

The Windrow

Newsletter of The Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland

No 3 November 2011

Are You a Professional Land Manager — in the Public, Private or Voluntary Sectors?

If so, could you please take a few minutes to fill out a questionnaire about your experience using scythes. This will enable us:

(i) to discover in what way the supply of equipment and training for professional users and volunteers can be improved;

(ii) to provide potential users with better information about when and where scythes might be an effective tool, and how to use them advantageously in a professional context.

To fill out the form, either:

(a) Use the rtf file sent in this email, and email or post back your response to the address below.

(b) Print out the survey form from the rtf file or from pages xxx of this document, fill it in by hand and post them to the address below, or scan it and email it.

(c) If you would prefer a Word, Open Office or Apple Works file, please email back and we will send you one.

Also In This Issue

Scythe Festivals 2012	p.2
Courses and training 2012	p.3
Apprenticeship	p.3
SABI News	p.3
Reports of events in 2011	p.4
Cradles and cereal mowing	p.5
Scythe survey	pp. 7-9

The next issue of the newsletter will appear in the spring of 2012. We welcome contributions, news items, photos and advertisements of any kind related to scythes and haymaking. Please send material to the editor at chapter7@tlio.org.uk 01297 561359; Monkton Wyld Court, Charmouth, Bridport, DT6 6DQ. If you require a paper copy please get in touch.



Readers are invited to the Scythe Association Inaugural Gathering and AGM

The first annual gathering and AGM of the Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland is taking place at Monkton Wyld, Dorset (pictured above) on 14/15 January. Anyone who is interested in promoting scythe use for conservation, haymaking, reaping cereals, mowing lawns, churchyards etc is welcome.

The agenda includes:

- Constitution and structure of the association.
- Election of officers.
- Strategies and ideas for scythe promotion in 2012.
- Insurance scheme for courses and events.
- Improving competitions.
- An annual scythe bursary?
- Writing the history of the scythe.
- A bigger spring gathering next year, like the Bodger's Ball?

Plus: • Tour of Monkton's scythe-run smallholding.
• Films • Mowing winter grass (possibly ice mowing depending on the weather).

The cost of attendance is £48, including bed (shared single sex room), plus lunch and supper on Saturday and breakfast and lunch on Sunday. To register or for more information contact: Simon, 01297 561359, chapter7@tlio.org.uk

Festivals and Events

Prepare for intense activity in June as three UK events are on three consecutive weekends.

West Country Scythe Festival and Green Fair

Muchelney, Langport, Somerset

Sunday 17 June 2012

Scythe championship, scythe and haymaking events, crafts, stalls, music, speakers, kids area, local food and drink.

Thursday -Friday 14-15 June

Scythe Teachers' Training Course

Tutors: Christiane Lechner, Phil Batten and Simon Fairlie.

Saturday 16 June

Scythe Course for Beginners and Improvers.

Scythe tuition in the morning, and then a choice of workshops in the afternoon.

For more information contact Simon Fairlie on 01297 561359, chapter7@tlio.org.uk

Benefit Gig Somerton

for the West Country Scythe and Green Fair, because we lost about £3000 thanks to the rain.

Chris Jagger's Hedge Fund, Boston Tea Party, Kevin Brown Trio.

Sat 3rd December, The Unicorn, Somerton

Info: 07970 711368

World Championships 2012

You would have thought that the World Scythe-Mowing Championships 2012 would be held in London in August; but no, they are taking place in Salbitz, Saxony, from 17-20 May. These are well worth a visit, but in case you are thinking of competing, take a look at Joseph Mayer, the German champion mowing 10 metres by 10 metres in 1.10 seconds at Imdorf on youtube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLKKOKEWUc&feature=related>

For more information see the new ScytheWorld Championship website (in German) at <http://www.sensenwm.de/398.html>

Eastern Counties Scything and Smallholding Weekend

Wimpole Estate, Cambs

23-24 June 2012

Scythe competition, haymaking, and smallholders' fair.

Contact Simon Damant: simon.damant@gmail.com

London Green Fair Regents Park, 9-10 June 2012

Liberating London's Lawns

Talk, demonstration and tuition on the subject of mowing and managing urban and suburban lawns and gardens with a scythe, with Ida Fabrizio and Simon Fairlie. Contact Ida at ifabrizio@hotmail.com; 07930 927 979

Do not be misled by this picture of lawnmowing at Regent's Park in 1911.



Mowing Well and Mowing Badly

"Mowing well and mowing badly—or rather not mowing at all—are separated by very little; as is also true of writing verse, of playing the fiddle, and of dozens of other things . . . For the bad or young or untaught mower without tradition, the mower Promethean, the mower original and contemptuous of the past, does all these things: He leaves great crescents of grass uncut. He digs the point of the scythe hard into the ground with a jerk. He loosens the handles and even the fastening of the blade. He twists the blade with his blunders, he blunts the blade, he chips it, dulls it, or breaks it clean off at the tip. If any one is standing by he cuts him in the ankle. He sweeps up into the air wildly, with nothing to resist his stroke. He drags up earth with the grass, which is like making the meadow bleed. But the good mower who does things just as they should be done and have been for a hundred thousand years, falls into none of these fooleries. He goes forward very steadily, his scythe-blade just barely missing the ground, every grass falling; the swish and rhythm of his mowing are always the same."

Hilaire Belloc, *The Mowing of a Field*

Training Courses

Simon Fairlie has these courses arranged for 2012

19 May Course at Weald and Downland Museum, Singleton, W Sussex

26 May One day beginner's course at Monkton Wyld, Dorset.

13-15 July Two day scythe, haymaking and grassland management course at Monkton Wyld, Dorset.

Contact Simon at 10297 561359; chapter7@tlio.org.uk

Scythe Festival Courses

You can benefit from several tutors at once if you come to one of the training courses, for beginners, improvers or would-be teachers, at the West Country Scythe Festival, 14-17 June, see above left.

The following people are likely to be giving courses in 2012, but have not arranged schedules yet:

Cumbria: Paul Kingsnorth
paul@paulkingsnorth.net

Cumbria: Steve Tomlin
steve-tomlin@hotmail.co.uk

Lincolnshire: Deano Martin
deanom@madasafish.com

Herefords: Andrea Gilpin
info@cfga.fsnet.co.uk

S Wales: Phil Batten,
michelle_laine@care2.com

Wiltshire: Chris Riley
chris@riley2009.plus.com

Somerset: Andrea Ricard
arickard@madasafish.com

Devon: Alastair Inglis,
al.inglis@yahoo.co.uk

East Anglia: Richard Brown
lovellshall@talk21.com

Hertfordshire: Clive Leeke
cliveleeke@o2.co.uk

W Sussex: Mark Allery
m.allery@virgin.net

E Sussex: Beth Tilston
bethtilston@googlemail.com

Employment/Training Opportunity

It would be nice if we had a whole list of well paid scything jobs on offer, but alas, there is only this one:

Mini Apprenticeship at Monkton Wyld

SF writes: I'm looking for someone interested in doing a "mini-apprenticeship" in scythe-use, haymaking and small-scale dairy farming, at Monkton Wyld Court, a community in Dorset, for about three months from mid May to mid August.

The work will involve scything, haymaking by hand, milking and managing dairy cows, cheesemaking, pig management, farm maintenance and helping out at scythe courses and the West Country Scythe Fair.

No previous experience with a scythe is necessary, but I am looking for someone who is a keen and fit worker, has a good grounding in the use of hand tools, is bright, affable and likes cows.

The right applicant will receive full board, lodging in a static caravan, ale, and £200 worth of scythe goods, plus the opportunity for occasional paid work.

Please apply by letter or email describing who you are, your previous experience, and why you are interested in the position.

Write to Simon Fairlie, Monkton Wyld Court, Charmouth, Bridport DT6 6DQ; chapter7@tlio.org.uk

Scythe Association Website

The Scythe Association now has its own website at <http://scytheassociation.wordpress.com/>. It includes information on courses, events, history, regional contacts and a page where anyone can post up news and views. The site is run by Beth Tilston, whom you should contact should you wish to post anything on the site. What more can one say about a website that can't be more easily discovered by googling Scythe Association of Britain and Ireland and clicking the item at the top of the list.

SABI Regional Contacts

The Scythe Association now has a list of regional contacts covering most of the UK and Ireland. Do contact them if you want to make contact with other people using scythes in your area.

Cornwall Derek Wells scythes@chapelbankfarm.co.uk

South West England Simon Fairlie [chapter7 \[at\] tlio.org.uk](mailto:chapter7[at]tlio.org.uk) and Andy Coleman ajcenvironmental@googlemail.com

Wales Phil Batten/Michelle Laine scythecymru@yahoo.co.uk

West Midlands Gemma Suggitt gemma@suggitt@yahoo.com

North West England Steve Tomlin steve-tomlin@hotmail.co.uk

Cumbria Paul Kingsnorth paul@paulkingsnorth.net

Scotland Gillian Hardstone hardstone59@hotmail.com

Lincolnshire and Humberside Deano Martin deanom@madasafish.com

East Anglia Richard Brown lovellshall@talk21.com

Oxon and Bucks John Letts jbletts@btinternet.com

Berks & Greater London Clive Leeke cliveleeke@o2.co.uk

South East England John Bannister johnw.bannister@virgin.net and Beth Tilston bethtilston@googlemail.com

Ireland Chris Hayes chris@lightfootforestry.ie



A sketch, by Jan Bowman of Simon Baddeley, who uses a scythe on his allotment in Birmingham. The high flying blade, he assures us, is "artistic licence".

Reports from Summer 2011

Erno Vadas



We aren't allowed to show photos of the shooting of *Anna Karenina* before the film comes out. But any excuse will do to print this photo of Hungarians mowing rye by Erno Vadas, which conveys something of what the director was trying to achieve.

Anna Karenina

At the beginning of August about 40 mowers, decked up in beards and Russian peasant togs mowed a few acres of Salisbury plain for a shoot of the scything scene in a new film of *Anna Karenina*, with screenplay by Tom Stoppard. It took the director, Joe Wright, quite a few takes of chanting "Left . . Right . . ." to get all 40 people mowing in unison, but eventually he managed to orchestrate what was probably the largest number of people mowing together in the UK for many decades.

The Independent reported that the scythesmen had protested about the rates of pay, but this seemed to be a complaint emanating from Equity, because everyone who participated enjoyed it immensely — even the lasses who were reluctantly relegated to hayforks for reasons of historical accuracy.

English Competitions

After 6 sunny years, it rained relentlessly from beginning to end of the 7th West Country Scythe Fair; but though it kept the punters and stallholders away, it didn't deter the mowers. The competition was won by Simon Damant, for the umpteenth year running, but the runners up are getting closer. Simon reckons he has "one year left". Because of the rain, the fair made a £3000 loss, so if you are in the Somerset area do get along to the benefit gig in Somerton on 3 December (see p 2.)

The Eastern Counties competition was a close call, won by Albanian Ded Kalaj. See the interview with him on youtube (Google "Albanian scythesman Ded").

Transylvania

Quite a few British folk trundled off to the haymaking festival in Transylvania that we advertised in the Windrow. One aim of the festival is to raise the profile of the traditional hand-mowing of meadows, which is still practised but under threat as Romania becomes Eurofied. The week-long event included a mowing competition, hay-making, cheeses making, mushroom hunting, dancing etc. Amazingly the competition was nearly won by a Scot, Julian Holbrook, but he was just beaten by local farmer Szilveszter Oltean. The oldest competitor at 78 was "Aunt Lizzie", pictured below. At one point some of the visitors were called away to help bring in a neighbour's hay, finishing the haystack just in the nick of time before a rainstorm. Everyone enjoyed the event, which hopefully will be repeated next year.

Info from Steve Tomlin's website <http://scythespace.wordpress.com/>



foto: Kristó Robert

<http://scythespace.wordpress.com/>

Reinventing the Cradle

This year there has been a flush of interest in growing wheat on a small scale in the UK, and several people have been experimenting with reaping it with a scythe. Unfortunately the art has been almost completely forgotten, and everyone is having to reinvent the wheel. It will be some time before we can field a human reaping machine as efficient as the gang of Hungarians on the previous page.

The challenge with mowing wheat is to get it to fall neatly so that it can be easily picked up by the binders — otherwise a scythe is not appreciably faster than a sickle, because the sickle reaper can use their left hand to place the cut wheat in a neat pile. For an example of a farmer in India reaping efficiently with a sickle see the video “Harvesting Wheat by Hand” posted on You Tube by a party calling themselves called Mankrola.

There are a number of types of cradle, including the heavy wooden “turkey wing” popular in the US, the much simpler bow, and the Slovak bow advocated by Peter Vido. Here are reports from people who tried harvesting this summer with these three different types

Variations on Slovak model

Andy Forbes of Brockwell Bake experimented with a Slovak design. He started with the one wand model (top right) shown on the Scythe Connected website (www.scytheconnected.blogspot.com entry for “Grain Cradle Design from Slovakia” 17 July 2010. “This seemed to let out too much out at joint of snath and blade” so he added a second wand (middle left).

This improved matters somewhat but nevertheless he decided that he needed to fix fingers, parallel with the blade as in the turkey wing design. So he

“took the plunge and drilled two holes in back of blade, used two bolts to secure a finger on top of blade. Then added a second finger strung between the first finger and the top of the top snath stick, still secured in Slovak manner with chain and string. (pic middle right)

“Results were pretty good I think - considering nobody had any real previous experience. I could easily have kept more than the two people I had making sheaves busy if I hadn't been going to check what was happening elsewhere every so often. As it was, we easily outstripped the team with 4 sickles and lots of helpers - and in the end the wastage was quite insignificant.

“I did find I was cutting a swath much narrower than for mowing grass, I felt any wider a swath and the force/momentum needed to get across would mean loss of control when dropping the resulting cut wheat. Particularly the density of the wheat was a bit uneven so when one hit a less dense patch wheat tended to fly away on a regular width stroke.”

Stephen Simpson tried another variation on the Slo-



Peter Vido's basic Slovak style.



Andy Forbes variations on the Slovak style.



<http://www.brockwell-bake.org.uk>



Stephen Simpson's adaption of the Slovak style.

vak snath, using a bent piece of copper pipe to the wand to make a finger parallel to the blade.

“I have tried a cross between the Slovak bow and the Turkey wing, using a single finger made from bending 15mm copper pipe soldered (via a coupler) to a short length of 22mm pipe. The 22 mm pipe slips over the end of the hazel stick bow and is held in place by drilling a small hole and securing with a wood screw. It is possible to

adjust the height, and forward and aft position of the finger. I set the finger about two thirds the height of the crop. When I put the blade into a standing crop I notice how the blade tip parts the stems just before they are cut. Then I set the tip of the finger to run an inch or so behind that parting. I got this cradle to work in a weed-free uniform standing crop, and in an under-sown crop - where the green under-story helped bind the bottom of the wheat stems together - carrying them to the windrow. I think more fingers are needed if the crop has a lot of shorter secondary tillers. I found it helps to have a curtain amount of momentum and to keep the arc of blade travel slightly less than 90 degrees.

Richard Brown: Yorkshire Bow

Richard Brown started using a simple bow attached to the snath with two Norfolk style “prickers or mini “fingers” lashed on, which he found was not startlingly successful. His mark 2 is a Yorkshire bow fitted with a specially made metal strut. (see pics next page). Richard writes:

“My first trials with it were not a brilliant success either - but I think there is a technique to it, and



my wheat was rather soggy and soft stemmed . . . At the end of an hours experimentation I had mown corn that could be gathered and stooked without having to re-arrange it (as last year)."

"Whereas with grass you mow outwards, when mowing corn it was common practice to mow inwards with the corn falling against the standing crop [see Hungarian photo on p.4]. As I was working alone I reverted to mowing outward to keep the corn clear of the crop. This was OK – you just have to stoop a bit lower to gather up the sheaves.

Mowing corn is easier than mowing grass provided the corn is upright. As the book suggests "scythe according to the wind... never push against the wind". There is definitely a technique to mowing the corn so it lands neatly arranged to your left – I haven't put much footage on youtube as I have yet to master this! If the crop leaned toward me at any point the cradle was apt to get snagged..

"As to the different designs: the Yorkshire pattern having the bow extending forward of the blade did seem to snag more. To improve things I tried to attach a string from the bow to a small ring hooked over the blade tip (as suggested in David Tresemer's scythe book) - this would not stay in place for more than two strokes – and short of drilling a hole I cannot see how it would? My original bow cradle, with extended prickers, worked better but still snagged if the crop was less than upright."

John Letts: Turkey Wing

John Letts has been mowing with a scythe and cradle on his extensive fields of heritage wheat in Oxfordshire. He comments:

"I've found that a bow is fine for cutting short crops like barley and oats that were (mostly) raked into piles before carting. A skilled Bowman could have cut these cereals so that they mostly fell into order ready for tying . . . but it takes some practice, and additions like the Norfolk Pricker and various extra bits of string and wood added would help (although these also catch all the straw and slow things down). If a bow is all you have then that's what you have to use to cut the crop in short measure. Such bows will also work ok with short/modern wheat and oats which are about as tall as the older barley varieties.

"Cutting tall, older wheat varieties is a very different kettle of fish. It can obviously be done with a bow - of the right design, swung by someone who knows how to use it. In some parts of the continent, S Wales, and N. America they definitely preferred to use a 'finger/turkey wing' cradle because it worked much better and was fairly easy to build. The most difficult part in building one is bending the 'fingers' so that they match the curve of the blade - although I'm sure



Above, Richard Brown's Yorkshire Bow, and the metal strut used to hold it in position. Below, John Lett's with an aluminium "turkey wing" cradle.



you could find some naturally bent ones and shave them down rather than having to steam bend them to shape. I've made a couple out of aluminium only because it was easier and quicker for me to bend allly than to steam bend wood - and the wooden fingers we used earlier snapped pretty quickly. (This aluminium version had the added benefit of tuning into Sky Television broadcasts and the World Service:) The key point is that it worked well, and cut quickly and neatly, as those who were at our harvest festival last year discovered. The wheat we cut last year wasn't the best... but when the crop is standing tall and strong - and is still a little green (which is critical to scything cereals) - it's like cutting butter. It's much easier to scythe that-ripe wheat than grass.

"It's fairly easy to lay the 'swipe' in a neat 'bunch' at the end of the 'sweep' so that the 'bunch' can be tied easily into a 'sheaf'. A little flick of the wrist at the end helps keep the 'bunch' compact.

"I've also found that a blade (I now use an 85 cm Schroeckenfux) that has been sharpened with a coarse stone in order to leave a 'micro-serrated edge' works best for cutting cereals that are ripe for scything, but if the crop has already ripened (i.e. when its turned yellow... about two weeks after 'Lammas' day (July 20th)... so after early August) you need to use a blade with an even more serrated edge (i.e. a bread knife finish). Otherwise you'll have to hack at the straw which takes much more effort and causes the ear to shatter (so you lose a lot of grain). I also think a heavier snath/blade combination helps provide momentum.. which seems to facilitate the process... so I will eventually convert to the bent snath with a serrated Austrian blade."

Videos

You can see a bow being used in a video of Steve Tomlin and friends mowing wheat in Cumbria — Steve also uses a design from the FAO, exported to the Middle East to aid their agriculture after the war (the video is called *Reaping Wheat with a Scythe 12 September*, posted on Youtube by Stelkur1). And there is a video of Andy using his final Slovak adaption at <http://www.brockwell-bake.org.uk/vids/reap.html>. Both of these show less than abundant crops of wheat. I can't find any footage of a cradle at work on a bumper crop, like the rye pictured on page 4. It is interesting to compare these experiments with the sickle user depicted in "Harvesting Wheat by Hand", posted by Mankrola on Youtube.

Survey of Scythe Use by Professional and Voluntary Sector Land Managers

Please do not feel obliged to answer all the questions

1. What kind of organization(s) do you represent (eg voluntary, local authority, private company)

2 What area and what kind of land do you manage?

3. Do you use Austrian-style scythes or traditional English style, or both?

4. How long have you or your workforce been using them?

5. How frequently does your workforce use scythes?

6 Are your scythes used by paid employees or by volunteers or both?

7. What training have your staff/volunteers had in the use of scythes?

8. Would you say that your staff/volunteers enjoy using scythes?

9. What vegetation do you use scythes for (eg grass, bracken, brambles rushes etc)?

(continued on page7)

10. What areas do you use them in (ie steep areas, wet areas, paths, riverbanks, woodland etc)?

11 (a) . As well as scythes do you use brushcutters/strimmers, toppers or other tools for cutting grass and weedy vegetation?

(b) If so which jobs do you scythes for and which do you use brushcutters or other tools for?

12 What do you consider to be the main advantages of scythes compared to alternative tools such as brushcutters, toppers etc?

13. What do you consider to be the main disadvantages of scythes compared to alternative tools?

14. Does the use of scythes make a difference to your rapport with members of the public?

(continued on page 8)

15. Have you experienced difficulty keeping scythes sharp, peened and in good condition?

16. Have you had any broken scythe blades, snaths or ancillary equipment? If so, would you say this was due to misuse, accident, defective manufacture, inadequate instruction from supplier, or some other reason? Please specify whether the goods were supplied by Simon Fairlie, or not.

17 Have you experienced any other problems or difficulties when introducing scythes into the work schedule?

18. Do you have any suggestions how the supply of scythes and ancillary goods, or training, could be improved in the future?

19 Name and contact details (optional).

End of survey. Thankyou. Any reference to your response made in our report will respect anonymity.

**Please return your response by 12 January: email to chapter7@tlio.org.uk, or post to:
S Fairlie, Monkton Wyld Court, Charmouth, Bridport, DT6 6DQ; 01297 561359**