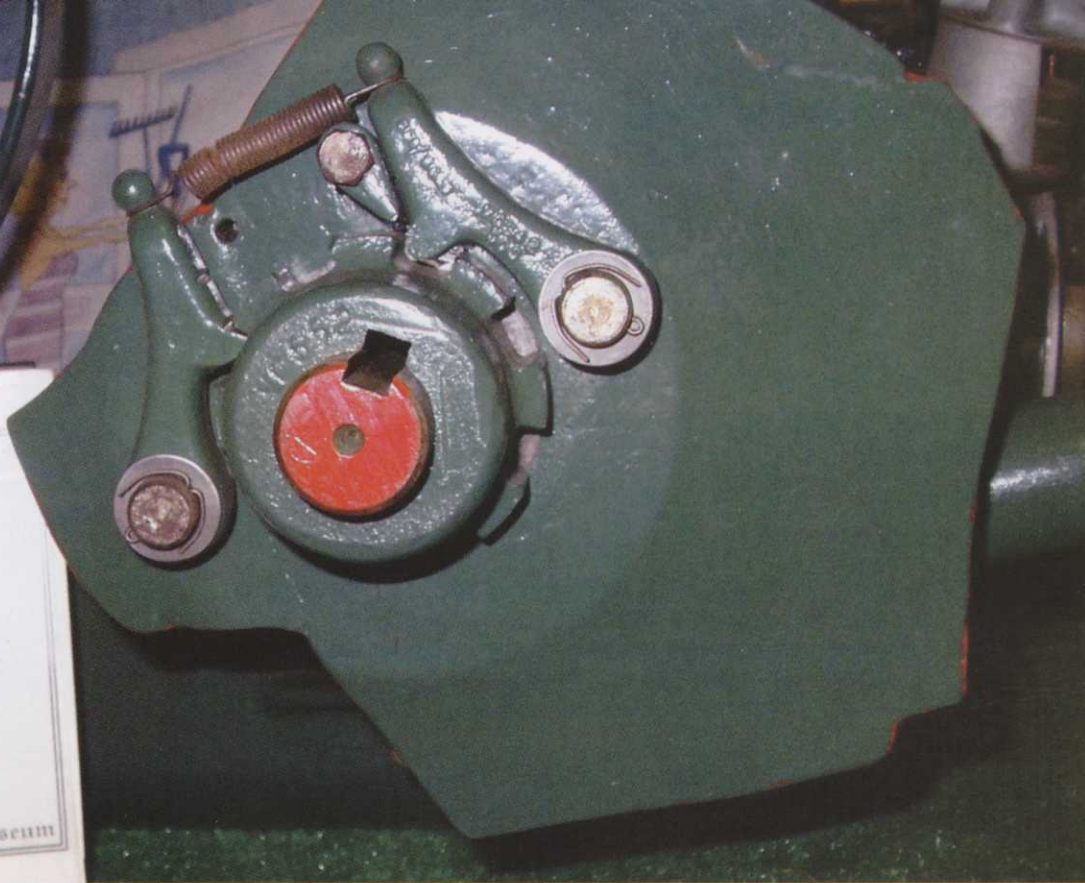
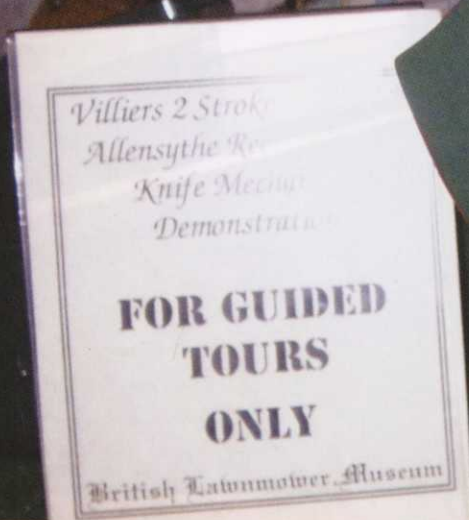


Villiers 2 Stroke Engine and Allensythe Reciprocating Knife Mechanism demonstration. Brian took this machine on the television programme Scrapheap Challenge. He has slowed the mechanism down to show how it works



Marvellous Mowers

Southport. Considered England's Golfing Capital with seven championship courses, including Royal Birkdale - which will host The Open in 2008 - Famous for its annual Flower Show, International Jazz Festival and Military Displays; Southport also holds claim to a museum unique in its field - The British Lawnmower Museum. Melissa Toombs reports.

One of the world's leading authorities on vintage mowers and the largest specialist in antique garden machinery, The British Lawnmower Museum houses a private collection of over 200 pristine exhibits, built up over a period of 50 years.

Included in this unique national collection are manufacturers not normally associated with the garden industry, such as Rolls Royce, Royal Enfield, Dennis and British Leyland.

Adding some variety to the vast array of mowers that the museum holds, solar powered and robot machines also make an appearance.



Brian Radam, The British Lawnmower Museum curator, aged 55

Situated above The Discount Garden Machinery Warehouse, this bijou museum is the only one of its kind in the world and understandably it attracts visitors from all over the globe, even celebrities and popstars such as Status Quo who visited the museum while on tour.

Brian Radam is the curator of this wonderfully unique museum, which opened in 1990. "It came about from a shop my father started in 1945 repairing lawnmowers. He ended up with an array of machines destined for the scrap yard, as they were beyond repair. Rather than throwing them out, we began restoring them," explained Brian.



Brian May from Queen donated his lawnmower to the museum

"We now get people from all over the country donating machines and we have some very rare lawnmowers of the rich and famous, such as Princess Diana and Prince Charles' machine, and also Brian May's," continued Brian, "They just phone up and ask if we would like them."

Greens Silens Messor - Latin for Silent Cutter - boasts a chain - the first time one had been invented. It made the machines much quieter



Marvellous Mowers

ATCO's wedding present to Princess Diana and Prince Charles



Paul O'Grady's rather fluffy lawnmower



The Unique British Anzani, ride-on mower made of aluminium. It had one or two faults; one being if you went around a corner too fast, you'd tip and fall off!

THE HISTORY OF THE LAWNMOWER

Edwin Budding of Gloucester invented the lawnmower in 1830. He worked in a woollen mill and was asked to design a machine to trim the nap from cloth. He was thought of as a madman for testing his invention at night and stated, "gentleman will find this an amusing and healthy exercise," when he unveiled it. It struck Budding that the same machine could be used to mow lawns and the cylinder machine he devised has not changed in principle since that date and has been the traditional lawnmower for formal lawns used throughout Britain.

ATCO built the first mass produced lawnmower out of wrought iron with a hand crank start and propeller for cooling, and priced it at 21 guineas, which was a lot of money at that time - about half the price of a car. This may seem expensive but you could aerate the lawn and cut it at the same time and as Brian explained "Lots of machines pre 1940's, when British engineering was the best in the world, were made to last a lifetime, nowadays people go out to buy a new lawnmower but come back with a grass cutter. We've pretty much lost all our British lawnmower manufacturers which is a shame as lawnmowing is a very British thing and with that in effect, we're losing all our lawns as well, which is sad."

Materials were limited when lawnmowers first began to be built and a lot of machines were made out of cast iron or wood, whereas today plastic, aluminium and steel are generally used.

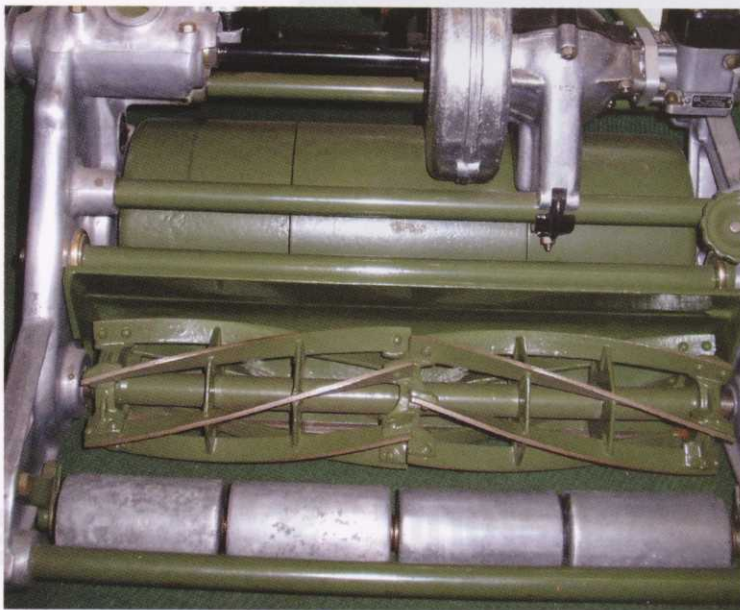
Ransomes produced the first electric mower in 1926, a time when not everyone had electricity in their homes and although classed as a lightweight model, the mower was still very hefty. It had a wood and copper switch which was considered a new gismo in '20s.

1965 saw the invention of the hovercraft lawnmower by Flymo. The mower is still orange to this day as a consequence of surveying 5000 housewives on their desired colour. At first these mowers would not sell as plastic was deemed cheap and not very strong in the 60s, so reps went to door to door to ask potential customers if they would like to try them out and the company grew and grew from there.





ATCO's first wrought iron lawnmower



Jerram and Pearson, a precision engineering company, set out to make the best lawnmowers in the world and were considered the Rolls Royce of lawnmowers when they first came out. Rolls Royce then went on to buy the company out and continue to produce lawnmowers. This particular model, the 24in Water Cooled, was made in 1926, has a water-cooled engine and is made from cast aluminium side frame. The special cutters are designed to send the grass to the centre of the grass box. This mower would have cost the price of two cars or even a small house. It's one of Brian's favourites as "the engineering quality is so good, a lot of their mowers are handmade and therefore have a lot of character."



Shanks' Pony. The Scottish company Shanks built the pony drawn lawnmower - a similar model to this picture



Ransomes first ever lawnmower - the 8IN NEW Automaton

Marvellous Mowers



The first ever robot mower cost £1m to make and retailed for £2000. The mower is powered by daylight. The top is covered in solar panels - the same panels used on space shuttles - and you don't even need to touch the machine, it just wanders around the grass like a sheep cutting it!

*Husqvarna Solar Mower
1995 Husqvarna Sweden*

Automatic robot lawnmower, uses solar panels and integral computer as on the Space Shuttle, and only requires daylight to work. Environmentally friendly, no pollution, no fuel, no noise unless stolen, then emits alarm. The mower will cut your grass for you when you are not there. This was the first type of robot mower produced, and like the first calculator, quite expensive at £2,000. £ CUSTOMER £1,000,000 TO PRODUCE

British Lawnmower Museum



Made by Friendly Robotics, this machine will cut in straight lines and is run by a battery. When it senses the battery is running low, it goes back to its docking station to charge itself up and then continues to cut the lawn

Why cut the lawn yourself when you can get a robot to do it for you?!

RACING

It seems lawnmowers are somewhat multi-purpose!

The modern sport of lawn mower racing has its origins in a meeting of enthusiastic beer drinkers at the Cricketers Arms, Wisborough Green, West Sussex, one evening in 1973. At the time, motor sport consultant Jim Gavin had just returned from a rally reconnaissance in the Sahara, and talk naturally turned to other forms of motor and motorcycle sport. The main point of discussion turned around the horrendously escalating costs involved in all branches of motor sport, whether it be rallying, racing, scrambling or whatever. So a few beers later, minds began to explore thoughts of an alternative form of motor sport with the main criteria since it is competitive, lots of fun and above all cheap. But what could we race? Motorised barstools and wheelbarrows were soon passed as being passé and so we were left with Lawn Mowers.

The British Lawnmower Racing Association race mowers all over the country and it's quite a hit with celebrities. The late Oliver Reed used to

compete and Noel Edmunds and Stirling Moss are both participants of the sport. The lawnmowers can reach about 65/70mph and although this sounds like a crazy, unruly sport, it's quite the opposite as Brian explained "It's good fun but there are quite strict rules - the mowers must have been originally bought to cut grass and you are not allowed to go bigger than what the manufacturer intended for its engine.

"The museum used to have a team and we held the Championship for two years," explained a smiling Brian.

The museum holds a display of racing mowers and equipment.

A team of five look after the museum and Brian's shop - The Discount Garden Machinery Warehouse - which Brian opened in 1969 and displays over 150 new models, and caters for all aspect of sales, spares and service.

The museum have just made a film about lawnmowers - the only one in the world - which is currently available on dvd for £12.99 + p&p.

BIGGA readers can get free entry to the museum and an audio tour on presentation of this article. Please visit: www.lawnmowerworld.co.uk for more information.



Museum Manager Brian Radam, is an ex-lawnmower-racing champion.

