting a Mk 5 into working order. Indeed, the cutting height is so limited that it is doubtful whether many people with domestic lawns would ever have had their grass that short!

This brings us neatly to the first point of interest. Both the Eagle and the Anglia have grass boxes that fix onto the tops of the front roller brackets, and while the Eagle has this allowed for with the bracket being longer than it otherwise needs be and solid above the slot, Ransomes don't seem to have thought of this with the Anglia, which means that although the mower can be set to cut quite high, in reality this can only be done if the grassbox isn't used, as the bracket won't project enough from the top of the frames to put the box on when set to cut longer grass. The Greens Prince gets round this problem by not having the box attaching to the bracket at all. Instead, like many Greens mowers of the time, the box has brackets on it which rest on studs on the inside of the side frames.

The down side to this is that the box has to be tilted forwards slightly to remove it which means that if the box is very full some of the grass will tip out all over the blades. Having said that however, the grassbox of the Prince is of a more bucket shape, and it is possible for the whole box space to fill with grass, while the other two mowers have boxes that can only ever partially fill before it starts to fall out of the front. The Anglia in particular is guilty of this, partly because its box is so shallow from front to back, making it the smallest grassbox in this test. The Eagle box is substantially bigger, and has a handle where you actually want it, i.e. on the top in the natural place to pick a grassbox up rather than on the sides. Quite why other makers never worked out that it was the logical place for a grassbox handle is a mystery, but Shanks had been using this design for decades.

The Prince is more suited to longer grass, as it has separate cast iron side runners on the front roller shaft, and the wooden central rollers can be removed so that they do not squash the grass flat in front of the blades.

The cutting ability of all three machines is virtually identical, and while the ribbed roller of the Eagle (and the Mk 5 Anglia) may give a theoretical advantage, in reality the difference is hard to detect.

The most significant difference between the Greens Prince and the other two though is that the Greens has flat steel side frames, which are lighter in theory, but the weight saving is probably largely negated by the complex cast iron blocks needed to support the roller and cylinder mountings. Maintenance is therefore more complicated on the Greens, with a variety of covers, bolts and fiddly housings to be removed if you wanted to regrind the cylinder. However, the Prince does run to hand adjusters for the cylinder, but a spanner is still needed for the lock nuts.

The Ransomes and Shanks mowers have a much easier arrangement with the bearing housings having a spring underneath and an adjusting bolt on top, the arrangement perfected by Ransomes on the New Automaton in 1885. Although the Shanks has a bad design fault that means the bearing housing isn't tight until the gear cover is in place (making back lapping very difficult), there is little else to choose between these two for maintenance.

Finally of course there is price to consider. This is easy as they all cost more or less the same. In 1936, both the Eagle and the Mk 5 Anglia cost £6 10s. while I don't have a 1936 price for a Prince, in 1937 it cost £7 0s. We can infer that they were all meant to be the same price as in 1939, the Prince and the Anglia cost the same at £7 15s, all these prices being for the 12" model. 10" and 14" versions were also available, but must have sold in much smaller numbers given their relative scarcity today.

So to sum up, I would rate the Ransomes Anglia at the bottom, as there are just too many things that the ordinary user would find irritating, especially the limited cutting height and the small grassbox, the maintenance advantages being relatively insignificant. The Prince would be in the middle, as for the everyday user, the spilling of grass from the box when you remove it is probably the only real fault, but its construction is over complicated, while the best is the Eagle, which although very like an Anglia, has the latter's worst faults removed. It is worth remembering though that the numbers of machines surviving today reflects that the Anglia was by far the most popular model.

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